

A Reconsideration of Identity through Death and Bereavement and consequent Pastoral implications for Christian Ministry

by The Rev. Christopher Race
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

The study considers the idea that bio-death has teleological meaning within the evolution of Personhood of relational identity in resurrection; and the results of pastoral ministry pro-actively engaging with dying as a pilgrimage *into and through* bio-death, in which every member of the immediate community of faith is pro-active.

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Abstract (not to exceed 200 words - any continuation sheets must contain the author's full name and full title of the thesis/dissertation):

This work seeks to examine traditional Christian doctrines regarding life after death, from a pastoral perspective. The study explores new ways of interpreting the meaning in human identity, dis-innocence and forgiven-ness specifically as relating to the continuing evolution of Humankind, and offers a description of humankind as Homo sanctus.

The thesis is built around three individual selected case examples of death and dying together with a constructed narrative of 'problem dying', and a group of five persons in a Fellowship of the Dying; it describes the development and praxis of new approaches to ministry in these areas. A number of new terms are introduced to better convey the substance of meanings.

The study itself may be considered as offering significant new insight in two respects:

- 1. It engages with the idea that bio-death has teleological meaning within the evolution of Personhood in resurrection.**
- 2. It offers the experiences of Christian pastoral ministry pro-actively engaging with dying as a pilgrimage *into and* through bio-death, in which every member of the immediate community of faith is pro-active in pilgrimage with the dying Person.**

The study draws on extensive cross-cultural and multi-faith experience in Britain and Africa.

DEDICATION

For Maeve

For Sigvard

**and in memory of the pilgrims with whom I have
walked**

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Statement:

"I hereby certify that this thesis is entirely the result of my own independent investigations and research. The various sources to which I am indebted are clearly indicated in the bibliography."

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GLOSSARY

Anthropic: As associated with and influenced by human beings; actively occurring during human existence

Bio-form: The existential appearance and expressions of a Person

Bio-life: That which is extinguished at bio-death

Bio-death: The point at which physical life ceases

Bio-moral: The distinctive relational unity of moral Being and physical body

Biotic life: (after Sheppy p.41) Life that ends with death; nothing survives

Catechumenate: A group of individuals undergoing elementary instruction in a subject. In Christianity, one undergoing instruction in the faith

Cosmos: The entirety of the *created space of God*, existing in consequence of the moving Spirit of God bringing ordered life-ness out of chaos (Gen. 1:1); the environment of God; the entire universe and all within it

Companionship: Enacted commitment

Creatureliness: Describes human beings as part of the created order

Creature-Person: Humankind; describes human beings for what they are, creaturely but also not just an animal

Dis-innocence: Moral clouding that manifests in the characteristic of guile; the pervading condition of Personhood once deprived of natal innocence and therefore of diminished capacity to perceive their actual basis of moral identity. "Dis-innocent" does not axiomatically imply proactive guilt

Finitudinal: An entity that is visibly and spatially present

Heilsgeschichte: Salvation history

Hominization: The evolutionary processes of becoming Human; in the context of this thesis, the term also intentionally includes the spiritual as well as the physical evolution of Man, as Man is a unity of Being

Homo sanctus: The ontological identity of Man as the Creature-Person who is 'Homo sanctus'. The ascription of 'sanctus' (Latin: holy: "Belonging to, derived from, or associated with a divine power") describes the relational identity of Personhood as of sameness to that in God

Homo sapiens: The anthropological identification of Man, essentially referring to the size and power of the human brain

Identity: Is that which clothes the particular distinction of each individual, making differentiation possible, and thereby, all Human interaction. Identity is essentially non-transferable; the enduring characteristic of *persona*, the two aspects comprising Personhood of relational identity, and also creatureliness

Koinonia: (Gk.) Fellowship, sharing in common, communion

Life-ness: To have a full capacity to live relationally; that which is resurrected within Identity

Myth: (after B. Flowers) A belief or a subject of belief whose truth is accepted uncritically

Numinous: The characteristic of the Presence of God (and therefore of God himself); His "otherness" (after R. Otto, 1869-1937) which is experienced as a transcending divinity of power and glory (Heb. *shekinah*), energy and force. As descriptive of the mystery of God 'numinous' is summarized by Otto as "*mysterium tremendum et fascinans*" provoking terror because it presents as overwhelming power, but also as merciful and generous in spite of the terror: in other words, the mystery (of God), fascinating power, energy and force of God

Persona: My use of this term intends an entirely different meaning to that of Jung. I have used it to denote the ontological essence of the individual moral being; the personhood of sovereign, individual life, endowed with sentient consciousness and identity and manifested in the conjunction of the physical and meta-physical, incapable of destruction by physical operation alone, or by its own will, or by anything of lesser authority than that of which its essence derives. *Persona* thus describes the basic distinctive characteristic of Human Personhood, that it is created in the moral image of God. The term is further used to denote relational function, specifically the identity of each individual Human Person of relational identity as morally capable

Person: The term that describes Man as conscious of self and relationality; the uniquely created, individual Being who is human

¹ Otto, R. Trans. John W. Harvey (1923)

Personhood: Moral Relational Identity

Relationality: To advance meaningfully beyond intellectual theorizing; the expression of oneself to others and the reception of their Being-ness

Seelsorge: (German) The cure of souls. From this, the term **Seelsorger** describes one who brings that care to the those they are called to serve

Telos: (Gk.) The end of a goal-oriented process

Un-Being-ness: By this is meant the erosion of Personhood so that what it consists in – moral relational identity – is denied expression or recognition

Unfinitudinal: An entity that is present, but not in bio-form substance

Zoetic life: (after Sheppy, p.42) Life in communion with God/a new order of being. Zoetic life also ended in death, yet that death is not extinction but teleological

CHAPTER 1

ASPECTS OF CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN PASTORAL ENCOUNTER WITH DEATH

Introduction:

Death and bereavement are major aspects in the field of Pastoral Theology. In the context of the essential Christian doctrine of Resurrection, and contemporary pastoral care, it is an urgent concern both for society and the Church. Classical Christian doctrine represents death as transformative and transcending; in contemporary language, this might also be described as evolutionary.¹ However, it is within the encounter with dying and bereavement that the interface between this evolutionary event and the Christian story of God are at their most stark.

Partly, this is due to the manner in which institutionalised, denominational Christianity has historically expanded and manipulated a fear of death² through the association of death with sin, and the historical support of deprivation of life through capital punishment.³ In these primary ways, and the negative use of liturgical language, death even through natural causes has been associated with calamity and censure, *vide* W. Kaufmann

“although some early Christian martyrs died fearlessly...Christianity has on the whole used its vast influence to make people dread death...” (1959, p.47)

It is also due to the post Darwinian success of scientific inquiry in describing Human as *Homo sapiens* out of the wider evolution of hominids. This mechanistic, functionalistic,⁴ identification has succeeded in focussing popular attention away from the unique metaphysical component of Personhood that inhabits the Human creature. The ontic nature of Human identity as being spiritual is reflected in the transcendent awareness of relationality and power to think in concepts,⁵ and Christian eschatology concerns the fulfilling of relational experience with God beyond bio-death. The reduction of human identity to the limits of material functionality has created conflicting opinions, superstitions, denials and beliefs concerning the identity and destiny of Human Persons.

This thesis seeks to offer further perspectives in the study and understanding of bio-death and resurrection as ontic to the phenomenon of Personhood and its concomitant, metaphysical relational necessity.

Background:

The focus of this thesis arises out of pastoral encounter⁶ since the 1970's with death and bereavement in Southern Africa, England and Scotland. As an ordained priest of the Anglican Church, continuous encounter with dying, death and bereavement has enabled significant opportunities for

engaging with learning and reflecting upon their processes and impact upon individuals and family units, as well as observing their effects within communities.

Especially at the beginning of my focused interest in the issues of death and bereavement, the social environment and classification of identity were of particular significance. This was the time that marked the high-water period of the Apartheid regime in the Republic of South Africa, at which time the racial encounter with death in the context of state violence was commonplace.⁷ Violent death in the civil 'non-white' ⁸ community was also a daily and widespread event. These circumstances pervasively promoted amongst black and mixed race communities the combination of tragedy and unfairness as characterising the causes of almost all death.

A widespread view in white communities was that such deaths were a consequential product of Godless, evil lawlessness, representative of the Biblical axiom that "the wages of sin is death". In this construction, the linkage of death and divine retribution maintained considerable traction within Christian and para-Christian cultures.⁹ Across all communities there were those seeking to discover a deeper Christian understanding of and engagement with the meaning of death and its place in the context of Christian belief.¹⁰

Functional experience is obviously gained through learning; in the early period of my ministry, I was of the opinion that my inexperience in conducting funerals, and comforting the afflicted parties was the reason for a sense of incompleteness – even inadequacy - in what had been done. Only later did I begin to question the “tools of my trade,” in particular the authorized burial liturgy, and what this reflected of the theology of death and resurrection. Closely adjunctive to this enquiry was the question of the historical teaching of the Church concerning death as a Godly instrument of punishment.¹¹

Subsequent ministry in Botswana, where in addition to the cultural influences of South African Apartheid, there was significant contact with African Independent Churches (AICS) and traditional African indigenous religion (AIR) that demonstrated the need to address the severe contradictions¹² between their responses to death, dying and bereavement, and Western derived, Christian theology and praxis.

These experiences pointed to an urgent and continuing need for more effective ministry resources - and particularly up-dated hermeneutics and liturgies to support Christian ministry relevant to dying, death & bereavement within multi-faith, educated, but also violent, and increasingly a-theistic, societies.

Adjunctive to these was the necessity for a more integrated and inclusive response to individual spirituality, whether Christian or of other faiths, or traditionalist, or humanistic, or of purely secular content, became apparent.

Later, in coming to Britain, it was apparent that whilst the cultural parameters and social environments of Britain and Southern Africa are widely different, yet there are significant commonalities in the beliefs, pastoral praxis and liturgies concerning death and bereavement, and ultimately closely similar patterns of ineffectual ministry and widening public dismissal of the Christian message. Significant differences are the intellectual atheism prevalent in modern Western societies, and that in English culture talk of death has long been regarded as a taboo subject (C. Gittings, 1984 p.7).

Concerning all these conditions the common thread to be found in the historical, and in some instances continuing, Christian influences and contributory involvement in their emergence and consequences, is the issue of death. In this, the claimed beliefs of Christianity in a loving, forgiving, nurturing and incarnate God appear as radically contradicted by the evident practices and language of institutionalised Christianity.¹³

The prevailing situation:

Anyone seeking to engage with matters of death and bereavement might reasonably expect there to be adequate - even exhaustive - material upon

either subject within Christian pastoral writing. Although it is true that there exists an enormous body of literature on death, dying and bereavement,¹⁴ pastoral experience indicates there to be significantly little devoted to a reappraisal of the theology of death, and the questions of “theological self, the self directly in the sight of God,” (S. Kierkegaard, 1954 p.127) or of eschatological identity,¹⁵ both of which matters are of central concern to a sound balance of pastoral praxis.¹⁶

In particular, this applies to the specifics of identity and the ontology of person-hood in the context of death. Common practice in Britain is increasingly placing visible emphasis upon the *manner and place* of death, especially sudden death,¹⁷ perhaps influenced to some extent by the secular perception that human beings cannot go beyond death. People seemingly are becoming thus drawn increasingly into relating to life on the basis of physicality alone, and with no perception of there being to it any eschatological dimension.¹⁸

The certainty of dying – ‘I shall die’ - is recognised and affirmed within the context of physicality, but that in itself offers no answer to the dilemma of capacity and relationship. The question, ‘Am I able to face death?’ simultaneously addresses self and beyond-self metaphysical realities.¹⁹ Equally evident is the degree to which contemporary Western society has isolated dying and bio-death itself from the mainstream of social existence. Whereas as recently as two generations back, death was an event primarily

experienced at home, and in the community domain,²⁰ it has become usual that death occurs within the specialised environment of hospital, care home or hospice, the corpse thereafter being transported and held at an Undertaker's mortuary, until burial or cremation. Subsequent scattering of the ashes is often an intensely private event; but it is also the case that many urns remain uncollected from Undertakers.²¹

Of similar effect is the prevailing secular perspective on bio-death as the relationless conclusion of the physical processes of dying, during which the faculties, through which relationality and social identity are expressed, collapse. Against this the Christian claim of life after death is regarded as incapable of rational meaning and is thus irrelevant.

In many Western clinical and secular counselling regimes, death tends to be treated as hostile to psyche; M. Lloyd records a hospice patient's comment that although there was much open discussion about cancer "we don't talk about death". (1995, p.29) Although there is a positive sensitivity in such an approach, there is an equally negative danger of casting death as an *unnatural* function and in consequence stimulating feelings of alienation towards the event, since the purpose of life cannot be to end life. In this context specifically, may be found the disconnect that lies at the heart of progressive reservation of, and disbelief in, Christian Churches' witness to the nature and intention of the God they proclaim as of love,

and unconditional forgiveness and who bestows the gift of new life to the relational Personhood of each human individual.

Within the general activity of contemporary Church pastoral ministry in England, conducting funerals (particularly at municipal crematoria), is a more frequent duty than is close pastoral nurturing of the dying. A great number of crematorium funerals taken by 'duty ministers'²² are for complete strangers; people who for various reasons had no pastoral association with the Church, and whose families and friends were equally detached from visible faith. That is not to say they have *no* faith; rather that their credo is not visible to organized Western denominational, Christian Churches, and may possibly lack coherent form even within themselves.

Into the situation of grief, the Christian minister arrives, invariably introduced by the Undertaker, to preside at the despatch²³ of the body, and to attempt to offer some comfort and hope. In Britain, this has for many years been the growing pattern of the Churches' ministry into situations of death and bereavement, although there are always a certain number of instances where the deceased and their family are known within their local Church.

Although many chaplains and dedicated carers have close contact with the dying in the hospital/hospice, this environment remains detached from the

wider pastoral situation. In the hospice situation that engagement with the dying is usually at an advanced point in the terminal process. For an outsider to the immediate family to enter the scenario of dying and impending bereavement only once it is actually in process, is akin to addressing the purchase of vehicle insurance whilst an accident is actually happening. The prevailing situation is summed up in M. Lloyd's comment:

"The task of developing a working theology in this field seems to have barely begun or to have barely reached those engaged in the pastoral field of dying and bereaved people." (1995, p.16)

Amongst active Christians there is often to be found a mantle of uncertainty or disbelief regarding the nature or existence of an after-life, and consequently little or no understanding of the eschatological hope that characterised the witness of the early Christian church and the Gospels. In such a situation what is, and can be, offered in the context of death and dying is most likely to result in what D.J. Davies accurately describes as "words against death". (1997, p.186)

The phrase highlights and the thesis seeks to take account of the consequence of the failure to adequately associate the vitality of personal relational identity within Christian eschatological hope precisely because it articulates a perceived need to correct the socially disruptive "error" of death. In so doing the endeavour stimulates the separation between the "world of people" and an implied "non-world" of death. In the face of this

Christian pastoral praxis is confronted with the need to achieve both awareness and involvement in people in a Christological response to death; a key re-focussing of “how theological and liturgical studies give meaning and direction to what the Christian Church does when someone dies.” (P. Sheppy 2003, p.3)

A changed and changing scene

In the context of contemporary pastoral theology and praxis, acceptance and belief amongst many Western Christians, including clerics, of historical interpretations and teaching of the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and *inter alia*, the meaning of death have undergone wide changes.²⁴ These continue to both reflect and stimulate doubts and confusions that are in subtle ways influencing and affecting the personal faith and praxis of overt and more nominal Christians alike, as much as they influence the life-views of a-theists. (L. Dupré 1981, p.14)

To a degree these changes are stimulating in Christians, as much as sceptics, a climate of suspicion of the historic Christian doctrines.²⁵ Today this seems particularly to be the case when it comes to beliefs in life after death and the Resurrection of Jesus. These doctrines are held to be incompatible with contemporary medical knowledge, and sceptical philosophies of life.²⁶

In the disciplines of science and philosophy, there are renewed considerations of the role of spirituality in the care and nurture of people, and also of the existence of God as a valid reality.²⁷ In the matters of dying and bereavement, significant work by professionals such as R. Stanworth, and the Hospice movement emphasise the necessity for Christian denominations to revisit their historical hermeneutic and praxis.

Contemporary approaches to health care have brought about philosophical and attitudinal changes. Today these involve educating people to the *context* as well as the *facts* of good health – that it is a product of an integrated life-style, consciously sought - and an understanding of what is inimical to it, that is, specific bodily signs and the significance of certain life-style conditions and behaviour.²⁸ Personal responsibility and co-operation in health management is now expected. However, the development, application and success of these programmes has required attitudinal changes in the mind-set and practices of professional health carers. It has also renewed a focus on the individual's independent responsibility for their life-style decisions whilst yet seeking to protect each from invasive temptation. Thus in Britain (and elsewhere), past decades have seen the progressive curtailment of tobacco and alcohol propaganda.

A kindred approach to spiritual symptomology and care is now, significantly, being engaged by secular caring professionals, R. Stanworth's qualitative investigation of the "sources of meaning and sense of self of people

who are dying" (2005 p.1), being a prominent contemporary example. Her research findings, and the achievements of revised secular 'awareness and action' programmes, suggest the requirement for Christian re-appraisal of historical attitudes, ministry and practice, concerning death. Presently, much historic Christian dogma suggests that what lies beyond death is, selectively, punitive judgement or unending bliss.

Historical liturgical language and pastoral practice has prominently reinforced this; *vide* the opening rubrics of the Order for The Burial of the Dead in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England (BCP):

"Here it is to be noted, that the Office ensuing is not to be used for any individual that die unbaptized or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves." (1968, p.326)

In other words, some of the most poignant and broken situations in life are advertised as outwith the refrain of the Gospel.

The rubric of the BCP service of burial was commonly reinforced in public preaching: "many people would regularly have listened to their minister expounding the terrors of the grave and the torments awaiting the damned" (C. Gittings 1984, p.8) This observation is not limited to past centuries; it is possible that such historical styles and dogma have significantly contributed to peoples' negative reactions to Christian ministry and also stimulated the reduction²⁹ of applied historical Christian ministry into the situations of

dying, death and bereavement. Significantly, R. Stanworth explores the contemporary situation where people do not use religious language.

The issues arising out of the historical and emerging situations, concern the conduct of Christianity's own internal dialogue; how this has shaped dogma, tradition, custom and liturgy (and ultimately the appeal of the Judaeo/Christian Gospels to all persons), and consider whether it can continue to justify the language and example it uses specifically to express an understanding of forgiveness in relation to death and resurrection. These are directly relevant to any consideration of the relationality and spirituality of human beings, the nature of Person-identity, and the possible origins of these phenomena, in the context of Christian eschatology and the reality of death. Arising out of these is the further consideration that Incarnation theology and pastoral engagement are jointly required in order to credibly represent a holistic doctrine of eschatological purpose in the phenomenon of Personhood.

Within the context of pastoral ministry and experience, and demonstrative case studies, this thesis specifically seeks to examine and question the prevailing *mores* of contemporary Anglican³⁰ expression of theology and praxis in relation to dying and bereavement.

Aims and objectives:

Five themes run through this thesis:

- A **reconsideration of identity** through bio-death and bereavement and the consequent implications for pastoral ministry.
- **Dualism** and **Personhood**
- **Dis-innocence** and **Forgiven-ness**.

Identity:

As is indicated above, contemporary theological consideration of the ontology of human identity is significantly unaddressed, and has been subsumed into the various theories of social identity. In this context, personal identity must cease at bio-death, and with it any eschatological view of human purpose. This thesis seeks to demonstrate that human identity is individuated in relational Personhood, and to consider this as manifested in the resurrected Person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Dualism:

Liturgical language and the Christian iconography of death demonstrate that Christianity has effectively held to the ancient concepts of dualism in describing Man as consisting in a combination of physical and metaphysical 'bodies' in this life, and of the radical separation of their combining elements at bio-death.

This thesis suggests that dualism cannot authentically address the issues of *who* Man is, nor the cause of Man in the order of the cosmos - the entirety of the *created space of God*, existing in consequence of the moving Spirit

of God bringing ordered life-ness out of chaos (Gen 1:1) - nor the *purpose* of Man within its order. It also suggests that these are questions that arise in consequence of *identity* of a particular type that is unique and systemic to human Being-ness, and of a singularity, not comprising two separate entities (O. Cullmann, 1958). In this, the thesis seeks to demonstrate that theology and pastoral engagement must authentically address the whole context of created being to achieve a holistic doctrine of *purpose* in the phenomenon of Personhood that can authentically offer an alternative to dualism and existentialism.

Personhood:

The theological significance of Personhood is central to the understanding of Human *identity*. It is suggested that this is better approached through the consideration of Man as Creature-*Person* whose Personhood of *moral*, relational *identity* is evidenced in *reflective relational capacity and necessity*. In this construct, Man is the Creature of Personhood in whom exists the conscious capacity of relational intimacy that is a property of the creating impulse of the God who sees that his creation is "very good" (Gen 1:31). That is to suggest the phrase "*Out of God, Human Personhood emerges*" as a succinct description of the evolution of Creature-Person (Humankind) within the cosmos as emerging out of the Immanent Personhood of God. Such a description embraces the realities of Human creatureliness, and relational Personhood.

Dis-innocence:

The concept of 'dis-innocence' is introduced in this thesis to describe the pervading condition of Personhood once deprived of the transparency of natal innocence, by the imposed limitations of human ignorance that foster guile, characterised by diminished capacity within each Person to perceive the origins of their Personhood of moral, reflective relational identity. The term thus also addresses the changes within the expressions of Personhood of relational identity in consequence of self-concealment and encountering vulnerability in self and others; typically those of hurt, denial of personal value, injustice, opaque disclosure, non-acceptance and disbelief.

This understanding suggests that the deeper significance of dis-innocence as the underlying condition *out of which* sin is propagated, has been insufficiently recognized within Christianity which has become focussed on the doctrine of the Fall of Man in the context of a mature and perfect relationship with God, from which man has fallen. The understanding of dis-innocence is based upon the hypothesis that Man's relationship with God is evolutionary, arising out of God's self revelation; it is an on-going process of development and discovery, growing *towards* a mature and perfect relationship with God (see further ch.6, p.175ff). Greater attention has historically been given to the denunciation of sin and correcting the effects of sinful acts and attitudes, than has been given to nurturing the

journey into the knowledge of, and relationship with, God and self, (and thus proceeding *out of* the condition of dis-innocence).

This thesis suggests that reconsideration of the death of Jesus in the context of dis-innocence (rather than as the iconic expression of the sin of mankind) enables a clearer understanding of the significance of dis-innocence in relation to sin. In so doing, the nature of the forgiving love of God is also more sharply exposed as Immanent in the context of chaotic threat to life-ness.

Forgiven-ness

The distinction between forgiveness and forgiven-ness is that of Immanence and Grace. Forgiven-ness is the continuous action of God's Immanence – it is of the reality of God; s/he is a forgiving God. The Grace of that action is that it is vicarious and not dependent upon individual repentance; human persons are already forgiven; there remains for them the choice of believing and accepting what the human condition cannot of itself conceive.

Central to the dialogue of this thesis is the perspective that forgiven-ness is not the environment of restoration of the old; it is the condition of opportunity and the 'ground of being' for new beginning, and of evolution:

“For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things...making peace by the blood of his cross...you

who were once estranged and hostile in mind...he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death..." (Col.1:19-22)

In consequence of this, it is therefore necessary to challenge the general, colloquial representation of forgiven-ness as depicted in church worship language: "Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent..."³¹ and pastoral praxis, in order that *forgiven-ness* might be experienced as the environment of new beginning. The historical opacity in liturgical expression of forgiven-ness can be seen as reducing its application from the universal (all have been forgiven) to the particularity of 'true' penitents, and also specific occasion (when it is petitioned). This has concentrated the focus of Christianity upon the overcoming of sin in the life of Man at the cost of enabling Man to recognize the Immanence of God, and the significance of Personhood as moral presence. It will be suggested that this also clouds understanding of the eschatological witness in the resurrection of Jesus.

Conclusion:

The origins of this thesis lie in fundamental existential realities – the contextual strata – of dying, death and bereavement that cannot be lightly treated, overlooked or denied.

In addressing these fundamentals, the thesis will consider resurrection as uniquely revealing the completeness of identity of Person, as in the example of Jesus, who is not a survivor from death but endowed with new

life-ness through the creative power of God. His Resurrection, therefore, demonstrates a moral transition of the Person into a new state, but of unchanged identity and Personhood.

In considering new approaches to hermeneutical and pastoral engagement with the issues of dying, death and bereavement, lessons from modern health care attitudes may offer valuable insights for Christian ministry.

It is the combination of *context* and *facts* and *lifestyle choices* that characterise modern health care methods that merits close attention. Just as the context of good health is a well balanced, consciously sought, lifestyle, so the *context* and *factuality* of Person-identity is both present and eschatologically relational to the Immanent God, and Creation, as the community of Immanence. Similarly, as the facts concerning good health include an understanding of what is inimical to it, so the *facts* concerning holistic Person-identity must include understanding of what clouds and reduces its capacities, and the responsibility that follows upon any and all choice. Crucially as within medical pastoral disciplines, the development, application and success of such programmes within Christian ministry will require attitudinal changes in the mind-set and practices of clergy and laity alike.

The thesis seeks to demonstrate that essentially, the unique and seminal witness of early Christianity to unconditional forgiven-ness has been

suppressed through the vital meanings in Jesus' life, death and resurrection becoming moralistically interpreted, and therefore as necessitating a life of radical moral eradication of sin. The enduring characteristic of this interpretation is the representation of God as angered, and the nature of his Judgement as yet to be fully revealed.

The thesis also seeks to demonstrate that ultimately, the concept of dualism fails in the face of bio-death to provide an adequate basis upon which to answer the Psalmist's question: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him?" (Ps.8:4), nor, psychologically, to provide any answers to the phenomenon of reflective relationality.

As a focus on practical, qualitative pastoral theology, the thesis illustrates through case examples that when ministry *does* engage with dying and bereavement holistically and systematically in the context of pilgrimage, personal experience demonstrates that significant pastoral and spiritual effect is attained, and historically negative and fearful attitudes towards death may be overcome.

The concluding chapter offers a reconsideration of some of the central historical views on forgiven-ness, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and Personhood-identity, together with a theological description of Humankind.

Appendices detail a form of service inaugurating pilgrimage into bio-death, and the outline of a published “Bill of Rights” for dying persons.

END NOTES:

- ¹ See endnote 7, p.108, regarding my meaning in employing this term.
- ² I mean by ‘manipulation’, the historical Christian dogma of hellish torture for those damned, by the same God who simultaneously delights in the blessed in heaven. H. Kung asks “Do I really have to believe in such a God?” See H. Kung (1992, p.171-180) where he discusses various examples of the Christian manipulation of the sin/death concept. Kung also quotes the example of the Norwegian dogmatic theologian O. Hallesby (ibid. p.172) speaking on radio; “I am certainly speaking this evening to many who know that they are not converted. You know that if you fell to the ground dead, you would go straight to hell.” Such fear tactics amount to coercive manipulation.
- ³ Christian groups such as the Quakers have never consented to capital punishment.
- ⁴ *Homo sapiens* relates only to the cubic capacity of the human cranium, and therefore brain size.
- ⁵ “By its very nature something that transcends matter” (R.A. Varghese “Thought” in Appendix A, in Flew, 2008, *There is a God*, Harper One, p.177).
- ⁶ The specific context is *Anglican*; arising either from pastoral experiences in the wider Communion, or from within the Church of England (C of E). It is important to note that institutionally the C of E is uniquely different in its character from all other parts of the Anglican Communion by virtue of being the Established Christian denomination in England, and having legal obligations. Pastorally, these result in situations that would not arise in a non-Established, gathered church. For example, the three prominent rites of passage: baptism, marriage and burial, are a legal right for all who live within a geographical parish. No C of E minister may legally deny their access to a parishioner.
- ⁷ Cynical colloquial terms such as ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ death were often used to differentiate between executions following trial-“formal death”- and the more numerous deaths at the hands of the police, or civil crime –‘informal death’. This latter term was a euphemism for murder.
- ⁸ The term ‘non-white’ embraced all ethnic non-Caucasian groups with the exception of the Taiwanese, who were styled ‘honorary whites’.
- ⁹ The distinction of ‘para-Christian’ is relevant to the then South African social context where many publically disassociated themselves from the central elements of Christian beliefs and practice that were incompatible with the *theology* of Apartheid.
- ¹⁰ These subjects were commonly under discussion at parish bible study groups and amongst university students.

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- ¹¹ This was critically important in the context of that time, as both State justification for Capital punishment, and the majority agreement and support for this amongst White, Christian churches, as being consonant with Godly judgement, brought into sharp focus, and challenged, historical church engagement with dying, death and bereavement.
- ¹² It is commonplace for clergy and laity to participate in traditional AIR rituals and burial rites, but most often covertly, especially ordained clergy and ministers, whose Church discipline expressly forbids active participation in non-Christian rites of passage. None of the mainline, Western derived churches have been able to entirely prevent this, and in Southern Africa little patience has been accorded to traditional customs and superstitions concerning death.
- ¹³ Roland Allen in an unpublished manuscript, 1947, subsequently entitled "The Family Rite", published in (1968) ed. Paton, David M. *Reform of the Ministry*, Lutterworth Press, p.199, described the witness of the Church of England as that of a church "which practised, and by its practice taught, what was false by its own theory". The immediate context of his remark was not concerned with death and dying, but the thrust of his words authentically describes the perception represented in this thesis.
- ¹⁴ As exemplified by D.J. Davies (1997).
- ¹⁵ By this term I mean identity such as is characteristic of the resurrected Jesus, according to the Gospel narratives and accepted by St Paul, *vide* 1.Cor.15.
- ¹⁶ M. Lloyd's view (1995, p.9) illustrates this perspective:
"Turning specifically to pastoral theology around death and dying, there is little which deals directly with the subject."
R. Stanworth (2003, p.2) observes:
"Scant academic attention, however, has been paid to religion's primary import, which Dillistone (1955, p.153) describes as supporting individuals in their 'steady advance to wholeness'. Most studies...contain frustratingly little reference to the human struggle for ultimate meaning and purpose."
- ¹⁷ *Vide* the growing number of roadside memorials in Britain that permanently mark the place and date of death of a named person or persons. Increasingly here, as across mainland Europe, these take the form and shape of the headstones of graves, and in Eastern Europe frequently contain the ashes of the deceased.
- ¹⁸ "Medicine is clearer to most Westerners than is philosophy or theology". (Davies 1997, p.198)
- ¹⁹ Expressed fears or worries about how close family or friends will cope after a person's death are frequently expressed. One young woman I was counselling would frequently plead, "I cannot die now because of the children." This focus deeply intruded into her sense of self worth. (CKR notes).
- ²⁰ This remains the case in rural Africa, but less so in the cities where people lose touch with their rural roots.
- ²¹ In the 1990's, there were at any one time as many as 60 urns being held by the leading Undertakers in Shirley, West Midlands. Some had been unclaimed for over three years (CKR personal notes).
- ²² In some urban complexes served by municipal crematoria (e.g.Solihull, West Midlands), Church of England clergy are rostered to be available to officiate as requested at cremations where the deceased had no known church connection and their family have no pastoral connections with any church, yet seek a religious service.
- ²³ I use this term conscious that it is provocative and seemingly uncaring. However, it does describe the consequences of modern, Western procedure at crematoria, and the de-pastoralised funeral industry. Clinical pragmatism, however gentle it attempts to be, distances dying from its natural context within the society of the living in such ways as to promote feelings of hopelessness, unrequitable grief, and injustice that the death has occurred.

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- ²⁴ *Vide* the views of Michael Goulder in D' Costa, G. (1996)ed. and Don Cupitt
- ²⁵ *vide* Dupré (1993) commenting on the widespread response amongst Roman Catholics to the official position on contraception considers it to be " [of] little or no practical bearing upon our lives." To some Christians of other denominations, the Curial position further reduces their view of Rome's Christian credibility. It is too early to assess how Pope Benedict's recent conditional allowance of the use of condoms may soften acceptance of the Vatican's overall view on contraception. An example of such suspicion can be recognised in the *de facto* widespread rejection by Roman Catholics of official Roman Catholic hermeneutic against all forms of contraception. In consequence, ecclesial teaching on this subject is regarded as of dubious integrity and dismissed as irrelevant.
- ²⁶ *Vide.* the late Antony Flew's seminal paper "Theology and Falsification" (1950)
- ²⁷ The late Antony Flew's retraction from atheism, and Rachael Stanworth's work being two examples of these dynamics.
- ²⁸ Hence healthy eating and exercise programmes currently being promoted in Britain to counter the trend towards obesity, and the highly successful programmes to diagnose breast cancer. The anti-smoking campaigns are examples of on-going and expanding health care programmes.
- ²⁹ Although this situation is broadly prevalent in contemporary British society, it is also latently true in the concurrent African context where African Independent Churches are developing significantly syncretistic language and expression that is significant to social and customary expressions of traditional religions. This will be discussed later in the case examples.
- ³⁰ Although expressed from within the Anglican discipline, what follows is true of the general situation in contemporary Christianity.
- ³¹ Form of words in recent Church of England, and Anglican, modern language liturgy e.g. ASB 1980, p.121; Common Worship 2000, p.261; An Anglican PB, Church of South Africa 1989, p.106

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

SPECIFIC TERMS, CASE HISTORIES AND REPRESENTATIVE LITERATURE

Perspective:

To understand the methodology of this thesis it is necessary to understand that it is grounded in the perspective of practical pastoral theology. It is the product of pastoral encounter with the physical and spiritual realities of personal identity in the context of dying, death and bereavement, and theological reflection on their material and spiritual expressions. As such it is a work of theological anthropology; ¹ the scope of pastoral engagement it reflects is cross-denominational and cross cultural, although it is rooted in historical Anglican hermeneutics and epistemology. ²

The thesis employs a descriptive analytical method to examine the premise that Christian faith (Christianity) is concerned with both present and future life as being the environment of intended purposeful relational expression between God and Human Persons. This reflects a view that relationality depends upon existent identity; that it is meaningfully impossible to relationally interact with any non-existent Being.

The methodology engages theological reflection of the relational dimensions of Human Personhood, identity in its eschatological significance, the Biblical narrative and continuing Christian doctrine and practice. Some specific terminology is developed to explicate this (see p.48ff below). This entailed an ideographic (Fig.1, p.34 below) approach to the phenomena of dying, death and bereavement in order to explore the meaning and connectivity of individual descriptions and often subjective phenomena and experiences that may also be related to dying people collectively.

In the context of the dying processes and amongst those being drawn into the bereavement cycle, as well as those offering ministry, the allowance of sufficient space for reflection is an essential part of the hermeneutic cycle, "...a person cannot reflect on lived experience whilst living through the experience..." (M. van Manen 1997, p.10) Such reflective process utilises both descriptive (in the form of case examples) and analytical, methodological theological reflection of those case examples.

The organic nature of the human experience of dying, and bereavement, is a delicate ecology, not susceptible to a purely academic process of acquisition of data. Rather, the essence of the experiences and people's interaction in those experiences is captured in inchoate expression.

Because they are exclusively contextual; involvement and engagement with dying and bereavement have realized meaning only in their actual contexts and particular time. These characteristics and circumstances dictated a phenomenological construct in the engagement and development of enquiry for this thesis. However strict attention was maintained throughout this process and in subsequent compilation from pastoral material, to the confessional prohibitions every priest must observe, and this remains the case.

The focus in each on-going pastoral encounter was *"How is this dying person relating to themselves and trying to share that diverse and intimate experience?"* Beyond the individual experience, the focal issue was *"How may the event of dying be theologically expressed to the community of close family and friends, and the community of faith (the local congregation) from amongst whom ministry was being undertaken to that dying person?"*

These questions explicate the interpretive paradigm (S. Littlejohn and K. Foss, 2001) that symbols and language are seminal to the ways people understand their experiences, and that their actions are based on interpretations of objects and actions relevant to their situation.

Methodology:

The objective of the methodology employed is to make theological sense out of pastoral experience in care for the dying and bereaved; the processes they and I have found helpful, and to suggest new ways of engaging with these issues.

The methodology employed is that of hermeneutic phenomenology, in keeping with van Manen (1997). This method was selected because hermeneutics enables interpretation of meanings and assumptions (van Manen 1997). The disciplines of phenomenological methodology facilitate clear identification of certain issues of particular significance to dying people, as well as facilitating understanding of some of the difficulties and failures of historical and contemporary Christian ministry and liturgy.

The hermeneutic phenomenology method is also intrinsic to pastoral caring processes; this study was not commenced as a discrete research project, but arose out of the contextual encounters of pastoral ministry and subsequent reflection and actions described within a pastoral spiral of experience, analysis, theological reflection and action.³ This process combines most productively in the energies of hermeneutic phenomenology. Phenomenology is a natural component of learning journeys – the matrix of experience which is actually lived through. More precisely the focus of phenomenology is on the core essence of a

phenomenon, and a key aspect of this practical pastoral engagement was the exploration of the ontic nature of Human Personhood as comprising of relational identity. The particular learning journey into bio-death is described in this thesis as a pilgrimage experience (see further p.108 and chap.7, p.188ff). How this was understood by those entering into the process of dying,⁴ as well as the consideration of clerical and lay theological assumptions in those conducting ministry, were key issues in the outworking of the pastoral spiral.

Hermeneutic phenomenology enables a variety of ways in which interviews may be constructed; in the pastoral context these are invariably unstructured and take the form of shared time rather than interviews as such. This is firstly to establish an open, empathetic relationship with the participant as the basis for a trusting, conversational and confessional⁵ relationship. Secondly that shared time is also the arena for exploring the issue of dying and the meaning of that inchoate experience personally; the listening to and gathering of the narrative of their lived experience. In this, the minister seeks to form an insider relationship of companionship, rather than acting as a religious functionary.

Practical, Qualitative, Pastoral Theology:⁶

The significance of this methodology is that practical,⁷ pastoral theology is theology rooted in practical and real encounter; the “actual and practical contexts and problems of ministry in the life of the Church” (J. Fowler 1989, p.14) and reasserts that theology has always been eminently practical.

Qualitative theology as with qualitative research, is both ideographic – that is seeking to understand the meaning of contingent, unique and often subjective phenomena (J. Swinton & H. Mowat 2006, p.43), and descriptive of reality so as to “enable us to understand the world differently, and in understanding differently to begin to act differently” (ibid. 2006, p.45). It is essential for dying persons to engage with this process at their own level. Qualitative theology, as with qualitative research, will therefore consider people as “actively creative agents” (ibid. 2006, p37) in its search for meaning and understanding.

I have combined the terms as “Practical, Qualitative, Pastoral Theology” (PQPT) to clarify and define the loci and characteristics of this work as seeking to understand the transcendental potential of Personhood-identity – the “human self [that may eventually see itself] no longer the merely human self but is...the theological self, the self directly in the sight of God” (S. Kierkegaard 1954, p.127), as commencing eschatologically in this life.

PQPT is expressive of a deeper focus and energy, that of "*Theology habitus*". The term is distinguished by E. Farley (1983) as theology "expressing knowledge of God...aimed towards the formation of persons and community in accordance with the knowledge of God" (E. Farley, quoted by James W Fowler 1989, p.14ff). In this, *theology habitus* is an existential phenomenon.⁸

In the context of pastoral care of the dying, the term "formation" is understood as including listening to personal story, and recognizing that story can be a means whereby the person themselves is formulating their self-understanding of their experiences. In the listening process, the minister is not only personally introduced to and included in the events, but is also able to reflect, be informed by, and thus be enabled to share more intimately in experiences that may not be extended to any other, family or friend.

Theology habitus is thus an important characteristic of PQPT in engaging with the phenomenology of dying people, specifically in enabling openness to the range of their subjective expressions and experiences, including the use of "non-religious language of spirit" (R. Stanworth 2007, p.1). In this sense *Theology habitus* as describing the awareness of the immanence of God, extending beyond the defining exclusivities of religious mores, is itself a phenomenological ideographic method.

Because of the intentional focus upon Christian pastoral ministry, there is no in-depth engagement with the theology and praxis of the companion Abrahamic faiths, or Eastern religions.

The examples from African Christianity are likewise necessarily confined within certain southern cultures – primarily those of the Shona and Tswana speaking peoples.

Figure 1 below presents an overview of the pastoral approach, methodology and process:

**Fig. 1:
Paradigm**

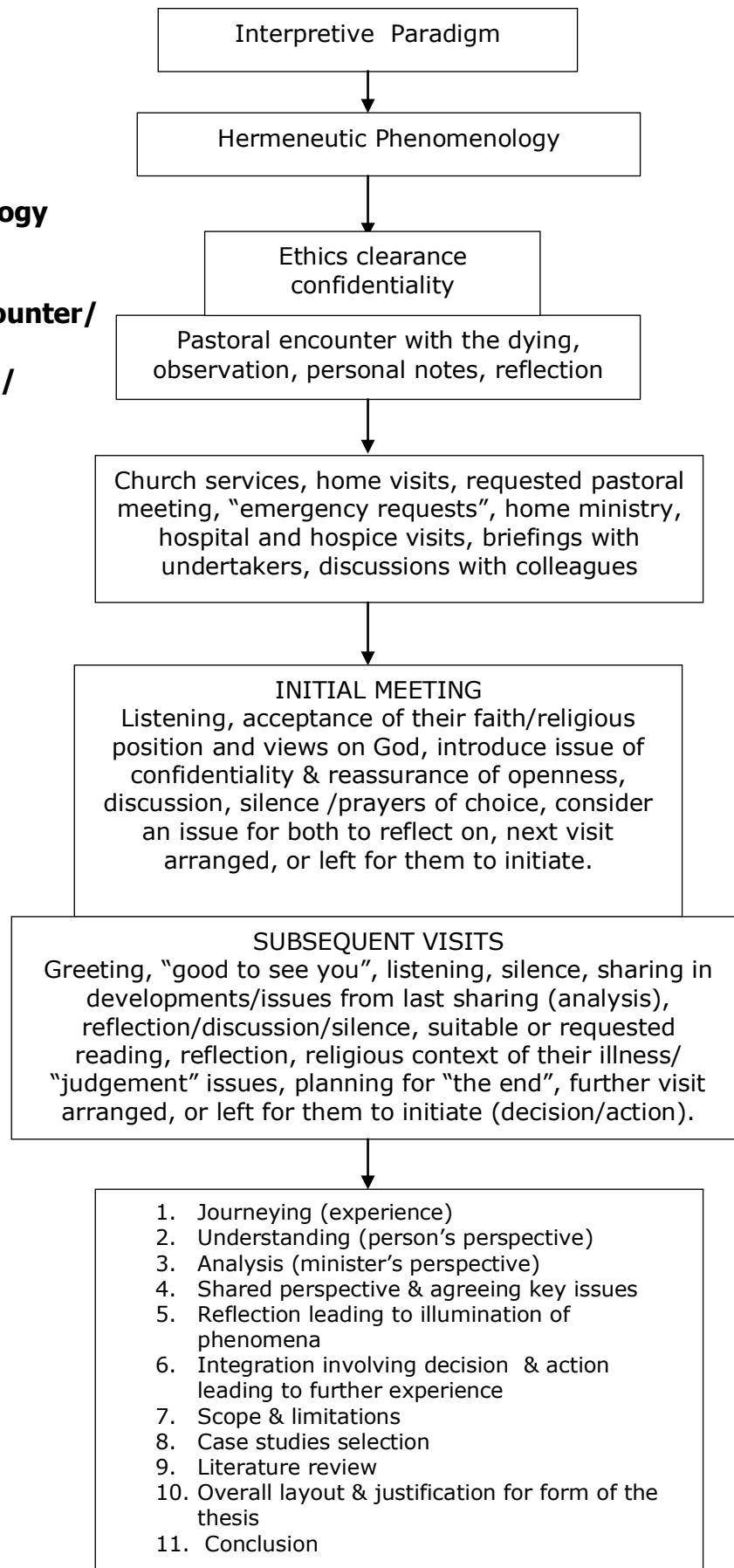
Methodology

**Data encounter/
collection/**

method

Process

**Stages of
analysis**



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Thesis Structure:

The thesis comprises ten chapters and two appendices:

Chap. 1 Introduction - the background to the thesis

Chap. 2 Methodology

Chap. 3 Case examples

Chap. 4 Boundaries

Chap. 5 Dualism and Personhood

Chap. 6 Dis-innocence and forgiven-ness

Chap. 7 Language for a pilgrim progress

Chap. 8 Language of Moralising

Chap. 9 Towards new pastoral response to Meaning in Personhood of
relational Identity

Chap.10 Summary, conclusions and proposals

Appendices

Scope:

The scope of this thesis is the reconsideration of identity through death, and the significance of bereavement to this, including some implications for pastoral ministry in this context.

The direction of this is two fold:

First is the consideration of Person-identity viewed in the contexts of dying and death, and an understanding of bereavement as located in the dying person, as well as amongst their close community of family and friends.

Key questions concerned:

- How do dying people understand and communicate themselves; *"I'm not the person I used to be"*.
- How do dying people express their experiences and relationality to others; *"It's so hard for 'them' to understand"*
- How do dying people learn to accept death; *"I want to die/Am I worthy of God?"*
- How do others learn to accept that acceptance; *"They don't want me to die"/"They won't accept I'm dying"*.

These issues led to the exploration of historical and current uses of language, liturgically and in the secular domain, and their overall influences within the theology and praxis of pastoral ministry.

Second is the consideration of dying and bio-death as a distinctive pilgrimage with different material conclusions and eschatological experiences for Personhood-identity.

The intention here is to consider specifically what it might mean to die as a Christian, in an understanding of faithful dying trusting in the love of God, his "judgment" and forgiveness of their lives, and the promise of life beyond bio-death. The eschatological dimension of Christian belief immediately raises the issue of conscious identity. This contextualizes and to a degree defines the underlying text of pastoral discussions: "*Will God forgive me?*"; "*Who will I be after dying?*" The question of identity extends the scope of discussion to include the language used in liturgy, prominently in the burial service.

A significant example here of problematic imagery in language is found in the opening bidding of the Committal wherein there is direct reference to the soul being taken "unto himself" (1662 P.B.) by God, whilst the minister and mourners "commit the [deceased's] body to the ground". The wording employed in the contemporary Common Worship (CofE) little changes the depiction of fractured identity: "We have entrusted our brother/sister *N* to God's mercy, and we now commit his/her body to the ground." The phrase "earth to earth...", etc follows in both editions.

Such language is capable of misunderstanding, particularly amongst those whose Christian knowledge base is slender. This reflects in concerns over recognition (identity): 'It seems so *final* that *N* is gone to a different place; how can he ever be 'him' again?'

Bereavement:

The subject of bereavement is considered from four aspects: 'false bereavement', 'unaccepted dying bereavement', 'obscured bereavement' and 'medical bereavement'.

False bereavement is expressed by the dying person as an avoidance technique: 'Of course it doesn't worry me at all, but I *am* worried about so-and-so.'

Bereavement in unaccepted dying is usually encountered outwardly as either a flat denial of the unfolding event, or a brittle optimism. When encountered in a survivor, it is often depicted by the 'mausoleum syndrome' - preservation of the deceased's room, or developing the grave as a shrine, or the resort to spiritualism.⁹

Obscured bereavement is a consequence of concealment, wherein the dying person is not able, or is unwilling, to be prepared for death, or to reveal their true feelings.

Medical bereavement describes the situation caused by medical interventions such as: abortion, artificial prolongation of life, refusal to disclose terminal conditions (although this is changing), and promotion of the 'donor industry'.

Margaret Lloyd's question, "What do pastors need to help them in their work with dying and bereaved people?" (1995, p.7) is relevant to each category. Her question suggests that the Christian Church may need to re-examine its theology of death, and pastoral practices relating to care of the dying and bereaved.

Ethical considerations:

Exposure to death and the processes of dying required particular ethical sensitivity in pastoral conduct in order to protect the dying person in their increasing vulnerability and weakness.

In the pastoral context where a progressively trusted and trusting relationship has been developed, the issues of manipulation and power must be safeguarded against. These concerns were monitored through shared narrative with a pastoral support group of people experienced in counseling, and a fellow minister/counselor.

When the situation involved a parishioner, whose condition and family would be known to the pastoral support group, support and counsel was sought only from the fellow minister.

The issues of confidentiality and informed consent are crucial. On all occasions, confidentiality has been maintained through the use of

pseudonyms, and by changing certain contextual details that might identify the dying person or their family.

Informed consent is defined as the “voluntary and revocable agreement of a competent individual”. (J. Sim 1986, p.584). The majority of pastoral contact with dying people is requested; contact is made by the person concerned or someone acting on their behalf.

Where contact was personally made, the first meeting assumed their desire to enter a dialogue. No assumptions were made as to the content or extent of that discussion, and the conversation was controlled by the initiator. Questions were reserved for occasions when the natural flow of conversation on the topic in hand ended, or the initiator themselves raised an immediate question. In this way, the risk of interrupting the ecology of the moment was minimized. At an opportune time, but always before the first meeting concluded, pastoral confidentiality would be fully explained, and specifically that there would be no disclosure to a third party of the conversation, or any part of it, without the prior consent of the participant, and only after reasons for such a request had been given, understood and agreed to.

Where a contact first occurred in the course of a general hospital visit, or at the request of a family member, or a friend, nurse or doctor, the initial

conversation was generalized and controlled by the patient. They were always asked if they [a] desired the meeting and [b] at its conclusion, whether they wished a further visit.

In all cases, it was carefully explained that sharing was entirely voluntary, and could be ended at any time.

In every pastoral encounter with a dying person every effort was made to develop a sound relationship with family members in order that they would feel included in the pastoral relationship. This was particularly necessary to counter feelings of exclusion as their loved one entered further into the inevitable isolation of impaired faculties and the unique internal privacy of dying.

In each of the case histories presented, consent for disclosure was freely given in the understanding that the material, including prayer biddings, would be used in the context of research into the pastoral understanding of dying and bereavement, and also to be shared as relevant in counseling of family and close friends, and for possible further publication.

In those instances where consent was not possible to obtain either because of the immediate or prevailing circumstances, material subsequently drawn

upon in general observation contains no detail that might enable personal identification.¹⁰

It was at times difficult to obtain the distance necessary for objectivity whilst entering into the closeness that is an axiom of genuine pastoral companionship. However, reflection after each pastoral encounter enabled a measure of objectivity; reflective process enables emotional disengagement.

Limitations of the study:

1. The focus of this study is deliberately confined within Christianity, and from the perspective of one denomination (Anglican), to interrogate the internal conflicts, strengths, weaknesses and failures of Anglican pastoral ministry to dying and bereaved persons. To this degree it is a narrow review, although much of what is covered may be generally applied to the wider public perception of the relevance of Christianity to the fields of dying, death and bereavement.
2. Although persons of different Christian denominations contributed to the general pastoral experiences that were formalized in the individual case examples, only one of these involves a non-Anglican. This arises out of the nature of this research as outlined above. In the example of the 'Group of five', two participants were non-

Anglican. The constructed case example of 'problem dying' assumes Anglican affiliation.

3. In-depth, personal pastoral experience covers limited ground; to encounter the representative field within Christianity alone would require a significant team effort, working in widely spaced research environments. This is particularly true for Africa.¹¹
4. There are limitations imposed by the nature and disciplines of qualitative research (confined to what people want to share), and by the lack of specifically organized *theological* research into the question of Personhood-identity.
5. The ethics of qualitative research and clerical confidentiality impose limitations on data gathering and publication.

Case examples:

The location of contact was primarily with the dying person in their accustomed home, but also included hospital or hospice venues.¹² The context was pastoral dialogue with a religious minister known to them.

Recognizing the arena of dying as a creatively changing environment wherein qualitatively, cognition and intuition exchange their cultural roles

of precedence requires a mind-shift best described as an ideographic process of openness to revelation and reflection. J.W. Fowler's term "transformative resonance" (1989, p.47) describes the shifting roles of cognition and intuition and captures the sense of interflow between their phenomenology.

The role of the pastoral theologian in this context is that of mediator between faith and culture; an observer of the complex experiences traversed by the dying person. Such openness engages the pastoral cycle in the requirements for empathetic 'journeying with', theological reflection and action, (as noted above).

The individual case studies within this thesis each concern the story of a Christian entering the processes of dying of natural causes. Two of the cases are set within England; one is set in Africa. The most prominent reason for their selection is that each was a fully engaged experience from the time of final medical diagnosis of their terminal condition to their death and funeral. The continuous pastoral dialogue with each to the time of bio-death, and with family and friends thereafter to the conclusion of their funerals, made possible a privileged theological observation of the inchoate experiences of dying, and of faith experiences and concerns within those events, including their bearing upon identity. Pastoral involvement in each case was requested, in each case identified as being to discuss the

prospect of dying and how to spiritually deal with that. This provides a secondary reason for selection; the pastoral engagement was direct and uncomplicated in the initial identification of intent. In consequence it was possible from the start to broadly map out the priorities for discussion,¹³ and for other parties to be included if desired. A third direct reason for the case selection was their representation of similar spiritual experiences and theological questioning, though each was coming from significantly different historical experience of Christian faith and culture.

Of the two English cases, one was a cradle Anglican and the other had previously minimal encounter with Christianity, other than baptism as a child. The African example reflects the consequences of imported Western Christianity and dogma; the conflicts this presents to African indigenous religious beliefs and expression, and traditional understandings of identity. Additionally this case example demonstrates the similarities in the uncertainties and fears surrounding death as expressed by Christians in the widely different cultural settings of Europe and Africa, in which the common root is the underlying text of historical church representations of death as a dread thing. This indicates both the transportability of dogmatic, prescriptive assumptions, and the contradictions they present to the credible acceptability of Christian eschatology.

A further English group experience involving five people, previously strangers to each other but all in the terminal stages of illness demonstrates the results and possibilities of a specifically formed "Fellowship of the dying", to provide people in their homes the opportunity to share and learn from their experiences of dying, and to support one another as pilgrims encountering one another on a common progress. This study is confined to the experiences of the group. It was brought into being as a pastoral exercise as a result of "word of mouth" introductions and naturally ended at the point where their individual health prevented further contact. These pastoral encounters therefore do not include significant detail of the participant's terminal journeys from their inception; the group study was concerned with facilitating an experimental method of support, formed and directed by its members.

In each of these case examples, as in all pastoral work with vulnerable persons, the role of the minister occupied three dimensions. Firstly as *pastor-companion*; in this, the emphasis was as trusted resource-person rather than a specialist advisor. This identification helped to facilitate trust and confidence. Secondly, as *friend-companion*; this role helped to reduce embarrassment over the use of non-clerical language, and to encourage the dying person to use often indirect terms, and varied imagery to describe their experiences and emotions. There was the sense that "the two of us" were "making the best of describing difficult things", and proved an

effective method of assisting the situation where a spiritually significant event or experience is easier to recognize than to explain (R. Stanworth 2007, p.2). Thirdly, as *theological companion*, there was the reassurance that their faith concerns would be discussed in the context of seeking Godly wisdom (Theology habitus) rather than in dogma. Although of significance for the reasons outlined above, each of the cases contains within its dialogue common ground with the everyday pastoral encounter with the concerns and confusions of dying people.

Terminology:

The thesis makes use of a number of specifically developed terms. It is because certain concepts and arguments put forward and developed through the thesis require different use of language for the conveyance of nuance. The technique is not of itself unique; Sheppy employs the terms "biotic" and "zoetic"; "biotic as relating to the origins of life, zoe as applying to destiny". (2003, p.40ff). Jungel (1973, p.114) coins "relationlessness" as descriptive of the state of death. In similar vein, in this thesis, the term "bio-life" indicates the material state of Being. De Chardin (1971, p.85) develops "noosphere" as descriptive of the progressively expanding phenomenon of human spiritual consciousness. In recent secular usage the phrase "the disappeared", arising out of the removal of individuals from society during the Argentinian military regimes and whose fate is unknown, has entered political language as a nuanced euphemism for "dead",

“executed”, “murdered”. The term emphasised both the continuing reality of their absence, and the probability of their illegal death, where engagement of more direct language was legally prevented by the lack of empirical evidence.

Nuanced language therefore has a legitimate employment in specific description, where common language terms are not sufficient in their every day received usage. Three examples from amongst those occurring within this thesis are the terms “Dis-innocence”, “Personhood” and “the Spirit who is Holy”. The application and interpretation of the term “moral” is also explained.

Dis-innocence is employed to convey a nuance of meaning that is not inherent in the terms “guilty”, “innocent”, or “naive”. It describes the condition wherein an individual identifies with the experience of an action without themselves being voluntarily participant in it, but in so doing, they become altered in the capacity of their moral experience. The intended meaning in “dis-innocence” is greater than simply consequential to experiencing loss of innocence, for the phrase “loss of innocence” does not usually embrace an understanding on the part of the loser, of what the offending action means; a child may be witness to an act of violence, may be traumatised by it, without comprehending its deeper implications. Three texts illustrate this intended meaning of dis-innocence:

“For our sake he made him to be sin who had no sin...” (2Cor.2:21)

“He committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips” (1Pet.2:22)

“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...” (1Pet.2:24).

Each text is specific in the apparent contradiction between innocence and culpability; the innocent one is tainted without personally having committed any transgression, yet *knows* the interior-ness of the experience.

A further text, the fragment of Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” attributed to Jesus on the cross, makes explicit his consciousness of the trajectory of guilt in its power to separate Person from the origin of Being, Person estranged from God. Dis-innocence is portrayed as a conscious experience of the loss of innocence resulting in moral anguish and the uncertainty that are characteristic of guilt.

Personhood of Relational identity:

The nature of human-ness may intrinsically be defined as Personhood of innocent relational identity, to which bio-form is intrinsic but not in itself what defines Person. By this I mean that the Human creature is a synthesis of the physical and spiritual. This construct offers a viable alternative to the anthropological language of ‘body/soul’, and the dualism these terms unavoidably establish as comprising the nature of human beings.

In that it does not presuppose or require the limitation of relational identity to the life-ness of its material bodily form, such a definition allows also for the greater understanding of meaning in the evolution, within the Creation¹⁴ arising from God, of self-conscious morally¹⁵ relational Personhood and the significance of bio-death as adjunctive to that.

The specificity of "*Personhood*" is that, ontologically, it is the product of God's intimate Grace which *of itself* determines the nature of human-ness; its use herein as applied to the Human creature, indicates what predicates each individual's identity¹⁶ within all the dimensions in which that life is represented. Thus the Personhood of an individual is concurrent within the physical *and* metaphysical conditions and actions of their Being.

The argument here is that *identity arises out of Personhood* – and to some degree must be recognised as synonymous to it – and, centrally, that the essential nature of Personhood is relational. Any suspension of, or reduction in the expression of relationality results in a defacing¹⁷ of Personhood; interpreted narrowly in this context, bio-death becomes revealed as its complete abnegation, to which there can be no remedy and therefore neither purpose nor capacity in eschatological religious faith.

Were this to be so, the foundational belief of primitive Christianity in the factual resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth as both a present sign and the

eschatological witness, the Christ: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead..." (1Cor.15:20 [see also Acts 2:24,32ff]), might have poetic integrity but no dimension of verifiable proof in the sense of the twinned meanings of the latter terms in modern, scientific discourse.

The Spirit who is Holy:

The phrase is used in the same sense as the phrase "the spirit of the age" is accepted as descriptive of the ethos or characteristic of a given time, identifying a defining uniqueness of that period. The Spirit who is Holy is intended as a re-clarification of identity; that the Spirit who is Holy is that of God himself.¹⁸

Moral:

The term "moral" is employed to qualify many claims e.g. the conflict between good and evil may be described as moral dualism. R. Holloway asserts morality to be created by human beings for social management "morality is a human construct; it is something that we ourselves have created." (2000, p.69) It is disingenuous to attempt the limitation of moral meaning by this very narrow, casuist argument. My uses of the term are:

- *As a description of the condition of God's Being;* any action or purpose that is intact of innocence, devoid of ulterior or deficient purpose; the condition of God's Being, and a defining characteristic of transcendence.

- *As a description of pure identity – moral Personhood;* the identity of Being that is intact of innocence, devoid of ulterior or deficient purpose, or the knowledge of same.
- *As describing a character of choice;* moral action, thought or purpose as the product of choice to do something that is innocent of assertive power or intention to possess or unilaterally determine the will or wellbeing of the subject of the moral action. For an action to be morally pure, it must intend to be innocent of guile¹⁹ – as demonstrated in the opposite by W. Owen’s castigating words:

...My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est
Pro patria mori.

(“Dulce et Decorum est”, www.warpoetry.co.uk)

- *As a description of bio-death;* bio-death is moral²⁰ in that of itself it is without ulterior motive; neither can bio-death be demonstrated as resulting from an intentional act by God.²¹

Representative literature considered:

The subject has involved a significant breadth of reading covering a wide selection of topics; however as can be seen in the bibliography, it has also demanded a careful focus upon the issues at the heart of the thesis of which the most narrowly selected subject was liturgy. There are two reasons for this:

1. This thesis is not about liturgical comparison.

2. Because the particular issues being considered liturgically as relevant to the enquiry of this work – the underlying Anglican doctrines being expressed in confession and absolution, baptism, ministry to the dying including Last Rites, and funeral services – are almost identically expressed in the historical and contemporary orders of service across the Anglican Communion. The most significant modern exception overall is the New Zealand Prayer Book of 1989.

Historically, the nuances of the 1st and 2nd Prayer Books of Edward VI provide an insight into the theological divisions of the times, and were historically significant 'base-line' material in focussing theological reflection on the intentions of the Church of England in framing the changes. These expand and explicate the grounds for denial of Christian ministry to those regarded as guilty of particular commissions or of unacceptable beliefs.

I have been greatly assisted by James W. Fowler's discussion of E. Farley's identification of two significant phases in theological development "*Theology habitus*" and "*Systematic or Applied practical pastoral theology*". *Theology habitus* describes theology as "knowledge of God...aimed towards the formation of persons and community in accordance with the knowledge of God." *Systematic or Applied Theology* reasserts that theology is "eminently practical", challenging aspects of pure [scholastic] theology. (Fowler 1989, pp.13ff)

I have drawn on Bishop Jeremy Taylor's work, "*The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying*", as a representative reflection of the theology and praxis of a period in the Church of England that has continued to exert considerable influence within the dispersed Episcopal/Anglican Communion up to the mid 20th century. Notably the pessimism of his analysis of natural ageing processes as metaphors of immorality and death as the inevitable consequence of sin. The eloquence of his language adds authority to the detail of his argument.

The Bible comprising Old and New Testaments, and the Apocrypha, remains the primary reference work for Christians. In relation to the specific issues raised in this thesis, it is therefore a significant resource.

Amongst contemporary writing, those of D. Adam, P. Badham, M. Bloch, T. de Chardin, O. Cullmann, D.J. Davies, L.K. Dupré (esp. 'Passage to Modernity'), E. Farley, A. Flew, C. Gittings, R. Holloway, E. Jungel, P. Jupp & T. Rogers, H. Kung, D. Lan, M. Lloyd, M. & D. Lynn and S. Fabricant, W. Owen (esp. his collected war poems), W. Pannenberg, M. Ramsay, K. Rahner, P.P.J. Sheppy, R. Stanworth, T. Wright and L. Wulforth, have been the most significant to my later reflections for the development of this thesis. R. Eklund's (1941) work on Islamic beliefs and traditions, although difficult to read, has been invaluable.

In the context of contemporary pastoral theology and praxis, the shifts in acceptance and belief amongst many Western Christians regarding historical interpretations and teaching of the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and *inter alia*, a theological interpretation of bio-death.

Three works spanning the past 100 years have been selected from the considerable body of writing about dying, death and bereavement as representative examples of Christian responses to these changes, and to the rise of philosophical and scientific questioning and doubt. They contribute distinctive pastoral insights and theological contributions to the foci of this thesis, relevant to the consideration of eschatological Human Personhood-identity as individuated within physical and metaphysical identity. Each offers a particular insight into the phenomenon of relationality as inseparable from Personhood-identity; where that identity exists, relational possibility exists. They are the sermon "*The King of Terrors*" preached in St Paul's Cathedral in May, 1910 by H.S. Holland; M. Ramsay's book, *The Resurrection of Christ*" (1945 & subsequent); and R. Stanworth's book "*Recognizing Spiritual Needs in People Who are Dying*" (2007).

H.S. Holland:

Canon Holland's sermn²² on the Feast of Pentecost was given at a time of national mourning in Britain; the King had just died and thousands waited

at Westminster to file past his coffin. The world's most powerful society was facing again the invasion of death upon its supreme symbol of permanence. This context is crucial to Holland's pastoral address, beyond the congregation at St Paul's, to the wider community of Britain. His addressing of the significance of death and the experience of loss modelled three possible forms of response, his point in each example being its end product and therefore, its bearing upon truthful integrity.

The first is that of the unmitigated sense of loss and the futility of death "an evil mischance".²³ The products of this are inconsolable loss, inchoate fear, anger, and despair, and the dilution of hope.

The second essentially refuses to recognize death as of any significance either in the life of the deceased or the survivors – "death is nothing at all...it does not count...I have only slipped away into the next room".²⁴ There is no closure possible in this frame of mind; only pretence that leads to greater artificiality that cannot last and ultimately ushers in the conditions of the first.

The third acknowledges all the emotions and reactions of the first two, but also what is attested in the resurrection of Jesus. Here Holland emphasises a process within the context of a living, unimpeded relationship: "we are in a condition of process, of growth, of which our state on earth is but the

preliminary condition²⁵ between God and mankind; “we have the Spirit of Him who says: ‘I am the Resurrection and the Life...’²⁶ Holland’s view is of a process of individuated spiritual Personhood; his depiction of this avoids the exaggerated imagery and ‘certainties’ of life after death.

An extract of Canon Holland’s sermon has in the past 40 years provided the text for one of the most commonly encountered bereavement cards in Britain. In this form, it represents a denial of death “Death is nothing at all...nothing has happened”. (see ref.²⁴ above) In fact Holland was focussed upon the complete reverse of these sentiments, yet that has not prevented a fragment of his treatise being widely popularised in a subsequent deliberate miss-construal of his message.

Immediately, pastorally, this extract from Holland’s comprehensive text abuses the liturgies, prayers and intrinsic theology of Christian burial rites, and as such repudiates the significance of death and renders meaningless the basis of Christian belief in the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. There is no congruity between its statement and those of the Christian gospels, but its advertised authorship lends credibility to the underlying message as being a reasonable and compatibly modern response to death.

It is the contemporary prominence and influence achieved by this fragment that suggests the extent of ‘everyday’ Christian ignorance of the core of

their faith, and the seeming paucity of theological pastoral counteraction from Christian Churches. Several factors may underlie this:

- A growing tendency to reject over-literalism in the redaction of historical Church insistence on an actual, bodily revival and translation of Jesus' once corporal body.
- The seemingly incontestable weight of ever advancing scientific knowledge that supports the reappraisal of historical 'truths' as mythological or poetic language alone.
- The secular rejection of faith structures and metaphysical experience as being anything other than imaginative piety; a sub-text of this being to accord validity to the phenomenon of experience only upon the basis of its empiricism.
- A consequent lack of certainty arising out of all of the above, and increasing Christian loneliness – lay and clerical - as the once Christian basis of Western cultures erodes.

Holland's perception of death is that of a relational process within the overall intention for human life; what Karl Barth would later describe as "the goal of human life [being] not death but resurrection" (Time Magazine, May 1962 cover story).

M. Ramsay:

Archbishop Ramsay's work in the mid years of the Twentieth Century represents a well argued engagement and defence of the Christian belief in the Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, in the context of a modern, scientific age. Ramsay argues that the integrity of the historical doctrine is not diminished by the avoidance of a literal resurrection of the biological body of Jesus, and that linguistically the term 'body' is widely used to denote both corporate identity (as in a Committee), and metaphysical identity (as in body of thinking, or understanding, or acceptance). He thus interposes a different possibility between the opposing beliefs of biblical literalism and the interpretation of the resurrection story as materially impossible and therefore allegorical. For all that it stands as a major scholastic work, and has been revised and reprinted through many years it appears to have little influenced the theology or language of contemporary European or American burial liturgies, or countered the continuing Western cultural incredulity – Christian and secular - of the biblical narratives of the Resurrection of Jesus as describing a substantial, rather than emotional, mythologically interpreted, event.

However, an examination of this focus in Ramsay's discourse extrapolates Jesus' individuated Personhood-identity as the 'body' of his resurrected entity, and the Apostles' re-encounter with that as the purpose of the Evangel; in this he agrees with Holland's culminating focus. His argument

also provides a response to E. Jungel's definition of death as "relationlessness" in pointing out that identity (and therefore, relationality) may inhabit, and be expressed in, form other than physical.

R. Stanworth:

Stanworth (2005) has demonstrated the reality of spiritual needs (and consciousness) in the dying, and that there is an intrinsic and deep basis for those awarenesses that is not associated exclusively with their bio-living. Her work in the closing years of the Twentieth Century, represents a significant re-examination of the inner needs of the dying as being other than psychological or consequential upon chemical changes to the body. She identifies Spirituality as the dynamic of a psychic dimension within human beings that is not a product of overtly religious consciousness or practice, or a culturally imposed lacuna. In this, her findings point to the ontic origin of Human Personhood-identity as being different from the understandings of identity as a societal phenomenon.

Her contribution to the discernment and importance of recognizing spiritual needs "the sources of meaning and sense of self of people who are dying" (2007, p.5) is a challenging reminder that human identity is itself spiritual, and that 'spirituality' is not merely a product of religious suggestive propaganda. Centrally, she demonstrates that human spirituality requires meeting and response; that there is a necessary and beneficial consequence to such

encounter and communication that addresses the needs of the dying individual in ways and dimensions other than clinical processes and palliative care therapy. Her work in this field in many ways demonstrates a parallel journey to that of this thesis – the consideration of the ontic roots of Human Personhood-identity. This approach to human identity²⁷ particularly in the contexts of dying,²⁸ death and bereavement is complex in that it engages a different idea concerning form as expressive of identity, rather than as identity deriving from social construct or the particular substance or construction of form.

Conclusion:

This pastoral research is undertaken in the interpretive paradigm utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach as described in the work of van Manen (1997). Several methods of data collection will be employed; observation during unstructured one-to-one pastoral dialogue controlled by the dying person, and notes made after each pastoral visit highlighting key/meaningful points and general tone of the visit. Every effort will be made to ensure the integrity of this process, for example the comparative evaluation of similar descriptions of an event or experience with those of other case experiences.

The qualitative value of the pastoral spiral is to connect experience of a phenomenon with the core essence and significance of that phenomenon.

Recurring themes and spiritual phenomena – particularly the vividness and description of their content – and occasional written prayers by the respondents were recorded. Analysis of the data follows the processes of the pastoral spiral.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is shown to be an appropriate methodology to facilitate learning and communicate the exchange and understanding of the dying persons' spiritual experiences and observations. This focus is congruent with the aims of exploring the understanding of Personhood-identity through the person's pilgrim experience of dying, including the impacting of the stages of bereavement of self – loss of essential faculties and abilities.

The findings of this pastoral study have implications for training methodology appropriate to practical qualitative pastoral theology and the reviewing of liturgical language. For example, concerning the emphasis upon relationality and relationship, the Christian evangel speaks out of encountered situations and not out of philosophical ideas concerning the capacity for life after death. These encountered experiences are interpretive; they describe the nature of individuated Personhood and identity as inhabiting both material and spiritual dimensions. St. Paul's narrative (1.Cor.15:44a) classically demonstrates the hermeneutic cycle in his identifying the eschatological dimension of human identity as

commencing in bio-life and not as an unquantifiable theoretical phenomenon beyond bio-life. This will be considered in the final proposals.

Using an interpretive paradigm enables an understanding of the ontology of Human Personhood identity through the experiences of dying persons approaching their bio-death as a pilgrimage experience into the event that ends the physical containment of Human Personhood-identity.

In addition to contributing to the body of wisdom concerned with the phenomenon of eschatological Personhood-identity, these methodological strategies, through their reflexive energies enabled my own deeper engagement with the significance of the ontology of Human Personhood-identity and the story of that transcendent identity as encountered in the resurrected Jesus.

END NOTES:

- ¹ Theological anthropology concerns human beings and their relationship with God, that bonding which Karl Rahner describes as at the core of our every experience (Spirit in the World, 1939, trans. 1969)
- ² It is probable that the Anglican experience has parallels in the theology and praxis of other Christian denominations.
- ³ The processes of the pastoral cycle/spiral are also described as Experience, Analysis/Theological Reflection and Action – Diocese of Birmingham Justice & Resource Pack; www.birminghamjandp.org.uk/assets/J&Presourcepack-pastoralcycle1.pdf

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- 4 Axiomatically this does not include the experience of sudden death by whatever cause, nor does it embrace the significant differences in the phenomenon of bereavement that survivors experience in that context, although some of that repertoire may be common to that of anticipated bereavement.
- 5 The term "confessional" means the sharing of intimate confidences, fears etc, as well as the articulation of personal faith. The confessional relationship may also embrace times of formal Confession in its moral and faith. context. Such instances and intention are signified by the use of the capital C.
- 6 The term "qualitative" is used to claim the properties it ascribes to research for practical theology also, as the aims and ethos of practical theology should equally seek to explicate and describe reality in order to enable understanding.
- 7 Also referred to as "Applied" theology by J. W. Fowler 1989, p.15.
- 8 The term '*habitus*' has generated considerable scholarly discussion. In Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) work, the concept of habitus finds expression and application in an individual's Dispositions... "the lasting, acquired schema of precepts, thought and actions" (www.wikipedia.org/habitus). Bourdieu argued that "Disposition" enacts preference. In this he inclines towards Max Weber's meaning of '*habitus*' - the product of learned habits. In employing the term '*Theology habitus*', both Farley and Fowler axiomatically include the concept of God's self-revelation to human beings as a legitimate basis for its use. It is therefore arguably possible to employ the term as a disposition of Faith, and as such is an existential phenomenon arising directly out of an awareness of the immanence of God. In this sense, *Theology habitus* describes an expression of faith rather than received habit.
- 9 In the churchyard of St. Patrick's, Salter Street, there continued weekly for many years an exchange of letters between a mother and her dead son, with corresponding letters from the son. The letters were written on different notepaper, enclosed in differing envelopes, and dealt with on-going everyday situations of their lives. They were frequently opened and left scattered
- 10 Notes were kept of significant pastoral occasions arising out of discussions, shared prayer, developments in understanding, recognized concerns and fears, and also with close family members when they desired to talk about their fears and emotions concerning their dying relative. Regrettably, most of these contemporary notes, together with various outlines of liturgical material, were destroyed in a house flood subsequent to this thesis being submitted in 2009.
- 11 In Botswana alone there are over 3800 Christian churches registered. The majority of these are African Independent Churches, wherein doctrine and praxis concerning dying and death, though broadly similar, nevertheless contain significant detail differences.
- 12 Three of the case studies were in majority conducted in their homes. The remaining case study was undertaken in majority in a hospital, due to the required regime of medical treatment.
- 13 These were loosely suggested by the dying person as being those things of conscious concern; the agenda was never fixed or formalized and thus might move indiscriminately between subjects and topics.
- 14 The term '*cosmos*' is not here used because the usual scope of its meaning is descriptive of the universe as an orderly, systematic whole; it attaches no relational identity within that universe. Scientifically and colloquially the "Big Bang" that is theorised as the beginnings of the universe, is an impersonal event arising out of molecular occurrence only.
- 15 This ascription of moral capacity as intrinsic to the idea of human identity being relational, directly opposes the notion advanced by R. Holloway (2000) that morality is essentially a construct of human society. In arguing that ethical behaviour and moral responsibility must be of human construct and humanly owned, he obscures the difference between moral expression (ethics), and the ontic origin of the phenomenon of moral capacity. The human capability to comprehend "good" and "not good" situations and to elect to act morally, informs ethical considerations and their enactment. Holloway argues speciously in making the distinction between sin and immorality; "sin is an essentially religious idea...the concept of sin essentially works on the basis of [blind] obedience rather than consent" (2000, p.5). Sin is an act that impairs relationality; it is not essentially a rebellion against "blind" obedience "the unthinking

nature of the obedience that is demanded" (2000, p.7); it betrays relational trust and hope. Holloway's arguments are typical of much latter day clerical hand-wringing and intellectual confusion.

- 16 I take the same view of identity as that expressed by Douglas Davies (*Death, Ritual and Belief* p.12 *Identity and embodiment*), "holding it to be the sense individuals have of who they are and what they are", etc.
- 17 The significance of this with regard to the processes and nature of bereavement is discussed later.
- 18 John's recording of the words of Jesus [4:24] "God is spirit"..., and the Matthew text [10:20] "the Spirit of your Father" both harmonise with the early Hebrew scripture [Gen1:2] "the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters" in describing the identity, authority and actions of the Holy Spirit. However, as the coherence and knowledge of the Judeo/Christian faith becomes more obscure from contemporary Gentile understanding, it may be instructive to use language that directly attaches personal identity to the characteristic of "Holy". The "Spirit who is Holy" is more readily capable of being descriptive of God himself, rather than merely consequent upon the nature of God.
- 19 The *application* of moral activity requires wisdom, but this does not alter the claim that for intention to be moral, it must be without guile.
- 20 The material causes of bio-death may not be moral, and the consequences of those causes may be described as immoral, but they do not impart upon bio-death per se the stigma of immorality.
- 21 In most cases the physical or chemical causes of bio-death may be scientifically determined. The fictional clause "Act of God", beloved by Insurers to describe an event beyond human control, may be directly responsible for boosting erroneous religious superstitions concerning unilateral and violent actions of the Divine. In this regard also, the superstition that "God gives and God takes away" is often expressed about cot deaths. Cot deaths may occur without apparent reason, but random causality need not have a reason.
- 22 "*The King of Terrors*", sermon preached at St Paul's Cathedral, London, 15.5.1910
- 23 Ibid. p.1, para 1, line 17
- 24 Ibid. p.2, para 5, line 11
- 25 Ibid.p.3, para 2, line 5
- 26 Ibid.p.6, para 1, line 5
- 27 It is not intended to engage in a comparative dialogue with philosophies of social identity, *vide* those put forward by E. Durkheim and H. Garfinkel, among others; however in my view Garfinkel's construction is the more compatible with a Judaeo/Christian theology of human identity.
- 28 Davies (1997, p.12) shows that identity is a key aspect in a significant number of cultural and religious responses to death.

Chapter 3

ENCOUNTERING DEATH AS PILGRIMAGE

The Case Examples

As previously stated (Chap.2, p.43ff) the individual case examples concern the narrative of three Christian people entering the process of dying of natural causes. Two of these cases are set within England; one is set in Africa. The three were continuously and closely pastorally supported from an early stage in their terminal prognosis, in the context of the concept of pilgrimage.

In contrast to the three detailed individual cases some of the issues of "problem dying"¹ are raised in a constructed narrative from a number of pastoral situations.² Prominent common issues encountered in the pastoral situation of problem dying include immediate and sustained fears and frustrations of deprivation of relational functionality,³ inadequate sharing of emotions and spiritual issues⁴ and the fear of judgement⁵ beyond death.

A further English group experience involving five people, previously strangers to each other but all in the terminal stages of illness, demonstrates the results and possibilities of a specifically formed

“Fellowship of the Dying”, to provide people in their homes the opportunity to share, encourage and learn from one another of their spiritual experiences⁶ of dying, and also to support one another as pilgrims encountering one another on a common progress.

Common to all cases was the focus and effect of pastoral ministry representing death as a unique *evolutionary*⁷ pilgrimage event of life, through which there exists the Christian hope in resurrection of unique Personhood-identity.⁸ Although each of the individual cases reflects different life experience, and in one case, an altogether different culture, the prevailing background thread amongst them was the similarity and effects historical Christian teachings and praxis had had upon their initial reactions to approaching death.

As experiences from applied practical pastoral theology, the three case examples demonstrate the beneficial results of approaching death as an evolutionary event within an eschatological pilgrimage of relational identity. Essentially, the group-of-five experiences indicated similar positive patterns of response.

Understood from the perspective of *theologia habitae*, Christian belief points to the Divine action as giving new life to the unique identity of Person, that is, resurrection into the pilgrimage of relational purpose in continuing eschatological unity with God. That pilgrimage begins in this life.

Encountering Pilgrimage:

Helen's story

HELEN was in her 80s when cancer at an advanced stage was first diagnosed. The prognosis was for a year or so of bio-life. In fact she lived for a further five and a half months.

She was an articulate, educated woman, now widowed, who had been married to a professional man. A life-long churchgoer and devout Communicant involved in many aspects of parish and community life, hers was the quintessentially 'faithful' Christian life, observing of Church customs and traditions and respectful of clerical ministry. Intellectually she understood Christianity to "*...encourage a good outlook on life and help one to be honest...*"⁹

Though alert to other expressions of Christianity she was, by her own admission, lacking in her experience of spirituality beyond the liturgical provisions of the Church of England. Her "*inner religion*" (an expression she often used) was private; it was, she said, where she kept her questions and fears.

Once apprised of her medical condition, she requested prayer for strength in what lay ahead. She spoke openly amongst the congregation of her cancer; the responses being predictably mixed. Shortly thereafter, her first experience of deep pain and reduction in mobility occurred.¹⁰ As her illness

developed her church attendance became irregular and then prevented her from coming to the Sunday parish Eucharist. It was arranged that she would receive the Sacrament after the service at home. She used these occasions to discuss her dying with me, at first in quite general and practical terms: *"It seems an insult to God to try and pray when my head is all fuzzy, but I do try."*¹¹

She "hated" her illness: *"It makes me into someone I'm not"*. A dominant concern arose from her belief in bodily resurrection and that God might ask her to *"always live with the cancer"*. She also missed worshipping with other people, so a small group of parishioners¹² began to meet at her home mid-week to worship and pray with her. On these occasions she would receive the Sacrament of Holy Communion, unless intense nausea prevented this.

The focus of prayer for her was contextual, that is it was firstly for those things that she herself felt need for – relief for specific pain or discomfort, or fears or worries, or for *"strength to cope with indignities"*. Beyond these she requested prayer for her married daughters¹³ and for her clinical carers. She also remained in touch with the parish circle of prayer.

At one of the earliest of the mid-week gatherings, she underwent an experience which appeared to be a lapse of consciousness, shortly after the group had begun specific prayer with her. Those who were touching

her felt her body lose tension and, although her complexion did not alter, she appeared to have drifted into a deep unconsciousness. Everyone present experienced the event; we paused, and prepared to revive her. Within a very short space of time - the entire event and group reactions to it probably occupied less than two minutes - Helen revived without any assistance, expressing an emotion of joy, which she at first found difficult to describe. She said that she had "*encountered the Lord, I think*" almost as soon as prayers with her had commenced.

The substance of her account was that she had felt herself being first "*quietened within*", and then being flooded with an experience of weightlessness in which she was floating above her physical body and being drawn towards an effusion of light, deriving "*strength and understanding*" from the encounter. Its attraction was considerable and she felt greatly reassured; then, whilst still at a distance from it, she felt herself being gently turned back towards her "*slightly distant*" body.¹⁴ She said that she had all the while remained aware of her surroundings and of the group's presence and prayers. The event had been unlike any previous experience; she had never before existentially experienced deeply emotional or mystical faith encounters;¹⁵ this had "*just happened*". She was not discomforted but said emphatically that she had never associated any dimension of intimate, sentient, faith encounter with her usual Christian experience.

The outstanding features of her first account were the continuity of her sense of identity "*I knew exactly who I was and all of me was there*", and the accessibility of a "*different dimension of life*". Her account was intellectual in its cogent relaying of her experience of who she was - that the form of her identity was intact beyond her biological body, and that she did not feel isolated from the group. In reflecting back to her what she had said, it became clear that the impact of this experience lay in her awareness of belovedness, Being-ness and sacramental relationality¹⁶ to God.

Hitherto in discussions she had expressed attitudes and expectations apparently entirely in keeping with the culture of her generation; that death was "*inevitable, but you just hope you get things right*," and that Christian faith could immensely support a "*dignified ending*". Of the future, she had expected that "*the glass through which you look would become less dark*" at some point "*in the next life*"; for now, faithful obedience were one's experience; any more personalised encounter with Jesus or God was reserved for the Judgement Day.

Her experience changed the parameters of our one-to-one pastoral discussions; she began to ask what "*life after death means, I've never been asked to think what those words actually mean about me*". We began a study of Biblical texts on the death and resurrection of Jesus, specifically to identify these as experiences within a pilgrimage of intentional love,

rather than as intentionally exposing of human sinfulness and guilt.¹⁷ Only at this time in our one-to-one discussions, did she begin to further volunteer her inner fears concerning life after death, specifically those of being restored to her physical body at the resurrection; an eventuality she had believed to be unavoidable. In this, she was expressing a dominant strand of historical Christian doctrine¹⁸ that had formed into a significant fear in her 'inner religion'.

Privately, she had latterly resented death, and did not desire any physical life beyond death. Equally, she had felt undeserving of "*going to Hell*" in consequence of rebelling against God who would, she had believed, restore her material body at the Resurrection. Progressively she began to express expectation and a new certainty of being loved and prepared in some way, and to employ different language in describing her mystical experiences. Increasingly she used language of relationship "*the sort of feeling there is between you and a close friend*"; her weekly mystical experiences were "*strengthening me in my daily existence*", and "*helping me towards the physical ending of my life*".

Reassurance rather than a devout fatalism increasingly characterised her outlook. For her, bio-death was becoming a transitional event into further existence, the nature of which she felt she was already experiencing "*as me myself*", completely conscious of her identity and being. She now described her experiences as not journeying *away* from one life into

another, but as rather *recognition of* another form of life, significantly, as a Person. She never expressed disembodiment or being dispossessed of identity. She was herself, "*I'm myself*", glimpsing and conscious of a different community of life, although as yet not fully translated to it. Her experiences seemed not to result in a situation of euphoria in which the realities of her physical body succumbing to cancer, or departure from loved ones, were willed away. Physically, she lived each day with great deliberation, tranquillity and inner peace although latterly she was beset by many indignities.

"Resurrection begins as hope is given to us, enabling us to live creatively in spite of death; it comes as a new perception given by God's grace."
(Rumbold 1986, p75)

Arising out of her sustained experiences, Helen found the opportunity and space at the weekly group gathering to openly discuss and reflect on dying, and in particular the significance of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and the substance of his 'bodily' Being in the resurrection narratives.

Through pastoral discussion of ontological identity as deriving in God, and that according to Biblical witness

"death and resurrection do not abolish the identity of the person but preserve it in an unimaginable changed form in a completely new dimension" (Küng 1993, p.111),

Helen was significantly freed from anxieties in her *"inner religion"*: *"Will I know who I am?"*, *"Where will I be?"*, *"Will I be like I am now?"* *"Will I be loved?"*, *"I've done nothing to be proud about, so why should God be proud of me?"*⁴⁹

These anxieties were largely derived from religious imagery and biblical apocalyptic language (especially the book of Revelation) concerning the status of life after death. In discussing the value of imagery, Helen's focus moved from a generalised position (what is actually known about life after bio-death - not a lot) to her own faith experience in present time: *"I know how much I have felt God in my life, for most of my life; why should that change"*.

This reaffirmation inspired in her a new dimension of trust and hope for a new energy of life in the resurrection of her relational Personhood through the vitality of God's life-giving love; *"I am now comforted that it will be in the spiritual body that St. Paul speaks of."* (see 1Cor.15:44).

Helen remained in her home until the last stages of illness. She continued to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion weekly until her death three months later, in the early summer of 1987. During her final short period of incapacitation she required full time nursing, at which point she was placed in a local hospice.

The ministry to Helen:

The weekly Eucharist and prayers at her home were central to the body of parish ministry to Helen, conducted by a group of parishioners with whom she shared her learning journey. Significantly, this became a ministry through her to many of her other visitors who found themselves relieved of anxiety about *"how to visit a person who is going to die"*.²⁰

At these home Eucharists discussion and teaching was focused on the Gospel accounts of Jesus' baptism, the Transfiguration, Crucifixion and Resurrection, and on St Paul's letters to the Romans and the Corinthians. Pastoral discussion with Helen included exploring the message of each of these biblical events in the contexts of baptism and death; firstly in relation to the baptism, death and resurrection of Jesus, and thereafter considering their relevance for her own Personhood identity.

These narratives as central to the life and understanding of the first Christians were also discussed in relation to contemporary expressions in the liturgies of baptism and burial. These considerations became essential as Helen began to share her understanding of, and private reactions to, the doctrinal teaching of sin and judgement she had grown up with.

These were significant also amongst the regular group members, and demonstrated that, in spite of statements from leaders of the mainline Western denominations,²¹ half-belief in the resuscitation of molecular body

persists.²² So too does the view of God's Judgement persist as a fearful and antagonistic event.

As an understanding of bio-death as a moral event within God's sustaining love, and in the particular expression of Romans 8:38-9, grew in Helen, the focus of prayer became for her bio-death to come, not in the sense of 'hastening the end', but to continue a pilgrim journey she increasingly recognised.

The form of service for Helen's funeral was the ASB rite (Alternative Service Book of the Church of England), though the set bible readings were replaced and other prayers more personally focused, were offered.

James' story:

The case example of James highlights a number of issues arising out of Western Christian theology and praxis that are problematical within African Christianity,²³ as well as in Britain (though less recognized as such), concerning death and those things held to lie beyond death.

Western originating Christianity within Africa has experienced difficulties in achieving acceptance of its doctrines of death, and especially in the insistence that the dead have no commonwealth with the living. Africans also perceive Western Christianity as conveying ambiguous messages

concerning life after death from the widely differing teaching of Catholic and Protestant beliefs.²⁴

A physical world discarnate from a metaphysical world, is an unknown (and impossible) concept to traditional African belief; an important distinction from that of the earliest Christians, amongst whom Resurrection was not a theology of absent body, but rather about the presence of a living Lord.

In certain respects, the understandings of these issues in traditional African spirituality bear closer similarities to some early Christian beliefs – for example, St Paul's acceptance of earthly and spiritual 'bodies', and the continuity of identity they represent (1.Cor.15:35ff). Traditional African spirituality understands a similar transition through bio-death into the domain of the ancestors, wherein the deceased, retaining their individuated identity, are translated into the parallel ancestor community. (J.S. Mbiti 1969, pp.83-91, 149-165; M. Gelfand 1962 pp.51 ff; P.D.E. Bertram 1992; J.N. Amanze 1998, pp.10, 143-167; C.K.R. notes) There is no belief that at death, all existence of the individual ceases. Even if a Person's life is characterized by badness, and they are not received into the ancestor community, they nevertheless join the wandering *ngozi* (MaZezuru; evil or revengeful) spirits, retaining their individual identity (Bertram 1992; Gelfand 1962, pp.69-83).

Similar beliefs persist amongst African Christians. However the tendency of Western Christian Mission Churches to highlight their particular association of sinning with death, judgement and punishment, and to employ abstract philosophical terms in so doing – e.g. “soul sleep”, “purgatory”, has stimulated extreme doctrinal positions²⁵ and often distorted syncretistic theologies and practices. These particularly emerge over issues of identity of the deceased and their relational status to the living. (Amanze 1998 p.162-166). Many of these issues and their consequences were confronted in James’ case, particularly those pertaining to identity.

James was in his early 40s when he first became ill, with considerable abdominal pain. He was a dynamic, seminary trained Minister of a mainline Christian denomination, serving the congregation of a large urban church in an African city. His influence and authority were extensive and he was a popular leader. Within a short space of time he was hospitalised and diagnosed terminally ill from a rare virus that caused the destruction of his major internal organs. His congregation and other Christian congregations in the city interceded continuously for his recovery, and for a brief time he appeared to be in remission. His subsequent relapse caused major confusion and dismay amongst many church members.

Within himself James was disturbed by what he regarded as a punishment from God for some defect in his ministry or personal commitment. As his congregations increased their intercession he, influenced by a theology

which represented sudden illness as retributive, and death (in any circumstance) as an unrelieved tragedy, repented of anything he may have done to displease God. Other factors, and to some extent the effects of clinical treatment, influenced his personal state of mind²⁶. James sought my counsel as priest and friend in the early stages of his illness, and together we began to discuss his Christian understanding of death and, necessarily, the contrasts with his tribal spiritual culture. These discussions were directed, not to the denouncement of traditionalist practices or to any form of exorcism, but towards further understanding of Jesus' death and resurrection and forgiven-ness.

Various groups within James' church – and other local denominations - objected to this approach, desiring instead a vigorous attack upon African traditional spirituality, and exorcism of its influences upon James.²⁷ For a time, this created bitter opposition between intercessory groups. In this period James's personal prayer focus was directed to Christ's authority to heal, and for himself to have *"more faith to be healed"*.

There were serious difficulties arising from the family history. His father had been one of the country's leading traditional Diviners and healers and as a young man James had been first his acolyte, then fully trained and initiated as a Diviner and healer, before converting to Christianity and renouncing the past. Subsequently his father had also converted, but the sudden and dramatic illness of his son caused the old man to revert for a

period and to attempt the 'recovery' of his son through traditional spiritualism.

His father assembled a group of traditional Diviners and healers at his own district home to pray and to interrogate the spirits (they also meditated at times in the grounds of the hospital). As a central act, they renounced the Christian name 'James', 'restoring' to him the name given in family rites after his birth. They thereafter renounced his Christian catechism, baptism, ordination and marriage.²⁸

The consequences upon James were dramatic. Although their services were conducted beyond his hearing, and no-one but themselves was permitted beforehand to know the times, James invariably sensually experienced their intercessions and seemed to know when they were divining. He would become disturbed, restless, experiencing the sensation of being "*torn apart*". In several mystical experiences during which he was also able to "see my body lying on the bed", he felt "*plucked out*" of his Christian identity but not reintegrated into his natal identity or tribal traditions either. This seeming suspension was relieved only by Christian prayer.

James himself never renounced his Christian faith, but was often unable to pray because of the inner conflict (see further below) which he believed was stimulated by traditional spiritual influences. On two occasions he was

unable even to utter the Lord's Prayer. The conflict began to recede when he experienced a visionary meeting with "*a great angel*"²⁹ at which he understood himself to be "*remaining a person quite really*".³⁰ He explained this statement as meaning that he had seen his physical body from an external vantage point, whilst being fully conscious of a whole identity "*I did not become a spirit*".³¹ It soon became apparent that, although his physical life was reducing in its extent and content, the same was not occurring spiritually; although weekly diminishing in physical ability, his sense of personal connectiveness with God increased.

From that point, ministry to James was conducted on the basis of an active pilgrimage towards his bio-death, "dying *into* God" (Küng 1993, p.177; Rom. 14:8-9) rather than praying for his consolation as the event advanced towards its conclusion. Engaging the approach of bio-death as a pilgrimage resulted in James forming a new basis for future hope and understanding of his identity,³² the consequences of which were a profound deepening of his faith,³³ and a desire for the processes of bio-death to be completed.

This was a particularly clear demonstration of the extent to which theology may be used to stimulate a religious fear of death that in turn compounds secular apprehensions and fears. Religious fear of death predicated on an over-focus upon moral failure and Divine anger seems to naturally meld with the physical processes of weakening and helplessness.

Conversely the intention of actively participating in the processes of relinquishing bio-life, trusting in the foundational experiences of resurrection by Jesus' immediate followers, seems to translate beyond acceptance of death into a confidence in dying. This was so for James and also Pat (see following case example).

Although James spoke of himself as "*already bereaved*" over the diminishing content in his physical life and the impending separation from his wife, children and extended family, he no longer expressed fears of God's anger, or of bio-death itself.

The ministry to James:

Initial conversations at the beginning of James's illness, and before clinical diagnosis, were mostly held in his office (occasionally elsewhere). He and I had previously formed a close bond through our mutual involvement in Christian healing ministry and teaching, and prayed together from the onset of his illness.

James weakened over a matter of months and in this middle period, I visited him at his home. He was hospitalised for the final eight weeks of his bio-life in a single-bed special care unit attached to a general ward. All final ministry to him was conducted there.

From the start of his illness, the wider ministry to James was through his fellow denominational ministers and members of his congregation amongst whom he had built up a considerable fellowship of prayer. Their theological positions raised significant issues, particularly when confronted by the perceived failure of Christian prayer for healing, and by the pressures of non-Christian prayer and divination.

The whole event highlighted three major topics:

1. The perceived insufficiency of Christian theology and praxis in support of ministry to the dying, and particularly when challenged by alternative beliefs.
2. The issues raised by the integrity of James' responses to contrasting spirituality and prayer of which he knew nothing in advance, and his response to mystical experiences and encounters.
3. The results of a radically different theological interpretation of bio-death, and a consequentially different pastoral approach.

The theological issues:

James adhered to a Reformed Protestant tradition, and had also been personally influenced by the Charismatic movement of the 1970's. The confessional beliefs of his faith community concerning bio-death were that it marked the limit of conversion and repentance opportunity. Death heralded a state of soul sleep – unconscious suspension – and an awakening on the Last Day to face Judgement. For these reasons,

intercession for the dead was disallowed by his denomination.³⁴ Prayers for the seriously ill to be protected from dying were customary, but never for death to come.

In African traditional beliefs death is never a 'natural' event but always effected by external influence,³⁵ always requiring careful examination through a Diviner to ascertain whether the external cause is benevolent, hostile or uncertain. This became a significant issue during a period when James questioned his understanding of Christian baptism in the context of Christian understanding of dying, and the implications of Jesus' promise "...though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." (Jn.11:25-26)

Commonly, African traditional beliefs in the community of the Ancestors,³⁶ their nearness and participation in the earthly lives of the living, represent community and relationship as being intrinsic to personal identity. Identity, in African traditional belief in the majority of this region,³⁷ requires the existence of community; that in turn means that community is a fundamental need arising out of individuated identity. The concept of Ubuntu (*I cannot be a person unless you are a person also*) enshrines this.³⁸

The deepest concerns in such traditional belief systems attach to the dangers for both person and community when separation of an individual

from the community in which life is given, occurs. Whilst there is no doubting of the physical reality of bio-death, traditional African belief is that the Person characterized by identity enters upon bio-death unto a transitional³⁹ period and lives initially in a different mode of embodiment: "the concepts of 'life' and 'death' are not mutually exclusive concepts, and there are no clear dividing lines between them." (Anderson 2003) Nevertheless, whilst in transition, such persons are of questionable relationship to the community of human society. (Bertram 1992; Mbiti 1969, p.24ff)

The central conjunction that indigenous African belief structures maintain is that Personhood survives bio-death in a changed form of *conscious, progressive* relationality to the immediate family and the surrounding community. This is ultimately effected within the community of Ancestors who, though departed in bio-death, nevertheless continue as individuals with Personhood. (Anderson 2003; Temples 1959)⁴⁰ Conceptually it is essentially dissimilar to the dualism of soul and body separating at death.

Although divergent from St Paul's perception of life "hid in Christ in God," (Col. 3:3), this belief system has in other respects the *appearance* of paralleling the Christian understanding of the Communion of the Saints. At the heart of African traditional religions of the Southern African region, however, is also belief in the *potential* mortality of the soul; that is, the event of bio-death does not destroy life; however the *integrity* of a Person's lifestyle and character might endanger it by preventing the

person's subsequent assimilation into the community of Ancestors. (Bertram 1992). Enquiry and examination concerning that integrity forms a crucial part of the transitional period (typically a year) from the initial burial, and essentially is set in process by initial burial rites (e.g. in Shona culture at the Kurovaguva ceremony, Bertram 1992)

Christianity - as received, understood, lived and taught by James - placed the dead beyond the realm of the present living in an existence of mute, soul-sleep, and in contradiction to Tswana Ancestor beliefs. (Amanze 1998, p.162ff) However, the implications of soul-sleep as a theological interpretation of St. Paul's writing⁴¹ had become, for James, contradictory of his natal, religious beliefs and culture, and also of the John 11:25 images of new life and relationality beyond bio-death together with Jesus.

The spiritual issues:

The effects upon James of the prayers and rituals of the traditional African Diviners for his healing, and to recover him from Christian faith, could not be ignored; neither was it possible that he was psychologically influenced by fore-knowledge of their happening. The Diviners and healers had no access to him and they alone knew when their ceremonies would be held. By judicious enquiry I and others (including the then Medical Superintendent⁴² of the hospital) ascertained that specific ceremonies coincided with occasions when James had expressed fearful alienation from

his Christian faith and semi-hostile doubts of the integrity of the Resurrection accounts.

There was no empirical accounting for the on-set or effects of these occasions; the special care unit James was in was placed deep within the main hospital building – itself at that time, surrounded by extensive grounds – and isolated from external traffic and noise. Although in his few bedside visits, his father would convey to James the urgent need to ‘return’ to the traditions of his natal Ancestors, as stated above, James was never given notice of the occasions of Traditionalist ceremonies for his ‘recovery’ from Christianity. It was a raw struggle against his father’s denial of the basic truth James had come to know and adhere to - that his (and all human) identity derived from God, and depended upon God, rather than Ancestral community.

The manifestations were of profound spiritual encounter; of specific character and intention, directed to claiming James’s ontological Personhood through a reversal of the historical choice options concerning faith-identity that he had made in life.

Intellectual scepticism is an easy antidote to such situations, but the compelling integrity of James’s struggle to understand the Christian significance of community and communion in the face of his inner struggles, protected those close to him from such attitudes.

Trance-identity experience:

A brief comment on trance-identity experience is apposite. Growing up as I did in the midst of African culture, I have many times witnessed mediums in a state of trance-encounter, or displaying paranormal behaviour whilst possessed by the spirits of their *Shava* (the identity of the Spirit-influence that uniquely possesses its Medium). Gelfand (1962, p.97) has recorded with photographs (plates between pp.102-103) a behavioural sequence of a medium under the influence of the baboon *Shava* and noted his lack of awareness of an out-of-body, possessed self.⁴³

In my experience (as with Gelfand), those describing these experiences disassociate themselves from their temporal identity⁴⁴ – their trance-identity is that of the *Shava* inhabiting them; they remain conscious of that *Shava* but not of their own identity whilst under possession. They are merely being used by the Spirit (*Mhondoro*) whose Medium they are; importantly this is affirmed by the spectators to whom the *Shava's* identity is revealed through the trance-identity behaviour and manifestations of the Medium's body.

James' mystical experiences bore no similarities to these and his account of his experience of the 'great angel' was expressed in pragmatic, rather than visionary language. His account of this mystical meeting with a 'great angel' bears close similarities to those reported by Badham and Badham (1982) of near death experiences; the compelling feature being continuity

in his self-conscious identity, even though separated from his usual embodiment of being; his comment about “remaining myself quite really” was a clear disassociation from traditional trance experience, and the retention of conscious personal identity. Badham and Badham⁴⁵ observe that

“the supreme barrier against belief in a future life is the doctrine that mind and body are inseparably united. If even one out-of-the-body experience is correctly described as such this barrier crumbles and life after death becomes an open possibility.” (1982, p.119)

This could be true even if the experience were not in the immediate context of dying as it could indicate the possibility of sentient and transformational relationality, and the uniqueness of Personhood, as properties whose origins are not in bio-life. It would mean that Personhood of relational identity is not confined to physical existence.

This is central to the event of the Transfiguration (Mk.9:1-9) whereat the appearance of Moses and Elijah in dialogue with Jesus is either entirely allegorical or a teleological example of Personhood of relational identity. The Markan record points to the latter interpretation; what is central to Christian theology is recognising that Personhood of relational identity is teleological.

As such it would add support to the basis of pastoral interpretation of death as an event within a transcending and evolving (see endnote ⁷

p.108) relational pilgrimage into God; Life is changed, not taken away (Küng 1993, p.187). For James, this was a radically different theological interpretation, breaking the rigid association of sin with death. This raises the question of the *significance* of the physical body to ontological Identity; if physical body is an *expression* of unique, moral Personhood, the ontological Identity of which derives from an act of God, then the physical expression of unique Personal, relational identity is equally one of moral, metaphysical Being.

Personhood in this perspective is not a *symbiotic combination* of separate, elemental forms, a dualism of physical and metaphysical; it is absolute, singular Being-ness outwardly and inwardly. It is not that one is visible, the other invisible; for example innocence is as much revealed physically as it is by the intangible nature of a person. The Transfiguration and Resurrection narratives reveal (e.g. the post resurrection encounter between Jesus and Mary⁴⁶) that the Identity of Jesus' Personhood retains its singularity and relational moral Being-ness by virtue of its ontological and sustaining moral source and a specific act of God (the Resurrection), and not by virtue of its physical substance.

Pat's story:

PAT was in her mid 30's when first diagnosed with breast cancer. Over a period of three years she underwent surgery and chemotherapy, the

treatments being initially successful. At an early stage of the process she had a profound spiritual experience (having never before been particularly religious). In hospital for initial surgery following diagnosis, she had been overtaken by feelings of reassurance and being loved, though she felt unable to identify the cause or origins of these feelings. This sense of wellbeing deepened during her time in hospital, and she began to pray to God "*out of gratitude but without any knowledge of how to do it properly*".⁴⁷

She was at that time an active outdoors person with a good job and excellent career prospects. Her interest in active religion had been confined to yearly church attendance at Christmas, and weddings and funerals. In consequence of her hospital experience she sought out her local church and requested a meeting with me. She became a regular attendee at Church and joined a Bible study group. Initially she was reticent about personal disclosure as she did not want to be regarded as someone seeking "*an emotional rescue*". It was some months later that she asked for people to join her in prayers of thanksgiving for the then success of her surgery and treatment, and at that time explained openly the events that had brought her to church.

As her faith grew, her lifestyle changed considerably; she was confirmed and married the partner she had lived with for many years. In this period she continued to receive medical treatment, including chemotherapy, and

was continuously prayed for within the local church congregation, receiving the laying on of hands and anointing on a regular basis, all with apparent success and healing. At the end of the second year medical treatment was concluded.

Pilgrimage *into* bio-death:

Late in the third year there was a sudden and unexpected onset of malignancy which created a major crisis amongst her friends and many of the church congregation for whom the development constituted an unacceptable contradiction of Christian victory over illness. Pat herself did not react in the same way, although obviously fearful of the outcome and considerably upset at the prospect of further radical treatments. It soon became clear that her condition was terminal and, after consultation with her husband and myself, she decided this should be made known.

Having already talked a lot about death and dying, I suggested that she should be anointed at a Sunday parish Eucharist⁴⁸ specifically to embark upon the pilgrimage through physical death and beyond. That occasion was preceded by a personal study course with prayer for Pat and her husband, during which they increasingly freely spoke with one another of their feelings, fears, needs and hopes. Pat was involved in drawing up parts of the extended order of service and she wrote one of the prayers in which she asked of God help to "complete this year of anniversaries."⁴⁹

Personal and Community Pilgrimage; Inclusive Dying:

Two weeks before Pat's anointing was to take place,⁵⁰ the intention was announced at the weekly parish Eucharist, and people were asked to pray specifically for her and one another in preparation. This met with strong support and approval.

To assemble the earthly community of faith as a similar pilgrim body of accompanying companions is, then, to restore dying and bio-death as religious experiences within that body, and because the Christian faith community is in the world, the action is evangelistic. In Pat's case that experience was initiated at the centre-point of the main weekly Parish Eucharist. At this gathering, and within the context of the liturgy itself, Pat consented to and entered her pilgrimage journey into death and, in faith, through it.

The order of service was so arranged that anointing came at the end of the Eucharistic liturgy and before the final blessing and dismissal, thus deliberately retaining it within the context of Communion. (See Order of Service, Appendix I) In response, Pat and her husband knelt together at the altar and she was anointed by myself and representative members of the congregation with everyone else standing and joining in prayer.⁵¹ The inclusion to the liturgy was entitled "*Thanksgiving for life and prayer for the future*", and was in two parts. The first, offering thanksgiving for her life,

concluded with a prayer she had written for the occasion; the second was explicit of her coming bio-death and included the anointing.

The whole text illustrates the combination of language and action as an example of inclusive, contemporary recovery of religious meaning in dying and bio-death. It expresses the necessity for companionship through the processes of dying. It conceals nothing, but holds everything in the context of the Immanence of God.

As people left the church, each was offered a card thanking them for their commitment to Pat's journey and inviting them to join in prayer, wherever they might be, each Wednesday specifically at the time of the parish midweek Eucharist which she attended. Her home telephone number was listed, and people invited to telephone between given times. The service of anointing was attended by a number of Pat's friends many of whom were of other faiths or of none. On subsequent Sundays, a number returned to pray directly within the congregation for her pilgrimage.

A number of issues are indicated from this example of 'inclusive dying'.

For Pat herself, it was a 'coming out' from the social conventions surrounding death and dying. She was able to speak freely of her health, and equally others began to speak openly to her. The common anxieties for a medical breakthrough before death occurred were replaced by

encouragement from her open commitment⁵² to dying and, equally, open regret of the things she would leave behind.

Initial reactions within the congregation – even though favourable – indicated the extent to which death and dying have been removed from the corporate experience, worship and faith commitment *within the community of faith itself*, to the point where the mystical dimensions of relational identity are lost, together with a meaningful, pro-active, association of Christianity with dying (and therefore, in death as necessary to life). This was demonstrated by objections from a few members of the congregation to what had been done. There was the feeling amongst them that Pat had been encouraged to give up all hope and to abandon ‘positive thinking’. In that misunderstanding they therefore rejected any suggestion that it could be legitimate for Christians to “*encourage anyone to die*” by accompanying them in the act.⁵³ Some left the congregation thereafter.⁵⁴

Continuing ministry:

The ‘pilgrimage anointing’ was followed by a specific time of weekly prayer with her and her husband. In the remaining six months Pat’s experience was of continuous reassurance and a sense of expectation for life beyond physical death. Although through the increase of her illness she experienced severe physical reactions and disability, she seldom succumbed to the depressions and listlessness commonly associated with advanced cancer. Her oncologist frequently remarked on this.⁵⁵

In this period of her pilgrimage Pat focused on putting her life into as complete order as possible as a connective process with what was to follow physical death. She specifically enabled her friends to both speak openly of her coming death and relate to her as a "*normal person approaching a normal life event*"⁵⁶. She did not conceal her sorrow at her daily reducing abilities and horizon, describing them as her "*daily progress in bereavement*"⁵⁷ but was also expectant of what would come. Although she at no time had the same kind mystical experience as Helen and James did, she was frequently profoundly aware of Immanence and of a different sense of purpose.

The end-ministry to Pat:

Pastoral ministry to Pat and her husband in the final six months before her bio-death was a natural extension from previous study courses and the regular times of anointing and prayer during treatments. In many ways it became also a ministry to the whole worshipping congregation and wider local community. Directly many new people came weekly to the main Sunday service, and the regular members found themselves involved in many street and telephone discussions⁵⁸ about Pat's progress and the general subject of dying and bio-death. The church was packed to overflowing for her funeral (ASB rite amended). Many of other faiths, friends with whom she had shared her growing faith, some of whom had also attended her anointing, shared how her Christianity had added to their belief in God.

The Community of Five:

The group comprised two men and three women, aged between 68 and 82 years old. Both men and one woman were married; one woman was a widow and the other single. They all considered themselves to be Church members; three were Church of England, one was Roman Catholic and the other was a Methodist. Two belonged to the same Church of England parish⁵⁹ but attended different Sunday services, and in consequence had only meagre, passing acquaintance.

All had been diagnosed with terminal cancer. At the time that they were introduced to one another, they were resident in their own homes and attending hospitals for treatments. All had expressed a desire to *"talk to someone who knows what it is actually like"*.⁶⁰ The group came into being through a lattice-work of contacts. The first two were members of my own parish, and receiving regular pastoral visits. Through them, the remaining three contacted me asking to *"join a sharing group they had been told about"*. With their mutual consent, I facilitated their contact.

I visited each new person, firstly to listen to their story and thereafter to describe the ethos and focus of those already involved; essentially the connection was intended as a mutual sharing and prayer forum as companions on a Christian pilgrimage into bio-death and beyond. They were all given each others' telephone numbers and further contact was left to them.

I thereafter acted as chaplain to the group, each person being visited weekly for discussion, reflection and prayer, using a similar study programme with each. This focussed on considering forgiven-ness, and the example of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance as witnessing to the preservation of his Personhood-identity. (Küng refers to identity of the person, 1993, p.111) Bio-death in this context then could be understood as an event of transcendence, according to the relational experience of the Apostolic church.

Although the five never met together in person - contact was usually by telephone - at various points they individually met one another. This eclectic process of pastoral connection resulted in a number of unexpected results.

Each person reported that they felt *"helped spiritually but free to make their own decisions"*. However, all commented that they would have wished to have longer in which to *"really discuss the beginnings of [my] identity"*. One woman said, *"I want my funeral to be celebrated with Holy Communion because that will say what I want people to know; that I am still a Person in God's eyes."*⁶¹

All considered that the concept of pilgrimage *"in some way brought them together in a special way"*, and had helped them to share more openly.

Two of the group emphasised that a previous feeling of loneliness had

been replaced by the comfort of being able to know *"I am dying together with [N.]"*

The process of discussion, reflection, contextual bible study and prayer helped them to *"think about dying in a new way"* and removed much of the apprehension they had felt; one reported specifically that he *"had realised that Jesus' resurrection meant there was more to dying than just ending"*.

The most unexpected result was the level of ecumenical sharing and discussion that developed within the fellowship. At first, comments to me were more of polite acknowledgement of church differences; *"He's a Roman Catholic, but we found it very easy to talk"*; *"I've never really talked to a Methodist about God before..."* Very quickly discussions about denominational doctrines developed into sharing of common ground: *"[N.] and I both cried about having been different kinds of Christians in different churches, and we've learned so much now from each other about being loved by God."*

A further dimension of sharing within the fellowship concerned their palliative carers, and their responses to any spiritual discussion or intimation. With the exception of the Roman Catholic, whose carers were Marie Curie nurses, all the others reported varying degrees of response from *"She's very gentle and kind, but doesn't really talk to me about spiritual feelings"* to *"She gets quite sharp with me when I tell her I'm*

happy to die. She insists I must think positively and not give up; she can't seem to see that I'm not giving up." These comments indicate the value of a pro-active practical pastoral theological input into the reality of dying, death and bereavement that provides both hope and words *for* death.

One major, common result from the individual case examples and the fellowship of five was the degree to which a contextual theological preparation for each individual's death had spilled over into their immediate close community. Persons from those communities (both family and friends) expressed their grief as different; one family reported that they *"had been so comforted by our Mum's strength to die that we wanted to be happy with her."*

There were occasions of speculation with each person. I found that the most valuable contribution I could make at these times was to remain silent for as long as each wished to share their thoughts. Frequently a person would admit that their speculation was a spoken-out private superstition they had held about *"pleasing God"*, and that they no longer held to it.

This small inter-support Fellowship of the Dying continued for four months, after which as final terminal processes set in⁶² the participants were unable to maintain contact, and it ended.

The observations made during close support in the three individual cases and the community of five indicate that marked differences emerge when those who are dying and those around them are drawn into an open and supportive dialogue to pro-actively journey towards bio-death itself.

The pastoral focus had simultaneously addressed the present circumstances of their life and the anticipation of *continuing identity and relationship* beyond death. Their individuation of that hope was expressed in comments such as "*Looking at dying on the basis of what you have already experienced of love and beauty in music and feelings about God makes it easier to trust God with knowing you even after dying...*" and "*I've discovered I'm not worried about who I will be when I die; God will make me 'me' again in a different way.*"

Through addressing bio-death as an event within an eschatological continuity of identity, it was possible with Helen, Pat and James, and the Community of Five to build upon their history and experience of faith in bio-life as the basis of continued trust in God's relational⁶³ love for them beyond bio-death.

However there are individuals for whom the prospect of bio-death cannot be faced, and this situation may also prevail amongst their close family. Such situations create an environment of 'problem dying', characterised by anxiety and loneliness.

An illustration of this is developed in the following narrative of a 'problem dying' situation (see p.64 and endnotes^{1&2} p.107). The point of its inclusion is twofold; it demonstrates graphically the complex difficulties that can arise in the pastoral care of the dying, when denial of death's approach is compounded by bad theology and fear of God's hostile judgement, and that it is representative of the apparent influence of superstitious and quasi-religious thought which can be encountered as much in Christian as in secular communities.

A Person called 'Miriam'

'**Miriam**' was a lifelong churchgoer. In her 50's, after surgery 20 years previously, a widespread malignancy had re-emerged. A biopsy confirmed secondary growths and the invasion of cancer. She made this known to me at a requested pastoral visit, at which she expressed anger that she had been given a prognosis of a maximum 18 months life expectancy by her oncologist and a second specialist, and advised against further, radical surgery.

She requested further medical opinion, and at the same time asked for her name to be included on the Sunday service intercessions list, but without making public the reason for this. A new specialist recommended a course of extreme chemotherapy and surgery, expressing confidence in a positive outcome. After the initial treatment, during which she was very ill, 'Miriam' was hospitalised for surgery. From the time she elected to seek further

treatment, 'Miriam' progressively reduced contact with her friends in both church and secular communities, until eventually none had direct access to her. The surgery was unsuccessful, and 'Miriam' returned home, severely ill and in pain. She was in continuous distress, anxiety and fear although pretending to recover: *"I and God have beaten this twice before."*⁶⁴

At various times her husband and adult children attempted to discuss the reality of her condition with her but with no success. On regular pastoral visits, she would introduce and allow marginal discussion of her condition, invariably with a reference to the effect *"I know I can discuss these things privately with my priest"*. There would invariably be an anxious request for prayer for physical recovery, but never to address dying – a possible further illustration of fear provoking denial.

As her condition deteriorated, it became increasingly difficult to reach her pastorally where she was, without the whole dialogue becoming entirely fictional. Statements such as *"physical illnesses can be beaten by positive thinking; my home nurse and I always say 'think positive' when she comes; and our prayer must be positive so that God can heal me"*, were her method of setting the direction.

Later there emerged a deeper reason than 'not thinking positively' for her refusal to prepare for death as her death constituted *"the wages of sin"*. She associated conscious knowledge of slowly approaching death as

evidence of judgement upon her Christianity, in contrast to sudden death - *"God just taking you up because he knows you are good."* This view on judgement was self-convincing because on previous occasions of surgery, her prayers for healing *"had been heard"*; her promises each time to be a better Christian had been rewarded. Now she feared God because she had somehow failed.

In her last days she was genuinely fearful of colluding with spiritual preparation for death as being an act of self destruction that would further anger God. Her fluency with the BCP funeral service and the injunction against those who had 'laid violent hands upon themselves', fed her fear.

'Miriam' died alone, afraid and unprepared in any sense. The immediate family were broken-hearted, mortified and angry at their impotence to relieve the course of events. Her husband did not inform me at the time of her death, and initially attempted to arrange cremation with no service or ceremony at a local crematorium. Although I did in the end take the funeral, at their request using the Alternative Service Book of the Church of England it was an occasion of unrelieved sorrow.

In this case, pastoral dialogue was essentially circumscribed by the conviction that death heralded the end of meaningful, enjoyable life. 'Miriam' believed that a hopeless captivity would be ushered in at death and her dominant perception of the dying process was increasing

relationlessness. The resulting anger and panic made it impossible to openly and specifically address her spiritual needs. For her, the promises of Christian faith were in terms of, and located within, this life. Only an unknown life in which she would be helpless and with nothing, lay ahead. Her fear seemed to derive less from regarding death as heralding oblivion than that it would result in a period of shrouded, suspended waiting anticipating Judgement. For her, terminal malignancies were the precursors of this.

In many of the actual pastoral encounters that this narrative represents, the roots of inhibition and anxiety could be directly attributed to a matrix of bad theology and denominational praxis and traditions. These contribute much to the 'problem dying' situation.⁶⁵ These radically different perceptions and responses within the overall compass of the same experience - the approach of bio-death - pose questions in regard to personhood, identity, need and purpose, and suggest that all are relevant to undertaking the journey into bio-death as pilgrimage.

Primarily, there is indicated a strong case for examining much of the well-rehearsed Christian dogma and pastoral practices concerning preparation within this life for what lies beyond the boundaries traditionally prescribed by bio-death. This is not to suggest spurious claims to some extended or re-materialised resumption of this life, but rather to focus upon identity and relationality between the Creator God and created Person. This builds upon

the central witness of the Resurrection, that bio-death does not of itself discontinue relational identity (Personhood) as morally created by God.⁶⁶

The contrasting positions between the case examples and the end situation in the model of problem dying may be summarised as belief in resurrection of Personhood of relational identity because of a personal realisation of the love of God, versus a structure of doubts and self-doubt that overwhelm the possibility of deep trusting. These contrasts may also be described as a cogent "radicalisation of belief in God" (Küng 1993, p.117) versus an insidious fear of a God of conditions – a God who demands perfection palpably unattainable by human beings, a God whose love and justice are historically represented in the confusing models of bliss or torment.⁶⁷

Recognising the relevance of 'pilgrimage':

It may at first seem inappropriate to describe death in terms of Pilgrimage - the 'journey of a lifetime' with purpose; something that is undertaken for a compelling reason. It is an elective decision to become a pilgrim to a destination in the fulfilment of a purpose of great value. To this end, Abram began his journeying and Chaucer's band headed for the shrine of Canterbury.

The concept of pilgrimage arises from there being a cause that introduces meaningful purpose for the event; in the case of Christianity, 'realised' eschatology. O. Cullmann's (1958) argument that the Incarnation

constitutes the eschatological mid-point expresses the very essence of this view. In this representation, Christianity is a faith-journey *forwards within realised eschatological time*, rather than *towards* that occasion. That is, it proceeds from the Incarnation forwards in the intentional purposes of God which are ultimately beyond time as we understand it.

The characteristic of Christian pilgrimage is consistent with that of the Old Testament journey narrative of the Patriarchs in that it is undertaken in “the assurance of things hoped for...” (Heb.11:1). However it is motivated beyond the Patriarchal limitations of the unseen.

The writer of 1 John expresses the nexus of the Evangel and Christian pilgrimage as intentional relationality:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes and touched with our hands...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1Jn.1:11).⁶⁸

In contrast, to arrive naturally⁶⁹ at death’s door requires no decision – it happens. Death is commonly, secularly, perceived as a concluding point, a depriving⁷⁰ event which of itself has neither value nor merit; “which on principle removes all meaning from life” (Sartre 1991, p.541), and from which there is no return, or physical re-embodiment of personal, conscious self,

or existence in another place. In this view, it is irrational to associate pilgrimage with death.⁷¹

P. Sheppy considers how this view has influenced Christian attitudes towards death: "Most of our contemporaries do not see death as the gateway to eternal life, and so look to the funeral to provide a means of summing up the past." (2003, p.103) In consequence, in many contemporary funerary rites eulogy forms a substantial part of the proceedings, and there is little or no focus upon either transcendence or eschatological hope.

If, in contrast to the perceived material evidence, the possibility of surviving death is considered, the prospect is frequently described in dualistic⁷² terms such as Immortal Soul set free from body. 'Immortal' in this context meaning an independently living soul, set free from the limitations imposed by "a body essentially alien to it." (O. Cullmann 1958, p.20) The problem this raises is not so much of survival *as an idea*; as whether disembodied survival is capable of sustaining any *Personhood-identity* and therefore has any quantifiable meaning.

Christian belief – the radicalised belief in God - both arises from, and depends upon, the Resurrection of Jesus not as a survivor from death but as endowed with new life-ness through the intentional creative power of God by which God overcomes the death of Jesus. In this the Gospels describe that Jesus had visible form and *continuing relational identity*.⁷³

The accounts of the first disciples are not descriptive of the *idea* of a continuing relationship with Jesus, but their *experience* of "...the identity of the one irreplaceable person..." (Küng 1993, p.117).

It was because of this that the expressions of actual relationship could be made, and from which emerged, the community of faith whose eschatology reflected their belief in the *relational purposes* of God. For the primitive Church the *eschaton* was a realized and revealed, not an as yet hidden but anticipated, event.⁷⁴ It is therefore legitimate to describe Christianity as a faith pilgrimage within which bio-death is an evolutionary event.

END NOTES:

- ¹ Cases wherein usual reactions of shock, fear and uncertainty to a terminal diagnosis become compounded by further extreme emotions and third party reactions, and make it very difficult to engage in a cohesive preparation for death. This is continually subverted by the need to deal with disruptive issues, including persistent denial of immanent death.
- ² This narrative is constructed from my personal experience of a number of cases, and is for illustrative purposes only. It does not reflect any one specific case.
- ³ This included disgust at their own loss of physical capacities (speech, incontinence, dependence), and the growing difficulties and burdens others were having to deal with in order to "...have anything to do with me."
- ⁴ These were often expressed in secular terms, sometimes prefaced with the comment: "I don't know how else to say this."
- ⁵ The focus of this fear was (usually), variously that their life had not been of a standard acceptable to God, and the sign of this was the *causal agent* of impending death; or that their soul and body might be lost to each other and therefore they would be lonely 'lost beings', the silent witnesses of a judgement. Among non-religious fears expressed, that of failed or inadequate relationships, now beyond reclamation or address, was the cause of self-blame and the denial of self worth.
- ⁶ They did also share details of medical experiences, but the main focus of the group exercise was to share their inner, spiritual journeys.

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- ⁷ The term 'Evolutionary' is employed as defining "...a gradual process in which something changes into a usually more complex or better form." www.thefreedictionary.com/evolutionary
A central theme of this thesis is that the processes and event of bio-death, are the occasions of *transcending* change. To transcend is to evolve, but the Gospel narrative indicates that not all people will transcend – evolve – into a closer union with God (Matt.25:31-46; Lk.13:22-28). It is therefore apposite to describe as evolutionary, the progress of Mankind into union with God.
- ⁸ The case for considering Personhood-identity as ontic to the identity of Human personhood, and its relationality to form is fully discussed in the following chapter
- ⁹ CKR notes
- ¹⁰ Effectively this marked the onset of bereavement in this very sociable person. She registered sharply the reduction of her physical capabilities and emotional capacities, and that these distressed others as they communicated with her.
- ¹¹ All extracts from direct conversations are from CKR personal notes.
- ¹² They included some who were trained in the ministries of healing and intercession.
- ¹³ Neither was close to her, one lived in a distant part of England and the other had married a member of a different religious persuasion and converted to their beliefs.
- ¹⁴ Such descriptions of mystical out of body events are noted by Badham and Badham (1982) and other researchers into near death experiences (N.D.E's); for Helen it was an experience within prayer. The phenomenon of near death experiences has been widely studied by qualified medical doctors and nurses, including Dr. Jeffrey Long (2010) in Houma, Louisiana, "*Evidence of the Afterlife*", HarperCollins; Dr Jenny Santori in Lampeter, UK, whose 10 published works include (2006) "*The Near-Death Experiences of Hospitalized Intensive Care Patients: A Five Year Clinical Study*" Edwin-Mellen Press; and a joint work by Dr Lee W Bailey and Ms Jenny Yates (1976) "*The Near Death Experience: A Reader*", Routledge New York. The web site www.near-death.com/experiences, offers many research and lay works on the subject, including material hostile to the veracity of the phenomenon. A major common factor in most published research accounts is patients' retained consciousness of individuated identity.
- ¹⁵ In subsequent discussion, it became apparent that Helen was entirely innocent of 'Charismatic' experience, and had no previous experience or conscious knowledge of the 'near death' phenomenon.
- ¹⁶ Initially that was not recognised by Helen or the group.
- ¹⁷ For detailed discussion of these issues, see chapters 4 and 5 on Dualism and Personhood, and Disinnocence and Forgiveness respectively.
- ¹⁸ Cullmann (1958, p.46) argues vehemently against the danger of this misrepresentation conveyed through the words "I believe in the resurrection of the flesh (*carnis resurrectionem*)" in the Apostles' Creed – "the error in the Greek creed". He contrasts this with the Pauline focus: "Paul believes in the resurrection of the *body*, not of the *flesh*." Kung agrees "We are not obliged to hold any kind of physiological ideas of resurrection." (1993, p.112)
- ¹⁹ These were essentially spiritual, not philosophical, questions and require to be recognised as such; they pertain to the ontological identity of Personhood, not to the psyche and ego of human nature, and their discussion lies at the core of pastoral theology. Vitally, they are reminders that it is necessary and proper pastoral theology and praxis to "recognise spiritual needs, growth and awareness even when they are not expressed in religious language." (Stanworth 2005, p.238).
- ²⁰ Comment to me after Helen's funeral.
- ²¹ In the latter part of the C20, they include explicit rejection by the C of E of literalistic belief in a molecular restoration of the body; *Doctrine in the Church of England* (1962, p.209); and similar expression in *A New Catechism*, issued by the Roman Catholic Bishops of the Netherlands (1967, p.479)

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- 22 'Half-belief' seems a fair description of the views expressed by over 50% of the ministry group around Helen; though prepared to announce "I believe in the resurrection of the body", none felt this was a credible view. Almost the same number (46%) believed that at least some degree of punishment awaited them at the Day of Judgement: "Punishment is part of forgiveness - you both know the record has been set straight then." (Said to me after one discussion evening.)
- 23 Beliefs, rituals and customs concerning death are extremely varied, complex and numerous in African societies, and to attempt any detailed comparative evaluation of them, even by region, is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, in addition to the authors directly referenced in this work – J.N. Amanze, A. Anderson, A.L. Berglund, P.D.E. Bertram, M. Gelfand, J.S. Mbiti, G. Setiloane (see Bibliography), the following authors and their works are a valuable resource:
 Bullock, C. (1927)*The Mashona* (1922) Cape Town; Campbell, D. *In the Heart of Bantuland*, London; Goody, J.C. (1962) *Death, Property and the Ancestors* London/Stanford; Hughes, A.J.B., van Velsen, J., and Kuyper, H. (1954): *The Shona and Ndebele of Southern Rhodesia* London; Meyerowitz, E.L.R. (1922): *The Akau of Ghana: their ancient Beliefs* London; Wilson, M. (1957) *Rituals of Kinship among the Nyakyusa* Oxford; Yokoo, S. (1966) *Death among the Abaluyia* Dissertation at Makerere University College, Kampala.
- Despite the complexities indicated above, Africans (whether Christian or of other creeds) are deeply conscious of religion and "live in a religious universe...the religious universe is not an academic proposition; it is an empirical experience which reaches its height in worship" (Mbiti 1969, pp.109, 57). There are a number of universally held beliefs, the most prominent of which include that: The deceased are 'dead', but 'not dead'; they join the community of the Spirits and mediate between the living and God. Death is a departure, but not a complete annihilation, but its causes are both 'natural' and 'unnatural'; therefore the causes must be discerned. Neither punishment nor reward are associated with life in the hereafter; this is regarded as a continuation of life as in bio-form; person-identity is retained, but the deceased do not progress into a closer relationship with God. (The beliefs concerning punishment and/or reward constitute a major, unresolved issue with Christianity, and constitute a point of internal conflict and confusion for a majority of African Christians. They are not subjects readily open to discussion).
- 24 Western influenced Pentecostal teaching and praxis particularly emphasises the direct connections between carnal sin and bio-death. An examination of the particular curriculum of teaching, and the syncretistic influences of traditional religion within the Western-originating Pentecostal churches are beyond the scope of this thesis.
- 25 "The Elects Apostolic Church...teaches that the Bible is the book of Europeans and that it is not fit for use by Africans..." (Amanze 1998, p.143)
- 26 A particular drug regime made him very drowsy for a week
- 27 Witchcraft or hostile divination were suspected as the causes of his illness, especially given his family background.
- 28 Told to me by James's wife. She maintained regular contact with me and one other priest-doctor as well as her husband. She also was never told in advance of her father-in-law's gatherings.
- 29 CKR notes
- 30 *ibid.*
- 31 *ibid.*
- 32 James disclosed this to me in strict confidence; he was ashamed as a Minister to have discovered 'things' in which he had not believed fully. In general these related to unconditional forgiveness.
- 33 By associating bio-death with pilgrimage and therefore journey into further relationality to the purposes of God, it seemed that the remaining confrontations between Western Christian models such as 'soul sleep', and the ancestral beliefs of traditional African religion – the journey into the community of the ancestors – had been reconciled. The concept of journey

rather than that of some form of suspension awaiting a resurrection suggests both continuity and solidarity with God.

- ³⁴ In terms of Ch.xxi, article iv of the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646: "Prayer is to be made for all things lawful...but not for the dead..."
www.reformed.org/documents/wef_with_proofs/ reformatted by Michael Quillen.
- ³⁵ Amanze (1998); Bertram (1992, Unpublished); Gelfand (1962)
- ³⁶ Although conforming to a common structure of belief, there are many tribal and even local variations of customary responses and rituals. Similarly one cannot speak globally of a single ceremonial form of burial rites, although the vital actions may be recognised across all cultures.
- ³⁷ The specific case example of James is from the Central /Southern African ethno-cultural region.
- ³⁸ See further: Setiloane, G. (1986 and 1976, p.128-131)
- ³⁹ Liminality as described by Van Geenep does not resonate with African beliefs concerning the transition period from this life into the community of ancestors. In the period between first and final burials, a person-in-the-spirit wanders in an unstable condition during which time the character of their life may incline them towards acceptance by the ancestors, or severance from this body. It is conceived as an active time, but not one in which the person is waiting for something to happen. For these reasons I have not used the term 'liminal' to describe it.
- ⁴⁰ Anderson (2003, p.9) quotes Placide Temples in these words: "Death does not alter or end the life or personality of an individual, but only causes a change in its conditions."
- ⁴¹ specifically 1Thess.5:10
- ⁴² The Rev'd. Dr. Alfred Merriweather – now deceased. A missionary and medical doctor, Merriweather was recognised for his knowledge of Tswana traditional religion and culture. Both James and his father were well known to him.
- ⁴³ There is much published material on trance in African tradition and custom, including: E. Bourguignon (2004) "Possession and Trance" in *Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology*, Vol.1, part 2, pp.137-45; W.van Binsbergen (1991) "Becoming a Sangoma" in *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol 21, pp.309-44; W.van Binsbergen (2003) *Intercultural Encounters: African and anthropological lessons towards a philosophy of interculturality* Münster, Lit Verlag; Sarasvati Bahrman (1997) "Trance types and Amnesia" revisited in *Anthropology of Consciousness* Vol. 8, Issue 1 pp.10-21 which provides interesting contrasts and comparisons in a study of North American yogis and spiritual mediums, to African presentations.
- ⁴⁴ Gelfand (1962) esp. chapters 2 & 6ff
- ⁴⁵ I am conscious of the many differing views and interpretations of researchers into the so-called near death experience; my citing of the Badham's research is not intended to indicate that theirs is definitive.
- ⁴⁶ Jn.20:11-18; Mk.16:9-14.
- ⁴⁷ CKR notes
- ⁴⁸ The caveat was that the congregation would accept the wish to do this.
- ⁴⁹ Her words, referring to the year preceding the final diagnosis, which had included her confirmation, marriage and conclusion of medical treatments. The foregoing has been described under pastoral constraints.
- ⁵⁰ The congregation had been previously told of Pat's medical diagnosis, and asked if they would be prepared to join in this way with Pat in pilgrimage into her bio-death. All had agreed.

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- ⁵¹ All the children and teachers from Junior Church were present, and children were encouraged to come closer to see and hear better.
- ⁵² Significantly, the phrase 'acceptance of' was seldom used of her by others.
- ⁵³ Their objection was summarised by one, whose view was that the occasion had interfered with the processes of God: "'The Lord gives and the Lord takes'; it should be left at that." None recognised the *Nunc Dimittis* as a prayer to die.
- ⁵⁴ One couple responded to my invitation to discuss the issues further. We met congenially twice, and although they agreed with the theology expressed concerning death and resurrection, and that the *Nunc Dimittis* is in fact a prayer to die, they held to their views and decision on the grounds that it was not Church of England practice to actively pray for someone to die. They had no difficulty over prayers for 'bravely coping with the horribleness of dying.'
- ⁵⁵ Information given to me by Pat. I also had one conversation with the oncologist during which he expressed the same thoughts and opinion.
- ⁵⁶ CKR notes from study group conversation with Pat.
- ⁵⁷ CKR notes from study group conversation with Pat
- ⁵⁸ Reported to me by the parishioners involved. Various of Pat's friends also telephoned me with questions regarding what they had been told by Pat herself of her 'dying pilgrimage.'
- ⁵⁹ One was Helen, the subject of the first individual case example.
- ⁶⁰ Remarked in conversation by Helen, but echoed by the others in turn; an amazing common desire for a spiritual dialogue that none had before expressed to anyone. "No one in my treatment group has any wish to talk about God," one of the men said to me. "I feel lonely inside," a woman said.
- ⁶¹ Her Church of England vicar refused this request because it was 'not of his tradition' – said in direct conversation with CKR.
- ⁶² Remarkably, all the participants entered the final processes of bio-death at close intervals, and all died within a three week period of one another. It seemed that their fellowship experience had extended to this dimension also.
- ⁶³ That is being personally loved.
- ⁶⁴ Similar emotions of denial/anger are described by E. Kubler-Ross (1969).
- ⁶⁵ Concerns about their baptism, expressed on the lines of, "I've only been told they [the parents] had me Christened; of course I don't remember anything of it. God won't have me if I'm not Christened," have often been spoken to me by older people. One young woman similarly raised the issue, "My Nan says I can't go to heaven when I die because my parents didn't have me Christened, so she wants me to have the service, but I don't feel I can just like that." In the Group of Five, one person expressed his desire to receive Holy Communion before dying, "But I can't because I'm a [Roman] Catholic and I married a divorcee [30 years previously] and they said I'm an adulterer and have a mortal sin. I go to Mass but never receive the Sacrament." All above comments spoken directly to me at various times.
- ⁶⁶ The term 'moral' is employed to qualify many claims. For example the conflict between good and evil may be described as moral dualism. R. Holloway (2000) asserts morality to be created by human beings for social management (p.32) "morality is a human construct; it is something that we ourselves have created" (p.69). It is disingenuous to attempt the limitation of moral meaning by this very narrow argument. My use of the term is to describe any action or purpose that is intact of innocence, devoid of ulterior or deficient purpose, and therefore the condition of God's Being, and a defining characteristic of transcendence. See the following chapter on Dis-innocence and Forgiven-ness for a fuller discussion.

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- ⁶⁷ There are of course also individuals who profess no belief in God. However, their religious position does not render their spiritual needs any less, and there need to be found ways in which those need to be met. Stanworth (2007) has valuable insights.
- ⁶⁸ The passage summarises the view of *Heilsgeschichte* – salvation history – as dawning with the Incarnation and proceeding through the Resurrection of Jesus, "...the whole of early Christian thought is based in *Heilsgeschicht...*" (Cullmann 1958, p.16)
- ⁶⁹ By this is meant of natural causes. It excludes suicide which to some degree must always involve choice whatever the motivation. However, the situation of *assisted suicide*, which involves not only personal decision but also the companioning presence of third parties, should be equally part of pastoral, Christian caring and deserving of sensitive theological dialogue and preparation. The subject is beyond the scope of this thesis, requiring of particular theological and practical study. Christianity must purposefully work to reverse its ancient anathematising of suicide.
- ⁷⁰ This is especially true of sudden death by mechanical cause. Such occasions bear the marks of injustice; additionally they cannot be represented as God's will or occurrences of random fate. It is accepted that these situations require very different pastoral approaches. Sudden death situations are beyond the scope of this thesis and deserve further and particular theological and practical study.
- ⁷¹ The evidential signs of death support a view of conclusive end: Primarily there is no dialogue with the dead that compares with conversation between the living, and no way of independently testing the dialogue claimed by spiritualist mediums. The title 'Immortality or Extinction' (Badham and Badham 1982) seems to adequately describe the span of post-modern speculations of personal survival of death's consequences.
- ⁷² The concept of dualism is dealt with in the following chapter.
- ⁷³ It is what Christ *did*, not what he looked like, that is the basis of recognition and relationship in the post Resurrection events described by Matt.28, Lk.24 and Jn.20f. Mk.16:1-8 records no post resurrection encounter with Jesus; the generally accepted gloss of vs.9-20 merely repeats material from Luke and John.
- ⁷⁴ Cullmann's detailed discussion of this is pertinent. *Christ in Time* (1951)

Chapter 4

WHERE ARE THE BOUNDARIES?

In British and African Christian cultures, a generally held view is that dying is a private affair and that the subject should not be too much aired in the context of generally accepted pastoral bible study programmes. It is often difficult to engage in open, direct discussion about death and dying. Consequently it is unsurprising that the experience of bringing death out into the open as a transcending event in Christian belief was often that people responded with caution but also some relief: "*Thank goodness I can talk about it openly without feeling that I am promoting some kind of disease,*" Pat remarked after one Sunday service.

However positive acceptance of death, or the pro-active programmes outlined in the case examples are not always welcome, as shown by the upset reactions of a small minority to Pat's anointing into a pilgrimage into death. Although only one couple of the few who left the congregation in consequence of that service was prepared to discuss their feelings with me, it was clear that their objections were expressions of faithfulness to the historical teaching they believed themselves to have received from the Church. They may in fact have heard what was not spoken, but they held to the wording of the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) in the various

intimations linking sin and death,¹ and to the tradition of the Church in the use of black or purple vestments for the funeral service, denoting the gravity of the event, rather than *"the modern idea of using white, which we feel is NOT fitting."*²

Such views must be taken seriously, recognising them as faithful response within the boundaries of what is undeniably the evidence of long held Church dogma and praxis. How this might be comprehensively done is beyond the scope of this thesis. The strength of feeling however suggests that the conflict between doctrines of forgiveness and judgement have in part authored those words against death that attempt to soften the perceived injustice of death and its blighting of personal lives. (See chap. 6 on Dis-innocence and Forgiven-ness for a fuller discussion of this.)

In 'Miriam's' case, the boundaries of pastoral dialogue were essentially demarcated by her conviction that death heralded the end of meaningful, enjoyable life. She believed that a hopeless captivity would be ushered in at death and her dominant perception of the dying process was increasing relationlessness. The resulting anger and panic made it impossible to openly and specifically address her spiritual needs. For her, the promises of Christian faith were in terms of, and located within, this life. Only an unknown life in which she would be helpless and with nothing, lay ahead. Her fear seemed to derive less from regarding death as heralding oblivion

than that it would result in a period of shrouded suspension, anticipating Judgement.

These radically different perceptions and responses within the overall compass of the same experience - the approach of bio-death - pose questions in regard to personhood, identity, need and purpose, and suggest that all are relevant beyond bio-death. Primarily, there is indicated a strong case for examining much of the well-rehearsed Christian dogma and pastoral practices concerning preparation within this life for what lies beyond the boundaries traditionally prescribed by bio-death. This is not to suggest accessing spurious claims to some extended or re-materialised return to this life, but rather to focus upon identity and relationality between the Creator God and created Person. The central witness of the Resurrection is that bio-death does not of itself discontinue relational identity (Personhood) as morally created by God.

The unique claim for the Resurrection event is that Jesus *is* raised from the dead; he is renewed – *having perished in bio-death*³, in his case inflicted at the hand of fellow man. (However, the reality of his having died was no different to his having died from 'natural causes'; only the condition inaugurating bio-death differ; 'unnatural' and 'natural' causes result equally in termination of bio-life.)

The Christian claim is that bio-death is not an act of God destroying what he has created and wills to love, but is rather, as explicit in St Paul's conviction, "...that neither death nor life...nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus." (Rom.8:38-39) The Pauline claim is to Divine purpose; the gifting of new, transcended life to each unique Person is an act of intentional individuated love, to be consciously received by a relational Human Person and without boundary.

The opposite – relationlessness - is not simply descriptive of separation, it carries the immoral, corrosive capacity to erode moral identity; relationlessness dominates the essence and process of Jesus' dying and death, according to the biblical narratives. These indicate that Jesus does not purify himself from this process through his ordeal on the Cross; the texts illustrate his fear, isolation and uncertainty: "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps.22) in his encounter with relationlessness. The Gospel accounts make no attempt to conceal the profanity of the experience.

His needs on the Cross were described as physical and spiritual. But he receives all, trusting that the God whose charism he has humanly lived by will receive him intimately: "Father (abba) into your hands I commit my spirit." (Lk.23:46) To commit himself in this way to the Divine source of life is to commit the Being of his life - his Person of unique identity – to God. As a Jew, Jesus' understanding of this would not have been that of Greek philosophy of soul set free from a corrupting body, but the release of both

from the limitations of human nature.⁴ It is an expression of eschatological hope and as such, the recognition of Being⁵ beyond the boundaries of time and space.

A problem arises from the limitations of finite language to express the revelation of Jesus' Being-ness in this context, hence the ambiguous use of the language of 'body'. The New Testament references to meeting with the resurrected Jesus emphasise 'presence'; the language is descriptive not so much of the ethereal as of the substantively Immanent. The references to Jesus' 'body' therefore require that one does not confine one's understanding of the term literally as meaning a body of material, molecular composition. Ramsay's discussion of this is detailed and authoritative, coherent with Apostolic understanding of 'spiritual body' (1966, p.55) and that the Resurrection is: "a divine intervention, transcendent and creative, whereby a new creation is inaugurated in the life of mankind and the world." (ibid. p.101ff).

Cullmann's contribution is no less direct: "with regard to our resurrection a different present situation has come into being through the fact that there is now one body whose substance no longer is flesh, but spirit". (1958, p.235) It is here that the 'scandal' of the Cross (1Cor.1:18-25) seems most to conflict with the boundaries that impute, in consequence of the Fall, no intrinsic goodness either to the created world or to humankind. An example from traditional theology illustrates this:

"..we geue thee hertie thanks for this thy seruaunte, who thou hast delyuered from the miseries of this wretched world, from the body of death and all temptation."⁶

Such language has from the past laid a powerful focus of negative judgement on the relationship between God and Humankind, to the extent that the meaning of Grace has been reduced, if not actually lost. E.L. Mascall observes that Anders Nygren

"sees the essence of the Protestant case against Catholicism as consisting simply in the affirmation that, even with the aid of grace, man can have no fellowship with God on the level of God's holiness, though he can have fellowship with God on the basis of sin." (1959, p.85)

The association of the Fall with mortality can be understood in the context of a monotheistic religion seeking explanation for the event of bio-death, and interpreting its meaning to lie in the sinful incapacity of the Creature to please or satisfy its Creator:

"In the Christian tradition...there is a strong belief that because of sin and wickedness human life ends in death as a natural process. But because of a divinely initiated salvation, it is now possible for people to become Christians and, accordingly, to overcome death..." (D.J. Davies 1997, p.18)

This effectively describes on the one hand, boundary-setting (because sin and wickedness create the fence line of death), and a divinely allowed escape by which death is overcome. The difficulty is that bio-death still occurs even for the Christian. Close examination of the dynamics of the Cross makes it difficult to understand how this, or the view reflected by

Nygren, attaches to Christianity, or that the Old Testament doctrine of sin being punishable by death has not been specifically re-examined and differently expressed in post-Apostolic Christianity, in the context of proclaimed forgiveness. One consequence of not doing so is demonstrated in contemporary Christian funerary rites, which tend towards memorialisation through the “feel good” factor of positive focus (eulogy) on the deceased’s life.

In these contexts, bio-death cannot be expressed as pilgrimage, and the ‘positive’ focus on the deceased’s life will typically ignore the other known aspects of their imperfect and inconsistent life in human society. This combination of omission and inconsistency erodes the integrity of Christian understanding of death; the history of the Jesus-event begins to lose credibility in people’s minds, yet with nothing substantial to take its place. There is clearly a reason for this.

In the reality and construct of human relationships and relationality, the dead cannot simply be treated as the ‘disappeared’.⁷ Identity of Person is necessary to the identity of Community⁸ in which the phenomenon of choice bears directly upon the expression, characteristics and quality of individuated and communal relational identity – the collective expression of Personhood.

The scandal of the Cross: "Christ crucified" who is yet "the power of God and the wisdom of God," (1Cor. 1:23-25) suggests that man's sinful choices and decisions (individual and societal) are not airbrushed away but that the emphasis has shifted, from man's culpability for the wrong decisions taken in the context of freedom of choice, to the wonder of God's persisting and systemic love in which he seeks to restore human Personhood from 'rebellion' to grace. Sinfulness may remain an endemic moral weakness of humankind but it has not destroyed the contact between God and man, or man with God.

It is within the orbit and character of Grace that the redemptive history of humankind takes place, and that the process of pilgrim encounter of journey – the Abram event – commences. Abram is given no boundaries for his journey into God; he is to follow as and how the Spirit calls.

In contrast, there remains at the heart of (boundary-setting) canonical regulation much of the prohibitive pastoral theology and language of the past. For example, even though now overlooked in the everyday world of pastoral praxis within the Church of England, the historical debarring of the unbaptised⁹ or suicides from burial in the consecrated ground of a Churchyard remains an active memory and, to an extent, forms part of the subliminal reasons for rejecting as hypocritical the ministry of the institutional church.¹⁰

'Beyond the Churchyard wall,' is a powerfully enforcing demonstration of excision from the ontological root of man (the personalising, creating love of God) and its communal expression, human society. It entrenches beyond all avoidance the threat of annihilation of identity, the anxious void of unknown Being: *'Will I know who I am?', 'Where will I be?', and 'Will I be loved?'*

It is such fears and uncertainty, and susceptibility to alternative philosophies, that are commonly encountered pastorally in the minds of the dying, and constitute major, *inner and spiritual* as well as *conscious and expressed*, uncertainty concerning Christian understanding of death and the perceived contradictions therein.

Death as the 'wages of sin' is commonly believed real and deserved; also that after death there is a restoration effected by God (resurrection), beyond which there lies yet the Last Day and Judgement, carrying the explicit prospect of Hell, classically taught as a place of considerable and unending torment. This is violent symbolism.

It is unsurprising that sophisticated litanies of 'words against death' (Davies 1997) have been historically framed to provide comfort, or that, in more recent times, Christian theology of death [has begun] to be questioned more and more:

“At first people were simply uneasy with the Christian understanding and began to select and discard. But as the years passed, they became increasingly open to other possibilities.” (Billings 2002, p.64)

Violent symbolism:

The Christian church has developed pastoral doctrines and ritual language concerning death that are entirely consistent with M. Bloch’s identification of the significance of violent symbolism¹¹ to the emergence of supernatural identity; that “violence is itself a result of the attempt to create the transcendental in religion and politics.” (M. Bloch 1992, p.7)

However, where Bloch sees a connection between a “religious construction and universal human constraints” (1992, p.4), one could add that “universal human constraints” actively tolerate violent symbolism in religious language, and that they should not. The relational identity of Personhood is itself transcendental to, *as well as being visible in*, bio-life form.

Reflecting on the language employed for the blessing of water for baptism, an equally relevant alternative focus would be upon the journey of pilgrimage the escaping Hebrews were on. In this, the experience of passing through the waters of the sea is a vivid description of entering into (commencing) a new way of living.

Bloch's development of the principle¹² of "rebounding violence" demonstrates that both language and symbolic actions within Christian baptismal and funeral liturgies would benefit from significant review. As presently set out they perpetuate models of acceptability, salvation and the nature of God, the full consequences of which only become revealed in particularly powerful, negative ways at times of human distress, and specifically in the arenas of dying, death and bereavement.

The historical language and images within baptismal services appear closely consistent with Bloch's examples of how rebounding violence is the means by which newness of identity is socially conferred – dying to a present identity in order to receive and be accepted in another. In the case of Christianity, this may be entirely unintentional; whether so or not, the reality of God's belovedness of each Person is obscured by models of violence: 'dying to self', the exorcising of "uncleane" and "cursed spirite[s]"¹³ from infants and children. It is powerful word-images such as these that insert into the subconscious of the individual the fears of inadequacy, frailty of capacity and conditionalism attaching to their ability to *be* Christianly acceptable by God, and that directly inculcate the fear of bio-death as 'the wages of sin'.

This is the language of termination, not pilgrimage, and the 'fear of God' becomes distorted into the fear of Judgement - that view of the Judgement of God as essentially adversarial and accusatory of human wretchedness:

"Like the mouse who thinks it can stand against the farmer's plough....it is insanity for man to think that he can oppose the living God, who is angry with sinners and is bent on taking vengeance on those who oppose him."
(Lutzer 1997, p.109) ¹⁴

Essential belovedness:

"The righteousness of God is not simply destructive." (Sheppy 2003, p.207)

The emphasis in Christian initiation is more properly the affirming, assurance and joyful explanation of individual, ontological identity, self-worth and value;

"the fundamental sin does not consist in recognising and rejoicing in one's own value, but in refusing to recognise the source from which it comes and to glorify its Giver for his gift." (Mascall 1959, p.86)

As Person, beloved by God, this describes the central impulse of pilgrimage as being the nature of Christian faith and praxis, in bio-life and beyond bio-death. In this the individual Christian may be "In Christ... a new creation", in whom "the old has passed away" (2Cor. 5:17); that is to say, baptism into Christ is not the deprivation of individual Person-Being, but rather the commencement of the dimension of God-Spirit dialogue and pilgrimage within that Person. This is a teleological dialogue, concerning relational identity in which that identity is not to be bounded by bio-death.¹⁵

Kaufmann's observations on the negative Christian contribution to an understanding of death (see p.2) are graphically illustrated by the dissertation of Bishop Jeremy Taylor to the Earl of Carbery:

"when nature, or chance, or vice takes our body in pieces, weakening some parts and loosening others, we taste the grave and the solemnities of our own funerals..." (1847 reprint, p.4)

Does bio-death mark "...the end of a life-history, the end of a history of a soul with its body, the end of the whole person." (Jungel 1975, p.115) Has it ever been so, or have religious and cultural taboos and fears created and sustained a system of dualistic self-affirming beliefs by which Christian theology and pastoralia have been influenced and directed?

The demonstration of sentient, relatable identity in the person of the resurrected Jesus, who was touched, and spoken to by mortal disciples, participant at meals, articulate in discussion, conscious of relationships,¹⁶ suggests that mortal death is not the end point of Person-history and, therefore, identity.¹⁷

However the continuous process of scientific discovery and philosophical understanding since the 17th Century does indicate that re-appraisal of historical Christian language and interpretations of bio-death are overdue necessities:

"ever since the development of a 'natural system' of human sciences...the focus on the universal 'nature' of the human being has been accompanied by an indifference to the Christian understanding of human beings and their destiny." (W. Pannenberg 1985, p.487)

It is possible that there is another and more intimate problem confronting Christianity in the view that death is the punishment of God for sin, the axiom being that without sin there would be no death. This is not an extrapolation that can be sustained on the basis of biblical account;¹⁸ nevertheless it is the basis of organic differences within Christianity over the consequences within Man of the Fall - what Pannenberg describes as "an object of confessional dispute..." (p.487) He identifies this in the differences between medieval Catholic and Reformed views on the consequences to humanity of the Fall:

"The Reformation view of the image of God in humanity...regards the image of God not as the foundation of a distinct, actual communion with God, namely the divinely given justice of the first human being (*justitia originalis*), but as identical with this actual relation to God. Consequently, the fall was regarded as bringing the loss not only of the similitudo but of the imago itself." (p.49)

He supports Emil Brunner's position that a remnant is left which consists in human rationality and the capacity for being addressed by God, adding that this:

"consists...in the fact that despite sin human beings remain human, so that God's revelatory action in its turning to them can establish contact with the original destination of their being, and remind them of this. This would be impossible if sinners were wholly immersed in hostility to God." (p.49)

What this means is that it was *grace* rather than *nature* which was lost

through the Fall, that *imago* being a property intrinsic to Personhood of relational identity, continues to exist; it belongs to humanity, and human beings have not ceased to be human in spite of the Fall. Viewed this way, it is unavoidable that *imago* and *Personhood of relational* identity are intrinsically linked.

However, the crisis created by this most basic of disputes in the confessional standard of the Christian faith may have contributed to the indifference and disaffection of scientific and anthropological disciplines towards religious faith, *and* a serious loss of understanding within the western Christian Churches of the *identity* and *context* of Personhood of relational identity as created by God, in his image, and having the capacity and need for a realized, communion relationship with her/his Creator.

For the Churches, this has resulted in the loss of what could be described as confessional confidence, specifically in regard to the pertinence of the death and resurrection of Jesus as a saving act for the whole of humanity. That in turn has resulted in the Churches having little to contribute either to a dialogue with other sciences or with an increasingly disaffected population whose fears of mortality are increasing in consequence of the dehumanizing effects of modern scientific opinion as expressed, for example, by Richard Dawkins. (1989)

It is hard to estimate the extent to which Christian divisions over the

nature, estate and destiny of humankind accelerated the search for new, secular definitions of the purpose and destiny of human beings. However, Christian disagreement over the essential human status *after* the Fall is reflected in the absence of a shared, systematic theology of death and in the ambiguities of liturgical funerary language that adheres more to the concept of immortality of the soul than resurrection through the creative, relational energy of God, into boundless new life of in Personhood.

Jesus' death and resurrection pertain to the *Heilsgeschichte* of his moral identity; eschatological hope is anchored in the concept of this identity reaching its moral purpose in community with God.¹⁹ The emphasis is on relational, moral identity within this community; it is not about memory contained in God.

The contrast is drawn in Jesus' dialogue with the thief on the cross who asks to be remembered (*mnestheti*²⁰) eschatologically; Christ's response is teleologic – they will be companions of one another today (*semeron*²¹) and thereafter. It is the unique identity of moral Personhood, not *memory* of the person that is to be found in the community of God. 'Today' the thief becomes Christ's first pilgrim companion into what lies beyond bio-death. This is close to the heart of a Christian doctrine of eternal life, but as yet there is no agreed theology of Person which systematically addresses the nature of 'body' as axiomatic of moral Personhood of relational identity and which moves on from the insurmountable boundaries imposed by insisting

that personal identity is anthropological and exists only in its bio-life embodiment.

These in effect deny human Personhood as consisting in moral, relational identity. No meaningful eschatology is possible by the denial of this construction and in consequence, bio-death becomes an immoral event, the injustice of which is countered by philosophies of transformed existence (immortality of the soul), or romantic existence (as a memory dear to God), or in multiple existence (as in re-incarnation).

In contrast to these is the view that death is a moral event (see concluding chapter), and grief and bereavement are to be understood as moral expressions of relational identity, and not merely as emotional phenomena. That is why there are spiritual as well as emotional, physical and clinical needs in the dying and the bereaved, and why these cannot be holistically met clinically or philosophically, and why 'memorial theology' in particular essentially distorts the Christian view of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

As expressed by Jungel, to hope in God is synonymous with hope in resurrection and therefore in salvation. However he interprets the hope in salvation as meaningful only in so far as it is "directed towards a God who saves", and thus, "Salvation then can only mean that it is the life man has lived that is saved, not the man is saved out of this life." (1975 p.120) This view is

accurate only in that bio-life does not survive bio-death. However, eschatological error is inevitable once identity is defined anthropologically and not ontologically - that is, by its moral origins and relational identity to a moral Creator.

Jungel's position describes 'memorial theology':

"[human life] made eternal... through participation in the very life of God. Our life is hidden in his life. In this sense the briefest form of the hope of resurrection is the statement: 'God is my eternity'. He will make everything whole; everything, including what we have been. Our person will then be our manifest history." (p.120)

Pared down this looks like a dualism that simply exchanges the domain of 'ideas' for the idea of Divine memory. In one sense it is true that the *product* of one's life becomes that individual's life in that what they choose, think, and do, forms *character*, but this is not the basis of individuated identity. Actions and their product can never become *Person*; we are not our history, although our history reveals something of us. The relevance of faith is to moral relationship and, without there being any continuation in identity of the unique Person, there would be little purpose to the individual human being responding in a personal relationship with God; death then would indeed be the gateway to anonymity.

With similar effect, the secular view of human identity as only anthropological reduces relationality to an expression of conscious, sentient

and ethical social community that does not survive bio-death. In this view, religious faith is an irrelevance because Personhood has no ontological, moral, relational identity. Death then is a social, but not moral, tragedy although its circumstances can be ethically and juridically immoral.

The Biblical message, however, speaks of moral relationality rather than bio-life characteristics as defining Personhood in conscious relational identity, freedom of choice (embracing moral capacity), and relational necessity (in respect of both inter-personal and animate dynamics, the capacity to love and be loved).²² It is this 'ground of moral being' that makes relationlessness immoral, and feared, because relationlessness is the contradiction of *livingness*, and a human being denied relationship has no context in which to live.

The experiences of Helen and James (chap.3) of mystical identity did not register with them as a loss of life; on the contrary, both spoke of an *expanded* context of life, a *teleological experience*. They did not describe any sense of namelessness, of lack of identity or of becoming within themselves two separate but parallel beings. Their experiences appear consistent with St. Paul's teaching: "If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body" (1Cor.15:44b). This theology casts bio-death as a moral event in the unique life of Personhood. This allows for the possibility of Personhood of moral relational identity – the awareness and knowledge of self - deriving from something other than physical embodiment. Relational

identity is the expression of the relationality of moral Personhood - the determining characteristic and sign of Human. To speak of the 'body of a soul' is an attempt to describe the coherent energy of its *moral capacity and relationality*. The expression is, however, unquantifiable and unverifiable as it historically stands.

The essence of Personhood of relational identity is not, then, that it is bounded by its physical embodiment. Conscious, relational identity demonstrably exists *beyond* as well as *within* physical embodiment, evidenced in interpersonal awareness and communication that may be experienced as unspoken or over distance; the 'inner knowledge' of another person that is common in close bonding,²³ the experiences of loss and the innate sense of moral justice being some examples. This is not to suggest that the identity of Personhood is somehow unilaterally immortal, but rather that the images and interpretations stimulated by emotive terms like 'immortal', 'extinction', 'soul sleep', 'still with us' all fundamentally flaw the models we construct in our search to find meaning in bio-death.

Each describes a condition we cannot know how to experience; we have had no encounter with a working model of immortality, or with extinction as an active personal experience, or with 'soul sleep'. Apart from its literal meaning of immediate or close, actual vicinity, 'still with us' is a loose metaphor for 'presence'; it cannot, even allegorically, mean absence. If I am absent, I am not present, and cannot be – spatially or logically.

Relationality is, however, actually experiential - the *action* of relational capacity and necessity. It is meaningful to us; we can recognize accuracy and error in descriptive models of relationship in present life. This relational capacity has been described above (chap.2) as the sign of Personhood of moral relational identity, the definitive sign of Human Being-ness. But even with such definitive moral significance to Human identity, relational *capacity* does not create *relationship*. That requires consent; we consent to offer, and we consent to enter into; both actions are required for the *evolution of relationship* out of relational *capacity*. (See further, chap.5)

Relationality is therefore a more productive basis on which to construct a paradigm of consensual pilgrimage through bio-death, and from which to interpret the integrity of human persona and identity teleologically. (See chap.7)

Pilgrimage describes a journey beyond boundaries that is purposefully made in the expectation of life-changing experience. A pilgrim is a searcher after new meanings. Secondly, relationality is crucial to the significance of the *moral as well as biological evolution* of creature into Person.²⁴

Evolution does not describe marginal adjustment, the slight change of boundaries; it denotes an entirely new condition. *Homo habilis* is a tactile user of implements; *Homo sapiens* is a strategically cognitive tool user by virtue of larger brain capacity and power (hence 'wise'), and is to some

degree reflective. However, the ascription *Homo sapiens* does not axiomatically confer an understanding of meaning and significance *relationally*. The actions of caring for and protecting another, *for the sake of that person* demonstrate *compassion*; that is *moral relationality*, and suggest that there is within emergent Humanity a further ontological characteristic.

Tabs, not boundaries:

In the contemporary Western world, the boundaries of death, and with them, the contexts of death, are shifting. There is now possible the real and general prospect of advanced longevity; many historical causes of death have been overcome and clinical medicine can dramatically postpone death. The advances have created new expectations and difficulties and present the Christian Church with renewed need to respond to people's fears concerning the appropriateness of death as an activity of life. This it can pastorally do by enabling people to understand the moral significance of death. However, to be successful there are serious historical issues of intentional language usage and the attitudes and understandings that have become entrenched in Christian belief and practice, the consequences of which have to a significant degree fashioned secular reactions to Christian spirituality, that must be faced.²⁵

The Jesus-event locates death and resurrection as the point at which ecclesial boundaries that set out and sub-divide conditions by which to

determine God's relationship with Humankind are confounded. In their place is a revelation of teleological experience²⁶ that must be considered as consonant with Sheppy's view of zoetic life. This is necessary to the distinction of relational capacity as a defining condition of human Personhood and moral Being, and unavoidable in Sheppy's distinction of biotic life.

Relationality to God in the identity of Personhood is the nub of Christian teleology, defining Christian *Heilsgeschichte* against philosophies either of the immortality of the soul or of extinction, and as being the moral basis for understanding death as an event in pilgrimage towards a goal, rather than termination of purpose. This demands a consideration of the language for a pilgrimage through death. This is addressed in chapter seven.

END NOTES:

- ¹ The rubrics concerning use of the burial service, the biddings of the Litany, declarative wording concerning God preferring an individual's repentance than the death of a sinner (service of Evensong), amongst others.
- ² CKR notes.
- ³ Cullmann centrally argues this as the essential basis for Christian perspective.
- ⁴ M. Ramsey (1966, p.112) points out that in Biblical Greek, 'flesh' also bore the meaning "human nature."
- ⁵ O. Cullmann (1958, p.4) asserts, "...deliverance consists not in a release of soul from body but is a release of both from flesh."
- ⁶ Extract of a prayer in the burial service, First Prayer Book of Edward VI. (reprint 1977, p.206)

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- 7 The widespread anguish amongst families of those who disappeared during the periods of the Argentinean military regimes was expressed also in the wider society from which they had been removed. 'Disappearance' is unnatural to human relational capacity and necessity.
- 8 The understanding, contra Durkheim, set out by H. Garfinkel (1967 'Studies in ethnomethodology')
- 9 In pastoral ministry in Britain, I have frequently encountered mythic beliefs that unbaptised babies 'cannot have a Church service,' or 'go to God.'
- 10 A written enquiry, November 2007, concerning the present status of the opening rubric in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, to a currently serving bishop of the Church of England drew the reply that it remains legally binding, and clergy should refer to their bishop in such cases (notwithstanding the recommendation of the C of E Liturgical Commission, 1965).
- 11 The words of blessing of water in the Common Worship baptism liturgy graphically recall the destruction of the Egyptian army in the sea, associating the event with 'the waters of baptism' through which we enter the domain of Christ.
- 12 It is the *principle* he identifies – prey transforming in to hunter through the medium of ritual actions– that is capable of invasive transmission. The theological principle of dying to self only becomes a supportive reality through the process of individuated experience. Baldly stated at the point of initiation, it is at best existentially meaningless; at worst a threatening commitment. Journeying towards, or into, the relationship with God may result in a surrender of self-will, but that is a condition that is variable in both depth and expression.
- 13 1st and 2nd Prayer Books of Edward VI (reprint 1977, p.238)
- 14 Lutzer was at that time Senior Pastor of (the conservative Evangelical) Moody Church, Chicago, and a prolific author with much influence in America.
- 15 *Vide.* Jn.17. In this specific prayer, Jesus describes the relational purpose of his ministry: 'I desire that those you have given me to be with me where I am' (v.24) and that this hope is to be fulfilled in Personhood being indwelt by the activity of God's love: 'in order that the love you have for me may be in them.'
- 16 The Gospels of the New Testament
- 17 1Cor.15 c/f Ramsey (1961 p.101ff)
- 18 However it is a persistent common belief and a significant factor in James's reaction when first told that his illness might be terminal; that it was the manifestation of the presence of sin. Later as the illness progressed, there was the fear of being judged.
- 19 Jn.11:25; 14:1ff; 17; 1Cor.15; 1Jn.1:1-7
- 20 The word carries the idea of fixture in the mind; being mindful.
- 21 The word conveys the dimensions of present and future.
- 22 Lk.10:27-28 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart...and your neighbour as yourself'
- 23 For example, love is experienced in inner feeling independently from any external expression, and external expression of love is not of itself causative of love within the recipient. Love can be offered but not compelled.
- 24 I am conscious that the concept of evolution is resisted by many Christians, as exemplified by Creationism.

²⁵ *vide* L.K. Dupré (1993)

²⁶ By this is meant the mystical experiences as relationally described by James and Helen and many others.

Chapter 5

IDENTITY in DUALISM AND PERSONHOOD

The complex make-up and capacities of human beings allows for their perceptive involvement with different kinds of activity in which the most apparent dissimilarities are between physical and metaphysical forms and conditions. Humans have physical and metaphysical properties that reside in – or are manifestations of - the Self. This raises questions about their properties and relationship to the Self, and has stimulated ideas of dualism concerning the basis of identity and nature in Humans.

Leibniz's Law of Identity states that two things are the same if, and only if, they have all of the same properties at the same time.¹ His Law enables substance dualism, typically expressed in the language of differentiation between 'soul/mind', and 'body'; the conclusions of René Descartes' are that mind and body are fundamentally different, of "real distinction" because they can be separated by God.² Descartes' reasoning is not dissimilar to that of Platonic dualism; that the physical body is a prison in which the soul is confined until death releases it to continue its search for higher Forms – universals that represent the pure essences of things. Death marks the separation of soul from body.

Descartes' view is modified by some contemporary proponents of dualism who consider that as the mind is non-physical there is no reason to consider it to be regulated by physical laws that apply to a material body (vis: R. Taylor 1983, p.11), but it is unclear how this distinction might contribute to the concept of individuated identity.

Proponents of the social identity theory (after Émile Durkheim 1858-1917) generally consider social facts to be more significant than methodological individualism (what motivates the actions of individual people). This approach considers identity to be the main product of social formation, and as such attributes to the forces of causality and social mechanism the significant formation, or embodiment of, identity.³

These perspectives have been challenged by H. Garfinkel (1967) who argued that the individual as an identity precedes society, which is the sum of the collective identities of its individual constituents. At the heart of his reasoning is the challenge to set aside preconceived ideas, or habitual use of language terms in order to view people-activity as it presents them, and to attempt to understand why they are that way.

J.E. Côte and C.J. Levine consider personal identity most affected by primary relationships, but additionally by secondary and self-relationships:

“...both sociological and psychological perspectives are essential for a comprehensive understanding of human self-definition...” (2002 p.9)

This traces back to Durkheimian views on “social facts” (persistent manifestations of normal patterns of thinking and behaving).

Contemporary Roman Catholic tradition holds that the human soul is infused into the body at conception and is immortal; death occurs

“when the human soul separates from the human body and the body disintegrates into dust” Its restoration to the human person “is the restoration...of an essential aspect of his/her existence as a person.”⁴

At face value, this seems to describe a dualistic philosophy of human identity that could easily lead to colloquial misunderstanding.

It remains true that we can imagine what we do not explicitly know, and equally that we are able to misconstrue what we do know. Thus, because we know ourselves to be capable of simultaneous and radically different thought and expression, the concept of dualism is easily assimilated into spirituality and language.⁵

It may be seen in this overview of some of the leading arguments concerning identity structure and social theory that dualism is a persistent issue. What can be said with certainty about the concepts of dualism is that they do not, and cannot, convey any sense of unitary Personhood to the identity of a human being. However dualism need not constitute a problem if relational Personhood itself can be regarded as the singularity⁶ of human identity. In such an understanding of identity, the forms through which

Personhood articulates itself would be reflective of that identity but not constitute it. The form of its representative appearance might be substantial or other, but nevertheless capable of conveying individuated expression, character, intention and relationality, in the 'language' of gesture. Thus although demonstrated in physical movement, the gestures of body language arise out of, and reflect, the inner state of being.

It may thus be seen that the expressions of Personhood conform to some characteristics of dualism, but that Personhood as describing relational identity does not. However, the combination of appearances and the different characters of relational expression appealing to human senses, and their conveyance in verbal language,⁷ create a subtle matrix of symbols and nuances that display their form differences⁸ but not their collegiality. My body displays my Personhood of relational-identity; the unsubstantial presence that enters a room as my body enters that room, is equally of my Personhood, it is me; but my ontic identity is the relational Personhood to which they both pertain.

Person and Personhood:

It may be said that the Judeo/Christian definition of Human Being is the creature "made in the image of God" (Gen.1:26, amplified in 2:7); but what is 'Person'?

In Christianity:

The term "person" in the modern sense of its meaning emerges first in Christianity, employed by Tertullian (c.160-c.220A.D.) to describe the concept of the Trinity ("De Trinitas") – how God exists in Himself. 'Person' in this sense therefore originates as a theological term to explain Christian theological concepts. From Tertullian's⁹ description of God as three Persons emerges the extrapolation of Man as Person. Boethius (5th century) taught that Person is "an individual substance of a rational nature".¹⁰ Subsequently the Third Council of Constantinople (680-681), debating on Personhood in Jesus ruled that Personhood is in part defined by relationship.¹¹ Later Thomas Aquinas added that a Person is "...a substance, complete, subsisting *per se* existing apart from others..." and having "...a rational nature..."¹²

The concept of rational nature, or rational intellect incorporated into the Christian definition of Person also marks a departure from the ancient Greek concept of *nous* as a faculty of the human mind that is perceptual, not physical. If rational intellect is the property of Personhood, it is more than a faculty of mind, it belongs to the ontology and expression of Personhood.

In secular debate:

Secular debate demonstrates that the concept of Personhood is not clearly defined in philosophical or legal terms, and remains controversial in both disciplines. Considerations such as the possession of consciousness over

time (Descartes, Locke and Hume); relational awareness beyond self, "things matter" (Taylor 1985, pp.98-102); free-will and reflective self-awareness (H.G. Frankfurt 1971, pp. 5-7); premise of functionalism:

"One cannot function as a person without being a person, but one can surely be a person without functioning as one..." (P. Kreeft),¹³

possessing of "inalienable rights"¹⁴ (U.S. Declaration of Independence) are suggested as significant markers of the understanding of Personhood in historical and contemporary debates.

The point at which Personhood is legally defined as beginning constitutes a major issue within some sectors of Faith and Secular communities alike, arising in the past fifty years out of successful moves to legalise abortion. The landmark American case (Roe vs Wade, U.S. Supreme Court 1973) was argued on the principle of Functionalism, and the premise that functionalism defines Person, and that Personhood describes the status of a human being having rights. The issue turned upon when a foetus is possessed of Personhood- and by extension, individuated identity - for which it was argued that human Personhood is present from conception.¹⁵ The failure of the application introduced further factors – which can be summarised as quality-life – as functional criteria defining Personhood and therefore the right to life. This determined individuated identity as potentially recognizable only when the child's life might be sustained before full term, when separated from its mother.

British medical ethics establish that termination of pregnancy may not (unless there are exceptional reasons) be carried out after the 24th week. This has laid down a marker for Personhood that reflects empirical criteria as supporting moral and relational considerations, but is not universally accepted by medical personnel or amongst the general public.

The concept of sanctity of life prevails over quality of life in contemporary debate over euthanasia and assisted suicide. The arguments here seemingly recognize that individuated Personhood morally defines relational identity; they are inconsistent in that they seem not to acknowledge the relational responsibility of community to hear and extend companionship to individuated need. A challenge in all of this is to offer a theology of Personhood that locates the origin of identity and its relational essence as something ultimate and which cannot be analysed in terms of continuity of body, memory or character.¹⁶

The value of different modelling:

There is a reported observation of the anthropologist Margaret Mead that, for her, the first definitive sign of civilisation in human society was the evidence of 'a healed femur'; for her, compassion was the defining evidence.¹⁷ No bipedal creature can survive alone with a broken upper leg without a level of care beyond the pragmatic. Intimate care as well as protection is required *for the sake of the person*. Such care is beyond – indeed potentially disadvantageous to – the well-being of the immediate

social group. A healed femur therefore evidences a deliberate action *against death*, revealing of conscious moral commitment and relationality to the helpless Person, *for the promotion of life*.¹⁸

If the sign of civilisation is a healed femur, what is the sign of Human; that which separates and distinguishes Human creatureliness from animal? In identifying the 'Human' dimension above 'animal', it is necessary to regard the determining condition of 'Human' as beyond merely a superior capacity of brain, or thought/action. This is a task of theology,¹⁹ and has to do with the numinous of spirituality, and the deep questing in Humans for an origin of Being, that is beyond religious emotion.²⁰

This is not simply Western, or even Christian thinking. Similar distinction has been made in many African traditional cultures and elsewhere; one of the clearest being amongst Lusi-Kalai speakers in Papua New Guinea whose traditions distinguish human from animal by the presence of a single spiritual component with two aspects: *tautau* = spiritual essence, and *anunu* = shadow or image. (Counts and Counts 2004, pp.887-897)

The term 'spiritual' makes the distinction from 'bonding', which is an associative action that differs in essence from systemic relational necessity. Bonds are formed; Personhood is endemically relational, and is severely damaged when relationality is denied.²¹ Human relational capacity, in this construct, constitutes a moral state and condition. It is further the sign of

moral *need, capacity and necessity* (each being characteristic of influence beyond deductive or intellectual origin) as being intrinsic to moral identity. Thus, as a healed femur was for Margaret Mead the sign of civilisation, so *reflective relational capacity* signifies Personhood as being the definitive sign of being Human,²² and 'civilised' behaviour as a moral expression of this; this interpretive model of Christian belief reflects an understanding that what is foundational to Personhood *is* the nature of God.²³

Theological significance of Personhood:

The theological significance of such a model of Personhood is that it describes the nature of God as being the ontological root of reflective, relational human Personhood. In this construct, Personhood images the way God exists in himself. That is to suggest the phrase *out of God emerges Human Personhood* as representing a succinct description of the evolution of Human Person as emerging out of the Immanent Personhood of God. Such a description embraces the realities of Man's creatureliness and relational Personhood. It also suggests Personhood as *moral* and intrinsically *innocent*²⁴ in that its capacities are endowed, not self-created. Personhood is explicated as a theological phenomenon in the capacities of loving, reflective understanding, cogent self-giving and systemic relationality. The phrase does not dispute the scientific description of human beings as 'sapient' in likeness, 'Homo sapiens'.²⁵ This designation defines our species only in terms of *anatomy*, in that it describes the greater capacity of brain volume and ability as compared with other species

of hominidae. It does not, however, describe Human in terms of Personhood.

Personhood *is* relational identity, and this relationality is not random, it is endemic to the conscious Personhood that images the moral nature of God in the capacity to innately comprehend and require love, community, justice, compassion, and conscious, associative creativity and to voluntarily and cognately be the Creature of their expression. Person expresses that of the transcendent Creator, in finite and mystical Creatureliness.²⁶ In a different but parallel context, de Chardin comments that "life is not an epiphenomenon, but the very essence of phenomenon." (1971, p.18) In hominization, the character of this essence is conscious relationality – physical and psychical - that is both the vehicle and purpose for the evolutionary transcendence of Personhood.

The energies arising out of this conjunction, are relational, sentient, spiritual and intellectual; each capacity resonant of, and reaching towards, the existence of Meaning beyond empirical encounter, into the Mystical; innocence, or that which is beautiful, or tranquil, or inspirational, or giving of space, or imparting a sense of security, or belovedness, being examples of unmeasurable truths essential to the expanding wholeness of relational Being.

The implications of this construction are that Personhood is itself evolving in the cognitive development of relationality; of this the Incarnation is an abiding sign that Person has become able to *relationally*²⁷ embody the pure innocence of God and its concomitant love.²⁸ Jesus is fully God and fully Man; that is his identity, and in the Resurrection, his transcendent Personhood.

Personhood as an evolving phenomenon:

The substance of this view is that Personhood beyond this life is a tenable concept in the context of continuing evolution of the relational identity of Person but that theologically, human Persons require the help of God for creative, co-responsiveness with this purpose.²⁹ The word 'require' is used to affirm the freedom to make choice; the mystical phenomenon that liberates the creatureliness of humans from the limitations of evolved instincts and tyrannous immediacy. However, perception of this essential freedom is drastically obscured when the meaning of choice becomes subordinated to more humanly appealing doctrines of conformity, compulsion, guilt and punishment. Without choice, the affirming gift of responsibility cannot exist; that is, responsibility as a creative dynamic that evolves out of the cognition of and identification with, purpose; hence the expression of the co-operative role of humankind in God's purpose from the earliest scriptures.³⁰

The theology of choice is that it is intrinsic to the nature of God's love; never withdrawn, never ulterior, and always honouring of responsibility; the Creature who is Person may make choice concerning how they exercise and embrace relationality. Notwithstanding the processes by which the self revelation of God is received, understood and described through the Old Testament narrative, in the person of Jesus, the character of God's love is exemplified in the generosity³¹ of the father of the prodigal son. (Lk.15:11ff)

In the story of Christian *Heilsgeschichte* the Resurrection of Jesus reveals that Personhood beyond bio-life retains its relational identity, but in transcended form. The first Christians understood this in terms of glorification (Heb.1:3-4; Col.3:4) and the concept of evolution is not dissimilar in that it understands difference but also more complex continuity. The concepts of transcendence and evolution may both convey the idea of Personhood continuing in cognitive, relational progress towards eschatological fulfillment; the theological significance in either term being that they introduce the necessity for Christians to recognize and accept that relational Personhood is itself the locus of evolution into the intimacy of God's love.

The relational identity that is manifested in the resurrected Person of Jesus resonates more closely with a new dimension of Being-ness, than with reconstructed molecular body or the survival of an immortal soul. Yet that

Being-ness is not artificial to the uniquely relational Person born in Bethlehem; it is that his systemic relational identity is encountered, beyond death.

It is the identifiable Person-Jesus, in relational 'being-ness' who is described in the Gospels and other New Testament writings; it is not an image of his Person, neither is it a symbolic vision of his Godliness as a companion and friend, that is recorded of the post resurrection encounters. It is Jesus as a relational Person who is seen and encountered; Luke records Jesus' protest that he is not an apparition – a phantom – but real; "it is I myself." (Lk.24:39ff)³² Luke and John emphasise the attention that Jesus draws to the marks of crucifixion in his hands and feet and side; "put your finger here and see my hands..." (Jn.20:27) These are central to his identity; Jesus was not only crucified in consequence of his lifestyle - "If we let him go on thus, everyone will believe in him..." (Jn.11:48) - but because of his relational identity as "the way, and the truth and the life" (Jn.14:6); the physical signs are of crucifixion *and* moral identity. It is to identity, not outward event (crucifixion), that Jesus draws his disciples' attention.³³

The issue then turns upon presence, not bodily composition; was Jesus identifiably present with his disciples in form and manner? Their certainty was that this was so.

Regarding the risen Jesus it would seem that argument as to whether disembodied life can have any meaning is secondary to the issue of identity embodied by its unique relationality; his identity exists because of Personhood, not because of material body. The substance and shape of material form only *express* the identity of *Person*. A submission of this thesis is that this is the intention in the form of words employed by St. Luke in chapter 24; the essence of the interchanges on the road to Emmaus (vv.13-35) is that they involve the relational Person who is Jesus, not the concept of a visiting spirit.

Similar experiences of relational identity are referred to by Davies who quotes two occasions when the deceased C.S. Lewis appeared to J.B. Phillips, and spoke to him, repeating "the same message which was very important to me at the time". (1997, p.154) Phillips was confident enough of the veracity of the events to publish them. The significance of the response of the bishop to whom Phillips' related the incidents, "this sort of thing is happening all the time", can be too easily dismissed as mildly hysterical personal eccentricity; the sort of comment that could be expected of a professional religious leader. Such encounters 'happening all the time', add substance to the meaning of the Christian proclamation of life after death as interpreting an unfolding understanding of the uniqueness of human *relationality*.

The phenomenon of identity as deriving from the moral actions of Creator in bestowing Personhood to Creature (Gen.2:7), explicates the phenomenon that de Chardin (1959) describes as Man rather than in the reconstitution of bio-life or Dormition, as expressed in the liturgies of Orthodox churches³⁴ or other religious dogma.

Continuity of Personhood-identity:

In the Hebrew scriptures, the moral *continuity* of identity is central to the narrative of Cain and Abel (Gen.4:1ff) and the relational significances of Personhood, both in God and Human. Implicit in the question from God about the slain Abel's whereabouts is the issue of *existing* relationality: *where* does Cain stand in all of this? The moral connection between these two Persons is not ended by the termination of bio-life; Abel's identity has not been expunged from the Creation. It is not that Abel is no more, for his infinite Being "the voice of your brother's blood" cries out from the ground; it is that Cain has attempted to destroy its existence, in spite of which Abel's identity remains infinitely in Being in the consciousness of God. As much as Cain is not his "brother's keeper", God is; Abel's ontological identity and relationship with God is the basis of God's questioning of Cain. God acknowledges Abel's "crying out" to him; this is not God crying out because of his *memory* of Abel.

The moral dimension arises because Cain acts as though identity – the expression of Being-ness – exists only in bio-life; his action in killing Abel is

immoral because it purposes to end what only God as Creator can end, the Relational identity endemic to Human Personhood that is teleological and relational to God.

The Cain/Abel narrative suggests the cosmic significance of Human Personhood as manifesting the *character and nature* of God in the physical and metaphysical properties of the Creation; hence a later narrative describes that "God so loved the cosmos that he gave his only Son...", to save, not condemn, that *cosmos*. (Jn.3:16-17)

'Identity' is a word of substance in human language and meaning; its application attaches to both physicality and character, for which it is a metaphor – individual, possessions and other such articles, and events are all vested with identity of being, purpose and consequence, subjectively and objectively. It is implicit also in memory, for the phenomenon of memorial occurs in consequence of an identifiable *something*. The Cain/Abel narrative suggests that it is not possible for the identity of Person to cease to exist, although the form of its manifestation – its expression – may alter.

Biblically the relational identity of Personhood is as a unity of physical 'immediate' and 'mystical', and not of itself immortal; in this construction, the idea of Personhood (*Nephesh*) as the unity of physical 'immediate' and 'mystical' elements is jeopardised if the elements differ radically in

character;³⁵ one determined and governed by the finite laws of physics, and the other not so. The interpretation of death requires either their unquantifiable and dualistic separation, and at least temporary survival of the one in Sheol - the Pharisaic view - or the cessation of life in both.

Either proposition ruptures the singularity of relational identity which is the essence of Personhood, and occasions illogical language in order to address the crisis of its loss. The risk in this use of language is that the meanings in death are humanly ascribed to the interactive consequences arising out of social and cultural definitions of morality. Within Greek philosophical thought what is termed 'soul' is immaterial and without location; an entity that is entirely subjective, though insubstantial, and as such is vulnerable to dualistic application. "Soul immortally lives on, set free from bodily incarceration, to return to its true home, the eternal world of ideas." (Cullmann 1958, p.20)

In the understanding of a whole person whilst alive comprising 'body and soul', yet in death somehow surviving the situation where the body is "committed to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust..", God himself having previously taken "unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed", (BCP 1968, p.332-333), dualism is continuously perpetuated. The singularity of relational identity is consequently contradicted, and its eschatological dimension obscured, or at the very least, confused. Such a situation must challenge the inadequacies inherent in historical language,

and affirm Sheppy's (2003, p.108) uncertainty that the categories of body and soul are entirely adequate.

Jesus seems to deliberately employ dualistic language to emphasise the ontological unity of Personhood, and that it is the Creator God who alone can annihilate relational identity. Jesus' words: "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt.10:28) are, rather, a challenge to the contradictions of dualism introduced in the dominant influences and language of Romano/Greco beliefs. The physical events that end bio-life are not of themselves actions against the morality of God.³⁶ Jesus also describes the circumstances of the coming event of his bio-death as immoral, yet that he will rise again (Mk.9:30-32), emphasising that neither death nor resurrection abolish this singularity of identity of Person, though both radically change its existence. Kung observes that instead, both events "preserve it in an unimaginable, changed form, in a completely different dimension." (1992, p.111)

This must, however, remain relational. Whilst agreeing that "changed form in a completely different dimension" allows for genuinely new exploration in the understanding of resurrection, Badham's agreement that

"Price's theory of a purely mental existence is logically possible and internally coherent, that it satisfies the Christian belief in divine justice and

the hope that we may progress towards a fullness of life in the world beyond..." (1978, p.146)

does not accurately describe relational Personhood. A purely mental state of existence could be indeed intellectual, but could it be relational? Does it not necessarily imply only an existential existence; only I need be aware of my existence? The key issue in this is 'why communicate?' for any beatific vision that would arise in my mental existence would be entirely satisfactory to myself. The challenge that the mystical experiences of James and Helen present is to understand them as indicating the spiritual substance of evolving Personhood of relational identity.

This implies two aspects:

1. Identity is cognate to presence *and* being; human relationality – the consciousness of self – evolves in both dimensions. The capacities of each are not in equal and static proportionality; but each should be regarded as the instrument of a progressive dialogue of identity. Their relevance is in the cognition of *bio-moral*³⁷ Personhood to the moral source of its life-being: Lord, you know [me] altogether...Your eyes beheld my unformed substance..." (Ps.139)

2. Relationality has no abstract meaning or existence. It is experienced, interpreted and understood through encounter; for example, increasing understanding of ante-natal emotional registration indicates that relationality is as intrinsic to foetal development as is bodily growth,³⁸ and,

significantly, that relationality is as much the sign of foetal moral Being already knowing of itself before completed embodiment.

This suggests that mystical experience of identity is an authentic possibility. In the same way that *bio-moral* life must exit the womb *because it is of independent Personhood* and cannot live perpetually *in uterine relationality* (birth is functional to this), so dying is functional to the cognate evolution of *moral relationality* of Human Personhood to the ultimate source of moral identity, God.

This thesis proposes that the concept of evolving Personhood does not limit individuated relational identity to its physical embodiment (the narratives of Jesus in resurrection make it clear that his body was not ordinarily materially composed), but that it does require a contingent expression of relational identity beyond. That continuity would certainly have warranted the description 'Resurrection' as framing the experience of memorial being overtaken by actual, renewed relational Personhood.³⁹

Relational Identity v Soul/Body:

'Relational identity' may therefore be a less divisive and more accurate term than 'soul/body', as describing Personhood; relational identity is Person. Our intimate recollections are of the relational Being-ness⁴⁰ of a past loved one; their ways, their 'signs', their values. These expressions do not attach to 'soul/body language', they are of 'relational-being' language.

In the proposition that bio-death is the annihilation of life, relational identity becomes meaningless beyond the empirical, and the human properties of self-consciousness and creativity likewise circumscribed.

The responsible Christian proposition is that bio-life is altogether ended in the event of bio-death, but that the relational identity of Person receives new life through the resurrecting actions of God: "death and resurrection do not abolish the identity of the person." (Kung 1992, p.111)

This view resonates with Islamic beliefs that relationality beyond bio-death continues:

"[In the grave there] lies no stillness of death; rather there is the picture of an industriously active and promising colony below ground...The dead see a great deal of each other, and it is therefore of importance for them to be buried near good neighbours." (R. Eklund 1941, p.54ff).

This represents a radically different depiction of life after death than that of Christianity; however, it is a serious attempt to convey relational identity as an eschatological and teleological phenomenon. The Islamic scholar E. Kazim considers that "death is not a vacuum, nor something negative; death is a positive entity." Kazim describes death as a "gift" of God "for which we have to thank him, because death brings us nearer to our goal of meeting with God." (1985, p.155ff)

Jesus' resurrection in Personhood of relational identity emphasizes that relationality requires expression that is recognizable to itself, *as* itself, and beyond itself, as being that unique Person. This is essential to the existence of authentic meaning in the Christian claim that Jesus has "in fact been raised from the dead" (1.Cor.15:20). Whatever the form of Jesus' resurrected body was, the recorded impressions describe encounter with the completeness of his transcended Personhood identity. In no biblical account is Jesus described as a survivor of bio-death; the emphasis in all is of authentic death, beyond which he is re-endowed with new life-ness through the creative power of God. His resurrection reveals a transcended Person in different form but of unchanged identity and Personhood.

This interpretation by the first Christians suggests that Christian and secular anthropologists should combine to reconsider the Incarnation as an authentic sign of the continuing evolution of Person⁴¹ and of bio-death as relevant within that. It may be considered in this way because relational capacity is the nature of Personhood formed out of bio/metaphysical conception, and born into life-ness within the cosmos of God.

The mystery of Personhood as yet eludes human understanding; we may only say that its origins precede its manifestation and if there is conclusion to it, that occasion lies beyond bio-death. However, it is central to Christian theology that what lies beyond bio-life has to do with immediate experiences of relational pilgrimage; consequently language associative of

pilgrimage most illuminates the pastoral understanding of dying and bio-death.

END NOTES:

- 1 <http://www.iep.utm.edu/dualism/#SH3d>
- 2 http://openlibrary.org/books/OL24648117M/A_discourse_on_method
- 3 www.faculty.rsu.edu/Durkheim/Emile%2
- 4 <http://www.catholic.org/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/soul.php>
- 5 This prompted Cullmann's (1958) treatise in which he demonstrates the incompatibility of dualism with core Christian belief and doctrine.
- 6 I use the term 'singularity' to convey the meaning of a single creative event that inaugurates the infinitudinal existence of an individuated Personhood of relational identity. The singularity of the event does not preclude an on-going evolution of Personhood in its relationality, but does determine that its Resurrection is not a new creation, but the miracle of restored natal Personhood, transcending life to an individuated Person.
- 7 Some of those conveyed in the use of religious and liturgical language are considered in chapters six and seven.
- 8 Physical activity is displayed in forms of movement and bodily mechanisms; the processes of mental activity require different structures of perception. Their collegiality is not always axiomatically apparent; for example, an irenic gesture may be a demonstration of strength or weakness.
- 9 In reinterpreting the Greek theatrical term 'persona', Tertullian establishes a unique precedent for understanding relationality as the essence of God's Being and self-expression - God is, in Person, Father, Word and Spirit; the cohesion of each arising freely in their unity of Personhood. The identity of Person is displayed through the properties of reflective self-evaluation, free-will, and relationality and by these markers, to be human is to be a 'Person'.
- 10 www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm
- 11 www.properrespect.com/councils
- 12 www.properrespect.com/thomas_aquinas/encyclopedia.htm However, Aquinas' philosophy of the soul allows for its punishment or reward in corporeal existence, and so for the literal existence of heaven and hell. This ultimately presents difficulties for a unitary definition of Personhood, and for considering the nature and intentions of God as being un-contradictory. At bedrock, God cannot manifest unbroken love and compassion and also inspire and sustain, Dantean punishment.
- 13 www.peterkreeft.com/topics-more/personhood.htm
- 14 The idea of an individual's entitlement of inalienable rights is rooted in the idea that God has rights and Man is a Person in God's image; for this reason, man has rights.
- 15 The judge during his summary of evidence commented "If this suggestion of personhood is established...the foetus' right to life would then be guaranteed..." Court Record.
- 16 R. Swinburne quoted by Antony Flew, 2007, p.51.

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- 17 I have not been able to trace this comment in Mead's own hand. Authoritative references to it include: Dr Harley Racer "Forward Reflections...the Individual Doctor in Third Millennium Medicine", Post Graduate Medicine vol.106 no.7, Dec 1999; Dr Paul E Stanton, President East Tennessee State University, "Address to Graduating Class at Commencement, 6.5.2000; Sharon Capeling-Alakija, Executive Co-coordinator, U.N. Volunteers, Tokyo Conference address, 7.11.2000.
- 18 Mead's reported perspective is both resonant with and sharply different from, Freud's view that "the principle task of civilization, its actual *raison d'être*, is to defend us against nature". (Freud 1989, p.11)
- 19 This requires also that theologians expand the small, existing contacts with researchers of identity theory and the psychology of religion, in which disciplines there is growing activity.
- 20 There is evidence of similar recognition in the field of Psychology: "a growing recognition that spirituality represents not only a core element of who we are as people, but that spirituality is a uniquely human quality. Only our species evidences any concern for, sensitivity to, or celebration of the numinous." (R.L. Piedmont 2005, p.269)
- 21 Being 'sent to Coventry' is not an idle threat; to be denied humanity, breaks humanity, the 'Cain crisis'.
- 22 *vide*: T. de Chardin (1971, p.9): "In man the highest aspiration of the phenomenon of life finds its fullest expression."
- 23 Non-believers would not, of course, accept such a linkage, and similar reservations may be expressed by agnostics, and some believers who struggle to reconcile the views of secular sciences with the tenets of faith. The reality of human relational identity is not, however, modified or dismissed by such views; Personhood remains needful of companionship, regard and compassion, and Christian pastoral care for the dying and bereaved must proceed from the Christ revelation of the nature and character of God's love and commitment to all Persons, regardless of their responses.
- 24 See chapter 5 for further discussion of innocence
- 25 (from Greek 'homos', 'same')
- 26 Finite because in whatever form creatureliness takes, it can never transcend the Creator; mystical because the Creature can comprehend the numinous.
- 27 That is, to advance meaningfully beyond intellectual theorising, and also as beyond the Adamesque receptivity of God's loving provision, into the representative role of teacher; "*as one having authority*" Mk.1:22
- 28 *c/f* the words of Christ: "*I am in the Father and the Father in me.*" Jn.14:11
- 29 Demonstrated in Jesus' actions of "taking, blessing and breaking" at the feeding of the 5000, and at the Last Supper; these are actions both of human choice and necessity.
- 30 Gen.1:28-30; 2:18-20; 13:8-11; Gen.18:1ff - the narrative of Mamre.
- 31 In describing the father's actions as generous, there is no implication of reciprocity as understood in Maussian theory (Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*.1923). Mauss' theory of reciprocity – that gifting is necessary to social bonding, and that gifts are therefore never fully given may have some relevance in the dynamics of power and control in some situations of social bargaining, and in this context represents an interesting view. It could be argued that plea bargaining for God to reverse a terminal condition in exchange for the individual's promise to commit to a high, moral way of life, or some act beneficial to the community, conforms to Mauss' theory. However, his theory has been strongly criticized, notably by A Testant (1998) "Uncertainties of the 'Obligation to Reciprocate': a Critique of Mauss" in *Marcel Mauss: A Centenary Tribute*: James, W & Allen, N.J. eds. New York:Berghahn Books, and J. Laidlaw (2000) "A free gift makes no friends" in *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 6, pp. 617-34. Christian theology is also at

variance with Maussian theory in that it emphasizes that all of God's gifting is without reciprocal intention; that God desires, but does not compel.

- ³² Luke's amplification, "handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have," should be read as indicating his substantial presence, not necessarily as a literal reference to molecular body. Waddams' (1968, p.9) comment, "...words are only symbols of the things to which they refer..." is relevant.
- ³³ Matt.28:20; Jn.20:17
- ³⁴ Sheppy 2004. p.8
- ³⁵ In Platonic thought, the elements of soul and body *are* radically different. In this there is no unity of Personhood.
- ³⁶ It seems to me that the essence of the Fall narrative (Gen.3) is that the garden people cogently broke their unity with God, central to which is the basic truth of their dependence upon God. Their election is to deny this, and by their following actions, noxiously and systemically infect their will and intellect so that they cannot admit to, or correct the lie. This does not, however, destroy the relational identity of their Personhood, which inheres in the moral Being of God.
- ³⁷ By this I mean the distinctive relational unity of moral Being and physical body.
- ³⁸ For example, the continued effects of an unwanted pregnancy upon a child's later sense of identity and value.
- ³⁹ Much energy has been historically absorbed by conjecture over the nature of the body in resurrection, in consequence of which debating the veracity of the New Testament resurrection narratives, has attracted greater popular prominence than has consideration of transcendent Personhood of relational identity. What is being considered in this thesis is the issue of *transcendent, evolving Personhood*, and that the individuated identity of Personhood is of greater importance to the central Christian belief in personal eschatological relational identity, than are issues concerning transformative, physical mechanics, i.e. how, or in what manner, the dead body of Jesus was migrated from the tomb. It is important to engage the *purposes* of the evolution of Personhood; the proposition in the New Testament writings is that this is to do with transcending relationship with God.
- ⁴⁰ Human relational memory records more enduringly the interiority of Person, than the substance of their form: 'Faithful friend'; 'Sincere companion'; rather than 'fat and laughing'; 'wizened but strong'.
- ⁴¹ de Chardin, "*Christ is realized in evolution.*" (1960, p.63)

Chapter 6

DIS-INNOCENCE AND FORGIVEN-NESS

Before considering the condition of dis-innocence it is necessary to reflect on the meaning of the term Innocence. It is employed to describe the nature of God inasmuch as it possible to do so. It is intended to convey the qualities of virtue, having no moral wrong, malice or evil, sinlessness, pure in intention and blameless. As forming the divine nature, the absolute expression and being of Innocence cannot be fully described within human understanding.

Pure innocence, meaning that there can be no contradictory intention or capacity than pure relationality is held to be the property of God alone. Inasmuch as the qualities and characteristics of Innocence may be recognized and within human limits expressed, the condition of innocence is considered theologically to have been imparted to the nature of individuated human Personhood. It is a defining value of what is described of Humankind as "formed in the image of God". Innocence is a moral condition of Personhood that is described as being "without shame." (Gen.2:5) To be innocent is greater than being not guilty; it is to reflect the transparency of transcendent truth as the absolute characteristic of

relational Personhood; to be trusting and trustworthy; to be without guile, and have no hidden fear.

Innocence is beyond creaturely creativity; it is intrinsic to original life¹ but thereafter eroded through the various dynamics of human behaviour and self-will. Every action that clouds transparency dims the individual's exercising of moral relationality and thus their sense of the beatific and of worthfulness; and of relationality to the Creator God. In this context, the separation of relationality to God results in a moral void,² a consequence of which – in the broadest sense - is a-theism;³ the effects of which upon moral Personhood are the senses of separation, and of outcast-ness, and the crisis thereafter one of a-theistic separation from the innocence of God.

The concept of an original innocence emerges prominently in the teachings of Pope John Paul II⁴ as interpreting the meaning of man and woman being naked yet without shame; innocence is here presented as fundamental to Personhood, to which it has meaning and content. The terms 'innocent action', 'innocent thought', 'innocent nature' are, in the Divine purpose, intrinsic to Personhood; they relate to the interior state of the heart of Man.⁵ This concept of innocence is contrasted with its radical absence, this condition being characterized by the descriptions of 'evil' (theologically), or 'guilt' (theologically and legally). Although in the common application of their meanings, the terms are qualified as to the seriousness

of their manifestation,⁶ they are intended to depict the opposing moral condition to innocence that is termed 'sin'.

Theologically, the adjective 'sinful' describes the altered nature of humankind as the result of losing the sublime interior character of innocence endowed from God's act of creation. The condition of sin is however not represented biblically as the contrasting opposite to original innocence. Sin is not an opposite of the quality of innocence; it is an alien experience to the relationality between God and Man. This 'Fall' has deprived humankind of the singularity of Godly innocence. Sin is described as a conscious act (Gen.3), perpetuated in thought, word and deed, and that humankind bears the responsibility for this contrary use of freedom of choice. The result is the realized capacity to act deliberately and oppositely to the manner of God; the consequences are both to know impurity and to have no innate, fundamental ability to return to innate innocence.

A contemporary model of innocence *after the divine nature* might be: 'The environment of *safe* nakedness'. A contemporary model of the loss of that innocence might be: 'The environment of *predation* upon nakedness.' Such modeling makes no attempt to conceal that the perfection of divine love is intentionally without boundary or defense and that its imaging in humankind cannot, likewise, be other.

The innocence of God's love is depicted in the nakedness of the garden couple; it is the mark of their Godliness and symbolic of pure relationality that expresses the immediacy of God "...at the core of our every experience..." (K. Rahner 1968, p.406)

The suggested contemporary models are thus both apt; original innocence has no characteristic other than purity; it has no elements of restraint or conditionalism. Once innocence is rejected, purity is vulnerable to abuse; it is predated and corrupted; the gift of innocent relationality can no longer be given. It is willfully and unequally taken without return.

In the creation story of Genesis (chap.2) innocent relationality is depicted in terms of mutual sharing. Thus God creates objects and his companion, Man, names them (gives them identity), and by gift of God, man receives companionship. Genesis 3 models the progression of relational alienation within the community of human Persons; their realization of vulnerability to one another and necessary self-concealment that predicates their suspicion of God. The cause of that alienation is located in the misuse of freedom to make choice that is a vitally defining characteristic of innocence.⁷ Whilst this model undoubtedly raises issues fundamental to morality, a less prominent line of association concerns the subtle energies and consequences of deprivation, and particularly the condition of the victim of that deprivation. These are inevitably overlooked when guilt is represented

as the antonym of innocence, thereby attaching the implication of culpability to the absence of innocence.

However, the contrasting opposite to the condition of innocence may not be that of culpable guilt; neither the victim nor witness of a corrupt situation is its author but both are afflicted by the miasma of its character. Individuated Personhood and collective community may bear the marks of dis-innocent predation equally whether victim or perpetrator. This further suggests that the consequence of impaired innocence is dis-innocence, but not axiomatically, guilt. Whilst there is a significant body of knowledge, enquiry and understanding of the concept of innocence and the range and character of its expression, the concept of dis-innocence has no direct references to its use in the English language.

Dis-innocence:

The Latin prefix 'dis' has established recognition; its meanings include 'to deprive of', 'to sunder', 'having a primitive, negative or reversing force'.⁸

The term 'dis-innocence' is employed to describe the pervading condition that prevails once individuated Personhood suffers the deprivation of innocence,⁹ and in consequence has diminished capacity to relate to, and from, the actual basis – the ontological root - of moral identity and personal worth. This understanding identifies dis-innocence as describing the pro-active condition of fractured relationality, the *product* of which is

sin. This is the opposite to received traditional wisdom, the dictum of which is that sin *causes* the loss of innocence.

This suggests that the loss of innocence in relational Personhood is attributable to the disregarding of grace rather than any initial, conscious decision to commit sin as such.¹⁰ (In Genesis 3 this is depicted as the serpent sowing the seeds of doubt and mistrust.) The distinction of dis-innocence is not intended as an excuse for minimizing, dismissing or ignoring sin; it explains the abiding character of human Personhood vulnerably impaired by dis-innocence as being the endemic condition in humankind that gives rise to acts of sin, seen and unseen.

This is not a question of linguistics; *Heilsgeschichte* is the account of God enabling the continual renewal in human Personhood of the capacity for innocent trusting and relationality. In a vital sense it may be said that to experience innocent relational identity is to discover the closeness of God. Nowhere in pastoral ministry is this more important to establish than in the context of bio-death, for it is in this time that uncertainty and fear have been additionally fed by historical Christian doctrines of God's punishment of sins.

The focus on dis-innocence in relation to the narrative of the Cross highlights the the question of purpose. Is it that in facing humanity's dis-innocent, broken relationality, God's desire is to heal and renew

fragmented Personhood into transcendent, innocent relational capacity, or is it his purpose to cauterize the sinner to expiate the sin?¹¹ Differently expressed, might the amputation of a hand restore innocence to the interior condition of the pickpocket's Personhood and signify them as 'without shame'?

Healing and renewal are facilitated through forgiveness (see discussion on this below), whereas the outcomes of 'cleansing' punishment are less definite. The distinctions between these two intentions bear directly upon any interpretation and understanding of the first and last of Jesus' words from the Cross:

"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do". (Lk.23:34); and

"It is finished" (Jn.19:30).

The intention in Jesus' prayer as his crucifixion commences may be linked directly to Jeremiah's prophetic insight into the focus, nature and consequence of forgiveness as described by God "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:34). Although the statement occurs in the context of Jeremiah's description of the basis of a coming, new Covenant with Israel, the underlying heart of meaning in the prophet's words concerns relationality, since Covenant understanding applies as much to each individuated Person, as to their relational Community.

The meaning of 'iniquity' is conveyed in the Hebrew root word: 'Avayah' – *crooked, twisted*.¹² It is a term of concrete meaning describing acts that are indicative of character; a crooked, twisted (perverse) act cannot originate in goodness. Since goodness is a characteristic of innocence, it is legitimate to identify crookedness (iniquity) as concretely describing dis-innocent character and intent.

The prophet's description of divine forgiveness may consequently be interpreted to embrace also the complete extinguishing from God's memory of the acts themselves; the sins (Hebrew *pasha* – to miss the mark; transgress, trespass).¹³

Divine forgiveness is prophetically revealed as irenic, intending of healing, reconciliation and transformation. These are relational actions, and must concretely apply to the condition of dis-innocence, since to wipe away the actions and their consequences, but neglect the moral condition of dis-innocence that enables them is not to heal, reconcile and transform, but to ignore their underlying significance.

Since Jesus is affirmed in the Christian Creeds to bear the nature of God, the meaning and intention in his prayer may legitimately be interpreted as establishing forgiveness to be the context in which all theology of the Cross is to be approached. God's commitment to actualize forgiveness and

healing for human Personhood entrapped by dis-innocence can be summarized in the first and final 'words' attributed to Jesus.

The focus of God's commitment to save Man from dysfunctional relationality must in consequence be directed upon the dis-innocent nature of Man. This proposition suggests a credible exegesis of St Paul's teaching, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2.Cor 5:21, RSV 1971),¹⁴ concerning Jesus entering into the experience of dis-innocence in his humanity, but not allowing its progression in to any act of sin. He experiences the condition out of which sinning arises, but not commit the act of sinning.

The meaning in Paul's words would be captured in the amplification:

For our sake, God allowed Jesus to experience dis-innocence as we know it; but although this experience was real, Jesus never committed any sin as a result. So in turn we know that we can, in him, experience the righteousness of God. This is closer to Eastern Orthodox understanding of salvation being from a fallen state in Man¹⁵ as axiomatically releasing individuals from their sins.¹⁶

The narratives of Jesus' death distinctively separate the Hebraic religious conjunction of *mortality* with *immorality*; Jesus of Nazareth, though sinless in himself, suffers complete death.¹⁷ It is as a juridically and socially

declared relation-less and identity-less, dying Person that Jesus trusts his relational identity to the moral source of its life-being – God.

The blatant anguish Jesus expresses in the conscious knowledge of his separation from relationality with God; “My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps.22:1; Mk.15:34), and the experience of loss of relational identity, demonstrate the disarray that dis-innocence imprints upon Personhood.

Jesus’ final utterance from the Cross refers to his first prayer intention; it signifies completion of God’s salvific act (Jn.19:28). The word *tetelestai* is employed at the heart of his statement. It is a Greek term of financial accounting, literally meaning ‘[the debt is] paid in full’. In the Johannine account of the final moments of the Crucifixion (Jn.19 28-30), it is first employed in v.28: “Jesus knowing that all was now finished” (*tetelestai*: paid in full), surrenders his life to God. What is finished – accomplished - is forgiveness. Again this may be related back to the Jeremiah prophecy that all Persons will “know God”, because of individuated experience of being set apart from their dysfunctional iniquity. Jesus knows within himself that the burden and character of dis-innocence he has entered into in order to manifest the love of God in Man’s condition, is lifted in God’s unconditional forgiveness.

Tetelestai conveys the complementary meaning that the debt is finished, is ended. It is significant that no major biblical commentator has rendered

the term as 'paid in full'. To do so would unavoidably introduce the concept of payment into Jesus' crucifixion - an idea entirely foreign to the Old Testament understanding of sacrifice as a personal act of reconciliation. The idea of Jesus' sacrifice being a 'payment' emerges only in the sixteenth century in theories of Propitiatory Sacrifice and Atonement,¹⁸ and only begins to obtain serious traction in Evangelical Christianity from the first half of the twentieth century. In Roman Catholicism, the theology of Atonement centers upon necessary cleansing of sins, but cannot be applied to the condition of dis-innocence.

The weight of historical interpretation therefore favours the interpretation of "it is finished" to mean the victory of God's absolute forgiveness over the anti-relational powers of both dis-innocence and sin. In Jesus God reveals Himself through actions that enable Humankind to grasp the significance of innocence as the nature of God. Salvation then consists in the process of reconciliation initiated by God by which human Personhood is recovered from dis-innocence and awakened to eschatological identity and hope. God's climactic act in the thread of salvation history is the transformative self revelation of his forgiving love to Humankind that becomes further understood in the resurrected Person-identity of Jesus.

The pilgrimage of Christian faith, as much for the committed believer as the searcher,¹⁹ is a journey into the recovery of innocence and the intensity

of the knowledge of belovedness that reveals the transcending forgiveness and companionship of God.

Christian mission, then, must interpret the Cross and Resurrection for what they inaugurate and demonstrate in immediate and future life-ness, not predominantly for what they are addressing of the past. Rather it needs to interpret the Resurrection for what it has established - that "the meaning of redemptive history...is Jesus Christ, who at Jerusalem's killing ground forgave and died (Cullman 1951, p.140) and is "in fact, risen from the dead." (1Cor. 15:20)

Forgiveness is not merely the lifting of the veil of fear, it is of one piece with the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17), creating in human Creature-Person a new dimension of relational identity that cannot be defined by previous forms of function and order.

Forgiveness and forgiven-ness

The act of forgiveness that lies at the heart of Jesus' death expresses a commitment that is transcending for relational Personhood; it is that the judgement of God upon humankind is that each Person is worthy to be loved as they are. This radical message from the Cross is set in the context of dis-innocence, sin and evil. Whilst it is a reminder of the omnipotent love and intention of God, the circumstances out of which it comes establish that it is not unilaterally imposed. Whilst it has been shown that healing

from dis-innocence and forgiveness of sins has been established by God and extends to all humankind; there is no evidence in scripture that this has been at the expense of individual freedom to make choice.

God's establishing of Forgiveness is a relational commitment without boundaries; it is for all people. It is for this reason – that it is not contained by any structure of law, custom or tradition – it is not possible to define its terms by rote principle or merit or formula of approval. Encountering forgiveness is an inchoate experience and unique to every Person. To precisely describe the processes by which its transcending encounter is registered within Personhood is not possible, and its effects upon the individual are typically described in non-religious terms. A frequently encountered indication of personal experience of forgiveness is the expression of difference; "*something different has happened to me*"; "*I feel a different person.*" Such words describe a movement within the human spirit that has been transformative; the realization of forgiveness is in knowing it as a continuously reassuring strength.

The term 'forgiven-ness' describes the state of consciously knowing the belovedness, acceptance and forgiveness of God which have been freely gifted to us without any deservedness on our part. The knowledge of forgiven-ness constitutes the condition of "pre-apprehension" of the unlimited horizon of God's own being; and inspires the human Person to

reach out "toward what is nameless and by its very nature is infinite." (Rahner 1978, p.62)

The distinction between forgiveness (that which God does) and forgiven-ness (that which individuated Personhood existentially experiences) is a necessary clarification. It points to the need for assent which in turn highlights that forgiveness is not meritocratic.

This has been described in the case examples (chap.3). For James it was defined in the moment he saw his striving to merit being counted worthy of God's acceptance as blinding him to experiential forgiven-ness.

For Helen, it was in her deeper encounters with God's love that she realised God was coming towards her, rather than she attaining greater closeness of herself.

For Pat it was through the reconciliation of long standing relational issues that she understood her life as transformed through forgiven-ness she had not authored.

The constructed example of 'Miriam' demonstrates the distinction between God's sovereign act of forgiveness and the freedom that exists in humankind to choose to receive or believe what God has done. We are surrounded by the forgiveness of God; but the personal embrace of that

condition requires individuated assent for the same reasons that are necessary for any progression of relationship.

Historically the meanings of forgiveness and forgiven-ness were conflated. Despite the denial of conditionalism in most Christian teaching and preaching, in practice forgiveness has come to be regarded mechanistically, with heavy over-tones of conditionalism attached viz. "he pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy gospel..." (BCP 1662)²⁰ Pastorally it was important to focus on the experiential realisation expressed in the term 'forgiven-ness' for people to be able to articulate what they were experiencing. It was this sense of forgiven-ness that enabled them to inhabit and be inhabited by a deep sense of peace - that peace which 'passes all understanding' even in the midst of their physical suffering.

END NOTES:

- ¹ By this I mean newly emergent life; the human infant is born innocent of cogent wrong-doing.
- ² Paul Tillich argues that sin is fundamentally a breach of relationship: "In every soul there is a sense of aloneness" (1955, p.156)
- ³ Casarella comments that for Louis Dupré "...the most characteristic feature of modern a-theism is not unbelief. Even more fundamental is the decline of the significance of the very question of belief and the rise of an attitude of indifference to questions of metaphysical ultimacy. Practical a-theism for him comprises an attitude common to believers and unbelievers alike." Casarella J. Essay in *Christian Spirituality & the Culture of Modernity: the Thought of Louis Dupré* (1998) Eds. Casarella, Peter J et al, Pub Co. Grand Rapids p.277ff.

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- 4 The following observations on the idea of original innocence are derived from the Pope's General Audiences of 24th & 26th October, 1979.
- 5 In this regard, the confusion of innocence (or lack of it) with the concepts of blameworthiness is obfuscatory.
- 6 There are lesser and greater sins, traditionally described as 'venal' and 'mortal' and there are lesser and greater conditions of legal culpability such as 'burglary' and 'aggravated burglary', 'manslaughter' and 'murder'.
- 7 A defining characteristic of innocence is trusting transparency; the parallel characteristics of dis-innocence are concealment and opacity.
- 8 *New Penguin English Dictionary* (2001) Penguin Books, London; www.thefreedictionary.com, www.merriam-webster.com/
- 9 The condition of dis-innocence is exemplified in the consequences upon victim and perpetrator of paedophilia. Defilement is impacted upon the victim, whereas the perpetrator is the willing participant in its destructive application.
- The victim is invested with the knowledge and experience of violation without choice; s/he has experienced immorality but is not of themselves thereby guilty of the crime. To become dis-innocent does not axiomatically imply pro-active guiltiness, but it includes the consequences of hurt, denial of personal value, impaired relationality, and injustice.
- The perpetrator imprints upon themselves a dynamic of dis-innocence in which the integrity of their relational Personhood becomes veiled within Self and less capable of relationality with others as a consequence.
- 10 The significance of Grace is discussed by L Feingold: *The Natural Desire to see God according to St Thomas and his Interpreters* (2010) Sapientia Press Naples FL
- 11 It is not intended thereby to offer any detailed discussion on the prominent theories of Propitiatory Substitution or Atonement except insofar as is necessary to the focus on dis-innocence. Neither is a formal requirement of Christian Creedal belief, although the substance of both is embedded in much mainstream and peripheral teaching in Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant denominations.
- 12 (Strong's Hebrew Concordance, H5753 & H5758)
- 13 (Hebrew *pasha* – to miss the mark; transgress, trespass; Strong's Hebrew Concordance, H6586 & H6588)
- 14 The verse is capable of variant rendition of the first phrase: "...Who knew no sin;" (KJV Cambridge Ed and New American Standard Bible, 1995); "...Who had no sin;" (NIV, 1984).
- 15 www.stmaryorthodoxchurch.org
- 16 Preamble to the Easter Triduum, Bulgarian Orthodox Church. CKR notes of discussions in Sofia.
- 17 That is in material and spiritual dimensions.
- 18 The roots of these are in the teaching of Irenaeus and Augustine of Hippo, in the context of the evil of matter and the appetites of the body. Augustine's later views were modified.
- 19 L.Dupré 1981, p.14: "We may call the prevailing climate a-theistic, not because faith has disappeared in our time, but because the question whether we believe in God or not, retains little or no practical bearing upon our lives... Even to the believer himself the flame of his faith has become secret, since it no longer enlightens his whole life."
- 20 <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/41129/mvprayer18-153.pdf>

Chapter 7

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE FOR A PILGRIM FOCUS

The language of pilgrimage contributes a valuable dimension to holistic, cognitive, development of faith-relationship in which bio-death is understood as evolutionary within the relational identity that is the essence of Creaturely Personhood; central to this is the awareness of transcendence. Whilst static language is expressive of that-which-is-now-and-always, pilgrim language is constantly open to interpreting old and new knowledge in the context of contemporary insights, reflection and understanding. Language forms and conveys images of meaning.¹ This particularly applies to the use of body/soul terminology; its anthropology obscures recognition that the ontological identity of Person lies in the unitary phenomenon of Personhood. (see chap.4)

As a general principle, the models and language employed in the vitality of pastoral ministry and associated liturgies – and particularly in the context of death and bereavement - must be faithful to the whole Gospel narratives of God's nature and purpose for humankind as defining *Heilsgeschichte*, rather than igneous punishment.²

A significant theological and pastoral expression of the flow of relationship between God and Human Person occurs at a point in the formalities of the Anglican Church for the admission of a person to Office, or in the profession of vows, when the candidate is asked whether they are able to undertake the task. To each such question, the responsorial form of words is: "With the help of God, I will."³ That is to say the enterprise is beyond human capacity, or indeed, propriety, unless assisted by the moral energies of God. Intellect, skill, education, willingness of self-giving, belief, dedication and good intentions towards others are admirable and necessary, but beyond each and all there is required the unique, moral sustenance of God; His goodness towards, and belovedness of, each unique human Person. The words, 'With the help of God, I will' affirm for the confessing Person, and those witnessing with them in their undertaking that, though unique in Personhood, they are yet Creature and not the Creator. The confession of need is a deliberate, freely made, and specific petition establishing that the nature of the event and its desired purpose is moral and intimately relational to Creature and Creator alike.

Essentially, this response freely affirms the ontological identity of human Personhood, the sustaining relationship of God, and the Creature-Person's choice to be co-respondent with God's love. It is seen as absolutely necessary that these recognitions – intrinsic to the integrity of all that is to follow – be given prominent articulation at baptism.⁴ Doing so does not

make an incidental 'difference' to the enterprise, it *establishes* its ontology and integrity; "Your life is hid with Christ in God..." (Col.3:3)

The language of even the modern Anglican and Roman Catholic baptismal liturgies is ambiguous concerning the teleology of the sacrament. The congregation's welcoming confession to each of the newly baptised is to "Fight valiantly under the banner of Christ against sin, the world and the devil and continue his faithful soldier and servant *to the end of your life.*"⁵

The phrase "to the end of your life" may, theologically, have been intended to convey eschatological meaning, and indeed once would have done so, but in the colloquial understanding of the general public, and many church-goers, it connects more naturally to the perceived span of mortality. The case here is that there are vital inconsistencies in Christian language use that reflect the self-understanding of institutional, structured denominations and their consequently necessary, controlling purposes, and obscure the numinal phenomenon of eschatological relational identity.

The difference between baptism and bio-death is self-evident; the one is unavoidable and requires no choice⁶ whereas assent is required before baptism is administered. Bio-death is the general property of all living things; baptism is not. Persistently in religious language baptism is described as sacramental and systemically eschatological, yet colloquially

bio-death is treated as though ending life in the sense that the life of a human being is now extinguished.

One reflection of this is the lack of any specific occasion and opportunity within public or private worship for the dying person and the community that surrounds them to relationally 'enter into' the event of dying in an explicitly consensual context. Consent to dying (see below) is a valuable expression of personal choice and acceptance, and may both release loved ones⁷ and friends from anxiety, fear and anger, and strengthen personal faith to endure acute difficulty. (See James' story pp.77ff)

This is an important consideration; much of the isolation and silence that has been imposed upon dying persons and those close to them, may be a consequence of professionalizing death; as much by the culture of Christian ministry⁸ as by modern medical processes and Undertakers. Consequently, the help of God is seldom pastorally expressed as an axiom to *understanding*⁹ the significance of bio-death, and to *consent* to it, for example the comment of a hospice patient: "we talk a lot about cancer here, but we don't talk about death." (Lloyd 1995, p.29)

The attitudes of clinicians and carers towards death and dying have undergone significant changes since E. Kübler-Ross published her work *On Death and Dying* (1969), in which she developed a five stage theoretical model of dying (subsequently referred to as the 'stage-based approach').

Although she identified assent to dying as a key point in the individual's responses, it is unclear whether she understood this to mean also *consent*. There has been much serious criticism of Kübler-Ross' method and conclusions,¹⁰ including (1) the existence of the five stages as such has not been demonstrated; (2) no evidence has been presented that people do in fact move through the stages consecutively; (3) the limitations of the method have not been acknowledged; (4) the line is blurred between description and prescription; (5) the totality of the person's life is neglected in favour of the supposed stages of dying; (6) the resources, pressures, and characteristics of the immediate environment, which can make a tremendous difference, are not taken into account (R. Kastenbaum 1998).

C.A. Corr discusses alternative 'task-based' models that "seek to avoid metaphors that that emphasise a passive or reactive way of understanding" how people cope with dying (2000, p.146). The task-based model is in fact significantly more compatible with pastoral caring, both by virtue of the flexibility it requires and that it neither assumes nor imposes the rigid categories of the stage-based approach.

Pastorally, the danger in Kübler-Ross' analysis lies in the fact that dying is an inchoate experience; as much for the dying person as for the pastoral carer. To attempt to systematize dying, or to rigidly differentiate between its stages, is to almost certainly to lose sight of the Person who faces the eclipse of life as they have known it, and to run the risk of deciding for the

person where they are, and what they need. The task-based approach allows the dying person to lead the way.

Kübler-Ross did, however publicise one important aspect of dying:

“People do not die in a vacuum; their lives have not become complete when they die. This means that there are unresolved issues and these tend to worry dying people.” (1969, p.103)

Purposeful pilgrimage involves consent:

Significantly words employed in the prelude to baptism and confirmation sensitively and inclusively enable the opportunity for explicit consent to be given in their framing of a dialogue with a clear basis, purpose and progression. The basis for inaugurating the event is belief in God. The purpose is for the candidate to begin an individuated relationship with God *“with the help of God”* and accompanying support of fellow travellers in faith. The progression is eschatological; “to the end of your life...”¹¹

M: ‘Do you believe in...?’

R: ‘I believe ...’

In the case of an older child or an adult seeking baptism, where their consent is publicly sought at the start of the liturgy.

M: ‘Do you wish to be baptised?’

R: ‘I do.’

These small interchanges establish the candidate as a pro-active partner in all that is to follow and are further, the basis upon which the baptising

community becomes participant with the individual in their pilgrim journey.¹² The point is that their *consent is explicitly given* before the event and the sacramental liturgy that follows; without that intention the activity of the Church would be significantly presumptive¹³ – possibly even just words of belief - and not a dialogue of faith.

This is not to deny Christian companionship and involvement with people whose wish is to make a public expression of welcome to a newly born, but who have neither the desire nor confidence at the time to embrace the specific commitments of Christianity. Neither should this imply a lack of supernatural faith, or the pejorative judgement of God upon them. It should, however require the Church to offer a ministry of care and spiritual hospitality and support, *without* gratuitously donating a Christian identity upon them. That too would be presumptive.

Baptism is the joyous Christian event when the giving a personal, relational name identifies the named Person to God: "N, I baptise you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." In the further invocation of the Holy Spirit, the intention of the Sacrament is that the Person shall, by the power of the same Spirit "who raised Jesus from the dead" (Rom.8:11), evolve into ever greater, transcendent, relationality.

It is essential to establish this point as inseparable from the significance of our bio-death; the Christian pastoral witness to dying and death is in the context of embracing a moral event in the evolution of relational, transcendent, identity; a parallel situation to that of baptism where the significance of relational consent has been demonstrated.

Consent to dying:

It is constructive to recognize that *consent* to dying constitutes a pivotal point in *Heilsgeschichte*; because it is in the fully Human Jesus that Human Personhood (relational identity) faces the significance of relationlessness, without attempting to mitigate it through blame, or condemn it by laws. The struggle at Gethsemane is the process of a fully human Person comprehending and confessing the ontological truth of *Nephesh* as consisting in Personhood and God's purposeful sustaining of it and, in that realisation, to consent to die. In contemporary Western culture, where dying has been significantly hidden from the daily life of society, there is now ignorance of death, and both fear and unwillingness to allow death to occur, as was shown in the Bland v Airedale NHS Trust case, 1992.¹⁴

It is also necessary to recognise that neither resignation in the face of terminal reality; 'my time is up', nor fatalist surrender to 'what is inevitable', can represent *consent* to dying.¹⁵ Neither will palliative care, comforting and sensitive companionship of the dying, though expressing

and intimately conveying love, axiomatically thereby enable a dying person to envisage death or to explicitly embrace bio-death as pilgrimage. "I did not, for one moment, see my death, it was beyond my imagining..." (Houghton 2001, p.22)

However, in expressing the ending of bio-life as a moral, rather than an inevitable, inscrutable and meaningless event, bio-death can be seen as consciously intentional to relationality, and not, inevitably, the *end* of relationality. Evolving in metaphysical,¹⁶ relational identity – to intimately know oneself in God as we are known by him – is resonant with the hope for human understanding expressed by Dupré, summarised as re-enabling people "to see a future which refuses the complacency of accepting metaphysical disintegration as the status quo." (Cassarella et al 1998, p.3) Christianity, therefore, must review and renew pastoral language in order to associate God differently with the natural processes of dying, however the event may occur. In this, it is necessary for Christianity to renounce its historical emphasis on the status of humanity¹⁷ as

"unworthy of the smallest benefits, most worthy of God's fiercest wrath, [and death as being] the miserable condition of all by nature, as being children of wrath, and under the curse: acknowledging that all diseases, sicknesses, death, and hell itself are the proper issues and effects thereof..."¹⁸

The effect of this language is to set the individual against themselves in order to be acceptable to God. Contrastingly, the narrative of the Gospels

describes God's initiative to reveal his love for humankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Baptism inaugurates individuated responsive pilgrimage; the systematic process of relational encounter with the intimate unity of God's love that is possible in Human Personhood. Pannenberg argues that only through Christ does "man reach his true destiny." (1997, p.13)

Language contradicting pilgrimage:

There is incidental but recurring evidence that the idea of eschatological pilgrimage explicit in baptismal theology is effectively conditionalised by the language of pastoral teaching: "One of the tragedies of death is that it interrupts our labour and cuts short our achievement." (J. Stott 2000, p.78)

There is in this statement no synergy of purpose between the relational identity uniquely expressed in baptism and dying 'with the help of God' – the *expectation* endemic in baptism is not reflected in language descriptive of death; the one is not articulated in the other. Stott's perspective expresses neither the expectation nor this intention. Eschatologically, bio-death is *intentional* to the higher evolution of Personhood, and therefore an event that is moral to Human Personhood. As such, bio-death cannot be a 'tragedy'. An example from the Liturgical Constitution arising from Vatican II describes the specific intention of the Roman Catholic burial rite, that "it should express more clearly the paschal nature of Christian death." ¹⁹

Yet Sheppy (2004, p.11) demonstrates a contradictory amplification of this statement from the commentary by Journal provided with the Constitution:

“Death, for believers, is a participation in the paschal mystery. Baptism has initiated a movement that *will terminate in death*, which, after Christ’s example, is a passage from this world to the Father. Sorrow accompanies death; but the thought of, and union with, the agony of the redeemer fill it with hope in the resurrection.”²⁰ [Emphasis is mine.]

Although particular to the Roman Catholic Church, the Commentary articulates beliefs concerning both baptism and death that are widely found in Christianity. By the manner of their linguistic expression, they contradict the essence of eschatological *relational identity* uniquely expressed in baptism, in the caveat that it will ‘terminate in death’; the phrase is commonly understood to define bio-death. Attempting to mitigate feelings of loss and sorrow amongst the bereaved with thoughts of Christ’s agonies and an unspecified hope in the Resurrection further obscures that eschatological relationality.

Jesus locates his systemic relational identity in that of God: “I am in the Father and the Father is in me...” (Jn.14:10-11) His consciousness of self is the expression of both personal identity and its ontological root; identity is not an abstract idea that describes the phenomenon of life, it is the unique expression of life that is Personhood; the mystical centre of Being, of which the term ‘soul’ is a common (but misleading) descriptor.

In pointing to the distinctiveness of these words of Jesus as the expression of relational identity, it is necessary also to link identity with purpose and destiny, being careful to distinguish between the two latter, as Christianity both arises out of, and calls people into, Jesus' perception of the reality and meaning of Personhood,²¹ "...that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, I in them." (Jn.17:26.) Here again, it is contradictory to confine the scope of this prayer to followers of Jesus alone.

Pannenberg's proposition that Man reaches his true *destiny* only through Christ points to the intrinsic purpose of God as intending of an evolution of Humanity into the eschatological dimension of Being and Personhood (1985). In the evolutionary progress beyond Creatureliness, baptism is an event of unique assent in a process of relational pilgrimage that illuminates within Person the ontology of their identity as being relational to God. The dying testimony of Jesus of Nazareth, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Lk.23:46), mirrors his baptismal experience of belovedness. (Mk.1:11)

Baptism into Christian faith (that is, the faith of Jesus), marks the *conscious* beginning of a transcending, teleological progress that is real. The Jesus-event of death and resurrection is the only basis of Christian pilgrimage and mission as "belief in a real occurrence, in real events which took place in time." (Cullmann 1958, p.1)

Yet bio-death itself is real; Christian theology does not pretend to anything other, but describes Jesus' Resurrection as

"..a victory of the Spirit in the region where death rules. We are not asked to believe in a reconstruction of the body after the fashion which belongs to the reign of death, but to believe that the death of the body as well as that of the spirit meets its conqueror in Christ...And this real event of death, so serious, so tyrannous, so much unworthy to be the conclusion of the body's story, finds its cure in Christ." (P.N. Waggett)²²

This perspective suggests an annulment of the 'time-space' limitation, and one avenue of response to the dilemma contained within the question '*Can I die without fear?*' It restores death to a natural function within bio-life, rather than a consequence of the disfavour of deity.

The incorporating of Pat's anointing into the Eucharistic liturgy (see Appendix I) was intentionally to make explicit the role and authority of the Christian worshipping community as the exemplar of the kingdom of God present amongst humankind now. Christian faith is not a prelude to a different, more real encounter with God; it is the experience of God that has neither time nor space curtailment, including the event of bio-death, expressed in people.

The question '*Can I face death without fear?*' therefore is linked to '*How may I pray?*' and, by association, '*Can I pray for?*' Can a Christian pray, entrusting a dying non-believer or a perceived sinner, to God's revealing

mercy *post mortem*? In modern Scotland, some folk suffering terminal illness will resist visitation by priest or pastor until absolutely the very last moment, when often meaningful dialogue is not possible, because to receive an earlier visit would be to court the fates. They would die sooner, they fear.²³ Here clearly is a lingering example of Church inspired fear and the avoidance of religious representatives a viable defence against a God who is causing death. The hope of life is dependent upon keeping any association with God at a distance, until the ability to struggle for physical survival is lost.

Secular language, in conveying necessary precision of social meaning in the aftermath of death, also establishes powerful images that must inevitably challenge the dialogue of faith. In the English language, one such is the precise, immediately descriptive term for the individual once having died; a single epithet which describes their status. Legally they become 'the late' - the lately alive. Death has terminated the individual's history within time, and simultaneously their identity within temporal society; here the dead are those who no longer live in time and the commonwealth of human relationships. The possession of rights is ended, as well as the relationship to others still living. This use of language propagates the implication that death annihilates identity.

The prospect of death cannot, therefore, be easily admitted, for to do so must begin the surrender of all to do with liveness. Where terminal evidence cannot be avoided, fear of vulnerability arises; this linkage gave rise to a document produced by an American nursing provider, of a multi-clause 'Bill of Rights' for dying people (see Appendix II - a dying person's 'Bill of Rights'). Each of the clauses of this document is a plea for identity to be recognized, and although not explicitly articulated, that there is meaning in death as both an ethical and moral process. Here, acknowledgement of the *right* to die is seen as a vital pre-requisite to any meaningful address of the life-question, '*Can I face my death without fear?*'

The question arises out of the phenomenon of Personhood, regardless of ethnicity and culture, as demonstrated in the similarities of mystical experience in the case histories of James and Helen, which in the case of James was additionally complicated by traditional culture in Africa. (See chap. 3, James' story pp.77ff)

The apostolic church was ignited out of disarray into a mighty witness of *evangel* in consequence of meeting their Lord. For these Christians, Resurrection witnessed to the certain possibility of new hope.

Biotic and zoetic life:

An important contribution to Christian understanding of pilgrimage is Sheppy's, distinction between "*biotic*" and "*zoetic*" life - *bios* as relating to the origins of life and *zoe* as applying to destiny. Anthropologically neither biotic nor zoetic life survives death:

"Yet this end is not extinction but teleological; we move to the new goal, for zoetic life is life in communion with God." (2003, p.40ff)

This *is* relational identity, and Sheppy contributes a significant insight in his use of these terms in support of his argument that at bio-death we enter a new dimension of being.

Revealed in the resurrection of Jesus is this new dimension of Being in the continuation of anthropogenesis; sapient humanity evolved into humanity harmonised with God; the journey of Abram to a promised, bounded land as a person of blessing, now extending in *Homo sanctus*²⁴, into the cosmos of God's presence and being. (See chap.10)

Christian eschatological assurance is located within the salvic actions of God in the Jesus-events of forgiveness and resurrection, and Baptism into the faith-relationship of Jesus with 'Father' who is Creator God. Christian baptism then is essentially an *embracing* event conferring grace to experience the belovedness of God as being the ontological root of personal identity (Personhood), of whom we are as Creature who is also Person.

The nuances of Baptismal meaning become overwhelmed in the historical language of Christian ritual, and the power that ritual itself exerts in the conferring or suspension of identity. This is specifically demonstrated in the shaping of historical Christian language and models depicting the purposes, justice and the Judgement of God, as culminating in either Heaven or Hell.²⁵

Is Resurrection a Reward for the Deserving?

An error of Christianity has been to combine the miracle of resurrection with the concept of moral deservedness as perceived during bio-life, and thereafter to fail to address the implications and consequences of this view upon the *heilsgeschichte* of the New Testament.²⁶ That error has systemically infiltrated – and largely dominates - the theological concepts and language of death and, concomitantly, pastoral praxis. A significant consequence of this is that it opposes any suggestion that the essential significance of human dying is that it is both evolutionary and relational. Both attributes are consonant with an eschatological view of the endemic, transcendent, relational significance of Person to, and within, the relationality of God.

To consider the event of dying as a process natural to the potential transcendent, evolutionary processes of Relational Identity - Personhood - is to recognise that dying may be lived into. It also enables the decisive

causative separation of bio-death from the immoral consequences of dis-innocence. (See further chap.6) In turn, this may also re-establish that the proper basis for understanding the intrinsic nature of dis-innocence, and its expression in sinning, is as the dynamic of relationlessness (and therefore, of denial ultimately of the transcendent capacity of human Personhood).

The use of contradictory language in describing bio-death as an event that may be 'lived into' is deliberate and is intended to highlight the fact that that institutional Christianity has decisively abdicated its faith when it is perceived as "a salvation religion primarily concerned with 'words against death'". (Davies 1997, p.111)

Words *for* death:

The pervasive and underlying problem is rather that institutional Christianity has been complacently content to contribute *retrospective* words rather than pre-sentient words, against death. Consequently and inevitably, pastoral ministry and liturgical expression are reactive, not proactive, to bio-death and bereavement.

This contrasts starkly with the underlying principles and praxis of Christian ministry into the other rites of passage - Baptism, Eucharist and Marriage. In respect of each of these, it is recognised that at least a degree of preparation and nurture is necessary – and in most Anglican parishes there is a commitment to doing this. There is the incentive of *presence* to do

this; the baptised and the married are visibly present in society, as is the Eucharistic community. Antithetically, the dying are departing, and the dead are departed, from that existential community. In Western society and culture, unlike the religious perspective of African communities, there is no dimension of the spiritual universe permeated by God, within which the dying and the dead retain their Being-ness, extending from their bio-life, and equally of the community of human life in all its dimensions.²⁷

Historically, pro-active preparation for Baptism, Eucharist and Marriage is seen as sharing and teaching the tenets of Christian faith, and equipping people to enter into their faith-journey *into* an ever-growing life of Godliness. Failure of Ministers to do this is regarded as pastoral neglect. Dying is also described in Christian terms as a rite of passage, and as such equally requires to be prepared for, and nurtured, in the context of Jesus' witness to Resurrection, and the eschatological hope that that event reveals.

The present situation regarding ministry to the dying is comparable to that which is historically offered to people facing the distress of divorce; there is lacking any overt course of pastoral preparation for either situation, only the sense that relationlessness unstoppably characterises both events. Much activity and ministry emerges *after* a divorce has occurred; likewise care and nurture of the bereaved is more prominent *after* death. As with

those who are divorcing, the processes of reduction and separation that pervade the lives of the dying and the members of their surrounding, intimate communities are not comforted.

But Christianity does have words *for* death, and comprises the community of faith from which to speak them. Christian pilgrimage into death may thus commence with a commitment to live *into* the process of dying. The Resurrection itself reveals restored innocence;²⁸ in this it entirely refutes relationlessness, and so provides words against relationlessness, because it speaks out the example of restored relational Personhood.

Such an approach should not be expressed in terms of triumphalism or success - a triumph over death or the success of evangelism. To do so would be to simply reignite the old confrontation with death as the wages of sin, and thereby to remain blind to the *transcendent* capacity of human Personhood. Rather, what is here being pointed to is the *fruit* of pilgrim relationality through the vulnerability of bio-death that finds its expression in the worship of a God who is sustainer and companion in weakness and vulnerability. It is the fruit of relational identity that is at the center of the witness to liveness bestowed by the Spirit who is Holy,²⁹ and the victory of love over despair and brokenness that otherwise would overwhelm relationality in the relationless obscurity of death.

The distinction between success and fruit is often overlooked in Christian belief and praxis. H. Nouwen contrasts their differences as between control and vulnerability:

“There is a great difference between successfulness and fruitfulness. Success comes from strength, control and respectability. A successful person has the energy to create something, to keep control over its development, and to make it available in large quantities. Success brings many rewards and often fame. Fruits, however, come from weakness and vulnerability. And fruits are unique. A child is the fruit conceived in vulnerability, community is the fruit born through shared brokenness, and intimacy is the fruit that grows through touching each other’s wounds.”
(1996, p.12)

A ‘good’ death is regarded as a mark of success; it is not. It is a fruit of the intimacy between God and human Person. The effects of death upon the body physical are not the expression of ‘the will of God’ or the ‘judgement of God’. What is true is that the material body, like all created matter, is mortal and finite; it is not capable of endless self-sustenance. Theologically, it is not immortal; physical body does not create life, it expresses it. The language of Christianity must in consequence affirm and express a personal relativity to the transcendent, and enable the individual’s pilgrimage of faith to be cognitive of, as well as spiritually incarnative of,³⁰ the Holy Spirit, the giver of life.

It is in this context that the words of Jesus,

“I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die...”

(Jn. 11:25)³¹

may be seen as affirming the process of evolving transcendence, rather than expressive of a Gnostic religious mythology of mystical triumph over bio-death. The essence of this saying is that in death there is life. It is also implicitly inclusive of those who are not of the community of Israel (as defined by *Shema Israel*) and those who may not be considered ‘righteous’, whose souls, as regarded in the text of the Book of Wisdom 3:1ff³² as

“[being] in the hand of God, there shall no torment touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seem to have died...but they are at peace.”

Without the language of recognition for interpreting the epiphenomenal characteristics of life and bio-death in terms of the relational identity of human Personhood as intentionally and relationally immanent *and* transcendent ‘with the help of God’, Christian faith is reduced to a purely human commitment the grounds of which are indistinguishable from any worthy secular endeavour, and the certainty of which is highly susceptible to fear, doubt, superstitions and manipulation.

It has been earlier observed that overall, the Christian contribution towards understanding death is highly negative; Bowker adds to this:

Judaism and Islam express a “relatively optimistic anthropology...Christianity, in contrast, has a radically pessimistic anthropology” deriving from the focus upon the “subversions of evil that lie at the root (radix) of the human enterprise...” (1996, p.210)

In this perspective, sin prevails over the love of God upon the circumstances of the bio-life of Personhood, to the extent that not a veil but an impenetrable wall disenables human revelatory perception of God in the lessons of life. This proposition equally denies humanity the incarnate love of God, for its delusion is the view that Personhood is carnally incarnate of sin, rather than *reduced* in Godly innocence in consequence of the moral capacity for making choices, some of which may not be life affirming.³³ Sinner and sin must be separated so that the sinner may be redeemed by a specific application of God’s grace.³⁴

This is indeed a pervasively pessimistic anthropology, the piety of which is to proclaim that ‘God hates the sin, but loves the sinner’, a sentiment challenged by Jesus in the parable of the Prodigal Son who, having come to the realization of the condition of his life, proposed a return to his father on the basis of non-relationality: “I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” (Lk.15:11-32) In the parable, father and son are both utterly vulnerable, the centre point being that the father accepts his son back *as he is*, and that can only have been as the person indelibly enveloped by the

nature of his life-style and decisions. To separate the sins of his life from the man himself would have been to destroy the man.

It is of entire importance that the man has returned to the father; it is true that the man no longer sees benefit in his previous lifestyle and that, devastatingly, he no longer believes himself to be of kin (in identity) with his progenitor; it is true that the elder son holds to this 'righteous' view; it is also true that the father of Jesus' teaching attends only to the *restoration* of the son, not to any re-purification or separation of sins from sinner. The son is not divested of his tattered rags, the garments of identity are placed over them, on the son's whole body. In Rembrandt's astonishing depiction of this moment, the father's hands are placed in blessing on the son, and the father's gaze is upwards in joy. The father's face and bearing are innocent of either anger or relief; there is only the innocence of loving;

'... since love covers a multitude of sins.' (1Pet.4:8)

Not only had the son never ceased to be a son, the father's pervading love covers that which is past, that which is yet to be faced in the present, and that which is to come. In Jesus' representation, it is the love of the father not the penitence of the sinner that deals with the son's alienation. Rembrandt paints the son, significantly, with life-worn sandals still on his feet as the young man begins his own journey into the recovery of

innocence and the intensity of the knowledge of belovedness as he receives the transcendent acceptance and companionship of his father.

Traditional Christianity requires the *amputation* of sin and its every historical manifestation,³⁵ in order that the redeemed way – the Christian way - might be transplanted onto the recipient. In absolute contrast, Jesus represents the father as addressing the ailment *as a unity* within the body, to effect healing and restoration from within the moral relationality that is unique of Personhood. Before leaving the analogy of transplant surgery, it is helpful to note its relevance in the historical construction of pastoral and liturgical language, for medically the recipient must always live precariously on administered supportive or repressing drugs to counteract rejection of the 'life-giving' transplant.

The parable of the Prodigal Son required for its telling and acceptance a revolution in the contemporary beliefs concerning the nature of God and the purposes of the Law for the justification of Man. The scandal of a child asking for their inheritance of a living father constituted the insulting treatment of the father as dead; thereafter its subsequent dissipation and the child's return to the resources of the home (even within the workforce) must require of him restitution of the provenance of his inheritance, in order to fulfil the requirements of the Talmudic law.

The elder son, in his rejection of the father's attitude and responses becomes the embodiment, the advocate and the *conservator* of the actual relational crisis that arises out of human tendency to draw God in their own image; a problem equally evident in Christian dogma and praxis: "Our problems begin because we try to impose upon the Christian faith a ready-made concept of God." (Gardiner 1997, p.127) When religious language images this, and the ethos of pastoral ministry reflects the character of pre-formed concepts of God, there can be no expression of love that exists beyond the bounds of appropriateness, no matter how wide and liberal those bounds may be. Jesus, however, demonstrates God's love to be innocent of supplementary causes. In this, he is vulnerable to what is contextually (religious and social) beyond contemporary acceptability.

In 1965, the Liturgical Commission of the Church of England published³⁶ a five point answer to the question "*What ought we to be doing at a burial service?*" The fourth point concerned a specific reminder of "the awful certainty of our own coming death and judgement". The term 'awful' is significant as it pre-ordains the expected character of the judgement and stimulates fear of the coming and unavoidable event of death. Had the term been instead 'awe-some', an entirely different prospect could have resulted.³⁷

The circumstance of bio-death raises directly the nature of God's judgement; is it to be the occasion for the expression of His righteous

anger, as advised by the Anglican divine, Bishop Jeremy Taylor whose counsel was: "The way to prevent God's anger is to be angry with ourselves." (reprint 1847, p.43)

The Johannine perspective offers different insights:

"God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him..." (Jn.3:17)

John observes it is upon this basis that we are judged, that God has judged us worthy to be loved, of which the Incarnation is the abiding sign.

"[Jesus] did not come to judge the world but to save the world." (12:47)

Such strongly pro-active imagery and words identify Christian mission as essentially teleological yet rooted in the immediacy of life. The journey with God is because God is, and remains in, human history:

"...what unites God us men is that He does not will to be God without us, that He creates us rather to share with us...that he does not allow His history to be His, and ours ours, but causes them to take place as a common history." (K. Barth 1971, p.7)

The stifling of personal worth and reduction of relational capacity in human beings' regard of self and others, and in alienating themselves from God, places humankind at an irrecoverable distance from God in the "far country" (ibid. 1974, p.157ff)³⁸ into which the Son of God goes in order to restore the love that humankind rejects.

Barth's imagery of the plight of humankind far from God, and the Son's obedient journey into humankind's situation in order to be there with them in their situation of need is particularly appropriate of the pastoral need to be with dying people where they are. The reduction of biological and mental capacities in the processes of dying constitute lostness for the dying person; unfinished business and relational failures and ideals not held to compound this sense of disorientation. They are the wildernesses into which companionship and reconciling hope can be brought before bio-death. This same companionship and reconciliation can bring comfort and hope to the bereaved through appropriately eschatological language in funerary liturgy.

Some of the difficulties in recovering these necessities are indicated by Michael Perham's dismissal of the value of the liturgical reforms introduced in the Alternative Service Book of 1980 as being

"harmlessly bland and [carrying] little conviction...Thus theological dissatisfaction has been one of the factors in the abandonment of legal forms of service by the clergy in developing funeral liturgies." (1997, p.161)

Yet whilst it is the case that the book of Common Worship authorized for the Church of England in 2000 allows for considerable choice in the selection of funeral texts, there remains an insufficient eschatological focus, without which the claims of Christianity are in danger of remaining in the realm of uneasy neglect. As Perham observed,

“...classic Protestant theology within Anglicanism believes that prayer for the dead is improper because at the moment of death eternal destiny, for better or worse, has been decided...” (1997, p.196)

This persistent attitude probably remains a significant contributory cause to wider clerical and lay avoidance of pro-active, theological pastoral engagement with dying and bio-death; there remains no example of an authorised Anglican liturgy that provides for the commencement of pilgrimage specifically into the event of bio-death and Christian eschatological hope.

As stated at the opening of this chapter, the language of pilgrimage is necessary to holistic, cognitive, development of faith-relationship in which bio-death is understood as evolutionary within relational identity that is the essence of creaturely Personhood. In this, the awareness of *transcendence* is both the property of Personhood and its very necessity. This proposition requires that Christianity revisits its contributions to the social expressions of moralising and negative judgement (see chap.4), and replaces them with effective expressions of empathy towards human inadequacies and wrongdoing in the context of alternative values and transcending hope. The expression of these values is not new, but describing their application as progressive and with the aim of discovering deeper integrity and intimate innocence³⁹ – as opposed to attaining theoretical standards of godliness, or the assuaging of guilt - would break new ground.

The processes by which these alternatives are embedded in behaviour and beliefs is anciently described as pilgrimage;⁴⁰ there is no reason why this model should not have continuing relevance in the experience of dying, where often the aggregation of past experiences and futilities emerges to stifle belief in personal worth and the possibility of renewed relational Personhood.

Barth's focus on the obedience of the Son of Man (1974, p.157ff) identifies the nature of the Christian calling to minister to the dying. It is in existential obedience to the knowledge of God's love of all people in all circumstances that Christian ministry achieves its greatest traction while at the same time being a most vulnerable pilgrimage which challenges the self-authored fears and superstitions of people and their cultures in the face of bio-death.

END NOTES:

- ¹ For example, it is unlikely that anyone other than the London licensing authorities refers to Black Cabs as Hackney Carriages, rather than Taxis.
- ² The absolute claim of early Christianity concerned the history of Man's salvation through the continuing acts and intention of God. The imagery of fiery immolation, taken as literal, contradict the message of salvation love that characterizes the ministry of Jesus.
- ³ This form of words occurs also in ceremonies of other historical Western Christian denominations. In citing the Anglican Church, I am in no way implying that the phrase carries any different interpretation for these others.
- ⁴ Notwithstanding the processes by which the self revelation of God is received, understood and described through the Old Testament narrative, in the story of Jesus, the character of God's love is presented as excluding any compelled or presumed reciprocity. The generosity of the father of the prodigal son (Lk.15:1f) exemplifies this.

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- 5 An Anglican Prayer Book (1989) Anglican Church of Southern Africa. Harper Collins p.374. The words are suitably amended when addressing more than one candidate. The emphasis is mine.
- 6 The point is that bio-death is a naturally occurring event; this does not suggest that individuals cannot exercise a choice to hasten the event.
- 7 I have experienced this phenomenon on several occasions. In one case, a woman in terminal illness who in faith desired to die, and whose doctor had agreed to restrict medication only to relief of pain, was over a period of three months held from death by the refusal of her husband and adult children to allow her "to just give up and die...we all still want you, Mum". Her doctor urged my fellow minister to persuade the family to desist from their daily importuning. When they did so, and joined her in her prayer to die, she did so within hours. On another occasion a woman in terminal stages asked for prayer to die. Her husband and two adult children joined me at her bedside when she was anointed specifically into a pilgrimage through death. We jointly laid hands on her at the point of anointing, and she died within ten minutes, having prayed the *Nunc Dimittis* with us. Her husband, a prominent businessman and public figure, requested to speak at the start of her funeral service. He spoke of the "awesomeness of asking for her death" and the "extraordinary power of spiritual presence and joy as she died with our hands on her" (CKR notes).
- 8 It remains true that most pastoral ministry to the dying is conducted with the assumption that because their death is inevitable they have pro-actively assented to it. There is significant difference between accepting the unavoidability of the event, and assenting to its occurrence.
- 9 God's help is not commonly invoked to give comfort and relief, and even to hasten death, in circumstances of pain and wretchedness, or in a different sense altogether, to "understand" why these circumstances should prevail.
- 10 Notably: A.D.Weisman (1977) "The Psychiatrist and the Inexorable" in H. Feifel (ed.) *New meanings of death* (pp.107-122). New York McGraw-Hill; E.M. Pattinson (1977) *The experience of dying* Englewood Cliffs; N.J. Prentice-Hall and D. Klass eds. (1982) "Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and the tradition of the private sphere: An analysis of symbols" in *Omega*, 15 pp.353-73; R. Kastenbaum (1998) *Death, society and human experience* (6th ed.) Boston, Allyn & Bacon; C.A. Corr (1993) "Coping with dying: Lessons that we should and should not learn from the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross" in *Death Studies*, 17 pp.68-83.
- 11 It will be argued further below that this particular phrase requires amplification as its eschatological significance is lost on those whose understanding of the words is confined to their literal, physical meaning.
- 12 Although not in these forms of words explicitly stated, the same intention is called for from parents and Godparents at the baptism of an infant or young child.
- 13 By 'presumptive', is meant equally those attitudes which either regard the mandate of Jesus to his followers to "make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt.28:19), as license to take people into solemn commitments that they may emotionally make without the desire to understand; or to regard baptism as somehow 'contractually' engaging God in a conditional arrangement, the sustaining of which derives from the candidate's immediate and continuing conscious, verbalised, applied commitment.

The former construct is a nursery bed for cynicism and the erosion of personal responsibility in solemn commitment, both conditions being by their nature, immoral. An ignorant promise prevents its maker from responsible, creative engagement with its meaning, and encourages in the promisee a selective, opportunistic regard for the meaning of its words, and theirs.

In the latter, 'confessing Jesus' comes inevitably to occupy a greater value-truth than the systemic, unending love of Creator God for each unique Person, and upon which every creature of Creation depends for its life-force. That too is immoral, because its very enterprise is futile: "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' shall enter the kingdom of heaven..." (Matt.7:21)

What is individually and collectively experienced in such attitudes and displayed conventions, and the relational language models introducing and conveying the initiating process, is likely to endure as the defining memory and ethos of the personal relevance of God, and value of personal faith.

There are two pathways of open choice regarding public witness; the one being social and cultural, the other having in addition specific intention of desired faith/commitment, acceptance, and transcendent expectation. This latter dimension makes possible the relational acknowledgements and solemn commitment that grounds Christian baptism in realised hope, and koinonia.

- ¹⁴ Sheppy's discussion on Bland v Airedale NHS Trust (2003, p.29ff) succinctly illustrates this.
- ¹⁵ Pro-active consent to dying was not listed by E.Kübler Ross (1969) as one of the five stages of dying; her list concludes with assent, but it is not clear if she intends this to be taken as including consent. Pastoral experience has demonstrated that "assent" to death can *apparently* occur at an early stage, but that this by no means axiomatically means acceptance or pro-active response to its onset. It is also true that "consent" does not axiomatically mean that the dying person has resolved their other concerns, fears and unfinished business; these issues can, and do, contribute to the overall, inchoate experience of dying.
- ¹⁶ By this I mean the mystical dimensions/capacities/properties of relational Personhood.
- ¹⁷ It is insufficient to claim this perspective as "in the past"; it has present and systemic residue and certainly informs the insecurities of denominationalism and fundamentalist evangelism.
- ¹⁸ "Concerning Visitation of the Sick: A Directory for the Public Worship of God through the three Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland", House of Commons, London, 1645, unnumbered pages.[The Westminster Confession]
- ¹⁹ Constitutio liturgica 1964:article 81
- ²⁰ Constitutio liturgica cum commentario ,1964: p.156. Commentary by P.Journal
- ²¹ That is of all human Persons; not just those who are baptised into Christian faith.
- ²² Waggett, P.N. SSJE. Paper on "The Resurrection in the Holy Eucharist" p.199 quoted by Ramsey (1961, p.109)
- ²³ Personal observation and experience.
- ²⁴ Humankind as resurrected in Personhood of relational identity.
- ²⁵ See chapter 8 for fuller discussion of this.
- ²⁶ Rom.5:8 "*But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us*" summarises the Gospels' message of salvation as arising in God's executive actions rather than in human moral deservedness *per se*. The isolated account of prayers being offered in the Jerusalem Temple for the future resurrection of errant, deceased Jews (2.Macc.12:38-46) suggests a belief that even so fatal a sin as concealed wearing of idolatrous tokens, would be forgiven through sacrifice and intercessory prayer *in this life*. The Christian belief that in dying for us whilst we are undeserving sinners, Jesus has already established our salvation; the situation now exists whereby we are free to either appropriate or reject that act of God. It is, however, beyond our capability to reverse what he has done by that act. It is therefore a profound error in Christianity to suggest that either individuated forgiven-ness or resurrection is dependent upon empiricised moral deservedness.
- ²⁷ As earlier discussed here are difficulties resulting from local traditions that make for difficulties in Christian pastoral ministry, but none of these alter the perspective of a spiritual universe.
- ²⁸ The integrity and authority of Christ's forgiving prayer at the moment of crucifixion "Father forgive them" is revealed in his subsequent questions to the disciples on the Emmaus road: "What things are you talking about?" "What things?" He has forgiven; the relationlessness of Calvary is covered in the love of forgiveness, the risen Christ is healed of it, he is innocent of its effects.

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- ²⁹ I suggest that this form of words better identifies and describes the identity, immanence and transcendence of the Spirit who is God, than the customary abbreviation of 'Holy Spirit'. This latter now conveys an institutionalised, remote ritual expression of God, whereas the form "Spirit who is Holy" conveys relational meaning to both 'God' and 'Man'.
- ³⁰ This should be understood in the same sense as the words of the revised Nicene Creed: "And was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary..."
- ³¹ Jn.11:25 RSV translation. The translation of this verse used in the Prayer Book of the [Anglican] Province of New Zealand, 1988, is particularly direct and unambiguous: "Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life; even in death, anyone who believes in me, will live.'"
- ³² See Chap.3:1ff. Here the "righteous" are explicitly those slaughtered in the Maccabean Revolt in consequence of upholding the Sabbath law; Jesus gives no indication that he is "the resurrection" of only the righteous, however this category of person is defined.
- ³³ The capacity for sin – even the inclination - does not make sinfulness incarnate in Personhood; its character and dynamic are acquired in consequence of decision.
- ³⁴ The caveat of extra-elective divine action is not exclusive to Christianity; Sufism holds as doctrine the Sacrosanct Tradition (that is one which presents God's own speech): "My servant does not stop drawing close to me by extra acts of devotion until I love him. Then when I love him I am his hearing by which he hears, his sight by which he sees, his hand by which he grasps and his foot by which he walks." – Baldick (1989, pp.27-28). This affirms the efficacy of works as meriting the rewarding attention of God, at which point a metamorphosis takes place in the servant.
- ³⁵ That includes as much the inclination to sin, as the words and deeds.
- ³⁶ Church of England Liturgical Commission (1965) *Alternative Services*, London: CIO, 2nd Series pp.105-6
- ³⁷ Members of the Liturgical Commission would doubtless argue that theirs was a grammatically correct use of the term 'awful'. However, by the 1960s its colloquial understanding and employment denoted 'dreadful', and this remains the predominant active influence upon secular and religious attitudes towards death and propositions concerning final judgement.
- ³⁸ Barth engages his analogy from the perspective of Man's forfeit of "predetermined salvation," in the quest to attain "another salvation which is to be found in the sphere of his creaturely being and attained by his own effort." (1974, p.10) The thrust of his analogy is undiminished, whatever has been the cause of Humankind's lostness in the country far from God. The central elements are that in that far place, God has come to be excluded from Man's environment, He is no longer "Emmanuel – God with us"; Man is unable to recover or reverse the condition he is in; the Logos in obedience to the Father's will, enters that place and Man cannot keep him out. From the destitution of that place, Incarnation, Resurrection and Ascension are revealed.
- ³⁹ By this I mean the personal discovery of interior changes in moral values and standards of relationship.
- ⁴⁰ The pilgrimage offered in the self-revelation of God is embarked upon by human beings as we are, journeying towards an ultimate destiny within the purposes of God and indicates a required challenge to the conventions arising out of the historical language of morality surrounding death, and specifically as these bear upon the issues of human choice and the judgement of God in such a way as to conceal –possibly even negate - the concept of relational pilgrimage into associative joy.

Chapter 8

THE LANGUAGE OF MORALISING SURROUNDING

BIO-DEATH AND FINAL JUDGEMENT

This chapter reviews some aspects of ecclesiastical and secular language employed, the words of Jesus, and the models that are developed in consequence, concerning death, its character and significance, concerning the survival of life beyond mortality, and its role in the ordering of Persons in bio-life.

The word 'death' signifies that moment when the individual *biologically* and *socially* ceases to exist. The essential, irreversible message is that the once living bodily organism is beyond any human and clinical resuscitation; bio-life in that particular identity has become disincarnate. There are the *remains*, the physical features and properties, of a once life-incarnated Being, but no life-presence within them. In this interpretation, 'death' also expresses the end of all creaturely, living expression *from* that person. It does not prevent address or expressions of recognition or intimacy *to* the person but these are devoid of inter-relationality. The moment that a person stops breathing, the moment that there is no corresponding feel of life in the human touch and the stillness of dead weight pervades the space of communication, every conscious means of contact, understanding

and empathy between human beings ends. The behaviour patterns associated with life-ness have no application, no expression. There is no corresponding communication in shaking a dead person's hand; there is no means of communicating thoughts or feelings, hopes or desires, or retrieval, to the corpse.

In one respect only is there broadly overlapping agreement in the language of medical, social and religious engagement with bio-death. The moment is not simply the clinical occurrence of a dramatic and irreversible termination of physical capacity. The event *immediately* voids every relational indicator that has hitherto applied, however fragmentary, and inaugurates the unknown.

Medical definition of 'dead':

In contemporary Western societies, death is clinically determined by an increasingly sophisticated series of indicators – particularly when a patient's bio-life has been sustained by mechanical, external means (respirators, intravenous feeding etc). At this present time, the ultimate medical/clinical indicator is the diagnosis of 'brain dead', meaning that the organism of the body is incapable of sustaining any form of life on its own. It is a clinical and neutrally pragmatic expression, expressive of death as disjunctive to purpose. In the essentially – and necessarily - clinical determination of 'brain dead', scientific indicators override emotional and relational factors. That is not to suggest that doctors, nurses and palliative

care workers are indifferent to the demise of a fellow human being, or are themselves immune to the distractions of deeper emotions.

'Legal' death:

In the wider ordering of human society, historically expressed within the framework of secular and religious law codes, the imposition of death has formed the basis of ultimate authority over the individual. Typically the enacting of capital punishment was¹ preceded by juridical process to justify interception of the right to life, or to disallow the freedom necessary to fulfilled life, and to allow the deprivation of all social rights.² Thus, for example, in the legal framework of the German Third Reich, 'social death' became the defined status of *all* Jews, and other such designated undesirables as the regime proscribed. (D.J. Goldhagen 1996, p.168) This opaque status validated the eradication of Personhood of relational identity, and therefore the actual moral identification of the individual. Thus in the Third Reich, Jews *could* be radically exterminated because they were already 'dead', being without personal, relational identity individually or collectively. They were exterminated, buried or cremated anonymously; no roll of names was called to be answered as they were herded to death; the 'unknown' could be relegated to the unknown.

The device of State execution of criminals thus sealed the removal of a Person from the society of relational Persons by consigning a Person to non-relationality that involved by implication, a devolutional intention to

destroy that individual's relational identity³. Their identity is attached to their crime; it is assumed into their crime, it becomes their identity, it consumes their identity. Their death is a consequence of their crime-identity; their relational identity is extinct. Execution then may be regarded as a symbol of intended *involution*. Its secular message, too, is that 'the wages of sin is death'. (Rom.6:23)

British justice has historically assigned to God the last word in the juridical proclamation, "May God have mercy on your soul", but it was always preceded by the sentence of death, and there was never any accompanying intercession for mercy upon the community of Persons in whose name the Person of relational identity was to be outcast and become extinct. Viewed in this context, capital punishment, historically portrayed as an action of moral redress, 'life for life', (Exod.21:23-25) is an action without any capacity for moral goodness.

The synergy of deliberately crafted language and powerfully rejective actions, reinforces a systemic linkage of bio-death with horror, despair, revulsion and fear. Christian churches have coercively reinforced this linkage through their historical executions of 'heretics' and 'deviants' in the name of God.

Christian contradictions:

Christian religious language proclaims its eschatology; unlike secular expressions that bio-death is 'the end' and the precise definitions striven for in medical and legal terminology, there is no precise Christian definition of bio-death. Western Christianity in language and praxis has historically focused on the *consequences* of death in the context of future moral judgement.⁴ One clear, publicly enacted pre-figuring of that future event was to be seen in the reaction to the act of suicide. Until 1800, the body of a suicide was commonly dragged through the streets and finally burned, and all their property was confiscated.⁵ In this intentionally horrifying spectacle, the evidence of the wages of sin being death and destruction became more implanted and *enacted* in the community of believers than were models of the sublime reward of everlasting praise and adoration of God for the righteous.

Cast in a modern language idiom, the denunciation of Person was 'in your face', enacted by a Church community demonstrating to itself and all society the implacable anger of God. It could be argued that the contrasting, sublime model of God's love, and human adoration, is the Eucharist. Here, however, there is no comparable relationally expressive, tactile participating role for the congregation. The Eucharistic actions are confined to the clergy alone; the sublime sacrament of love is received, not enacted, in the same way, by the present body of laity.

These religiously inspired actions were not perceived as moral contradictions precisely because Western Christianity predominantly emphasised a God who was a condemning judge. This had prevented the Christian churches from historically engaging with bio-death as being itself a moral event, pro-active in the evolution of relationality and identity, *vide* Kaufmann. (1959, p.47)

These examples of historical actions and contemporaneous language models illustrate the legacy of attitudes extending through Western Christian society, that have implanted a concept of the Beingness and *identity* of Person once deceased, as having ended.⁶ Immediately the deceased has no part of living society, and no future role having any connection with living society is perceived. There is seen to be no eschatological dimension to Personhood, no longer any sense in which the living and the dead have any connection with one another.

However, whilst medical and secular conventions consider there to be no extension of relational reality beyond bio-death – that is, no ontological existence - Christianity graphically asserts an afterlife *for the purposes of Divine judgement and appropriate reward* for each individual Person. In this, as the following examples⁷ will illustrate, there remains a more persistent negative focus on dis-innocent behaviour and circumstances, with 'death' as their reward, than there is upon the immanence and nature of Godly love, forgiveness and transformation.⁸ There is no expressed

concept of evolutionary transcendence in relational identity in the actual nature of Person-Being.

The phrase: "I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the *dreadful* day of judgement, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed" occurs at the opening of the marriage service, (BCP p.302) but the threat lying beyond death is clear. The language of the '*Order for the Visitation of the Sick*' similarly sets the character of that ministry as that of uncertainty:

"*Remember not*, Lord, our iniquities, nor the iniquities of our forefathers: Spare us, good Lord, spare thy people, whom thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood, and be not angry with us for ever..." (ibid.p.312ff)

The governing rubrics of the '*Order for the Burial of the Dead*' implicitly express impending Divine denunciation of the unbaptised, the excommunicate and suicides:

"Here is to be noted, that the Office ensuing is not to be used for any that die unbaptized, or excommunicate, or have laid violent hands upon themselves." (ibid. p.395)

The exclusion of the unbaptised – including infants - retains the early view of Augustine of Hippo⁹ that such souls could not obtain heaven in their original sin; therefore God had to assign them to hell:

"vessels of contumely...vessels of wrath and the wrath of God is upon them...There can be no doubt about the matter: they will go into eternal fire with the devil..." (Dyer 1964, p.6)

The wider emphasis carried into the intercessions projects uncertainty concerning the unconditional nature of forgiveness from a magisterial God

“who for our sins are justly displeased...deliver us not into the bitter pains of eternal death...” (BCP p.332)

The contemporary Roman Catholic view is:

"That suicide is unlawful is the teaching of Holy Scripture and of the Church which condemns the act as a most atrocious crime and, in hatred of the sin and to arouse the horror of its children, denies the suicide Christian burial."

(Catechism of the Catholic Church 1997 para's. 2280-2283)

These examples variously illustrate an unavoidable consequential process of imbalances and contradictions at the heart of Christian pastoral theology and praxis, axiomatically linking bio-death with moral judgement in such ways as to cast human inadequacies, foolish and wrong choices, imperfections and failures as the *causes* of Divine anger and punishment.

Experience without meaning:

The force of such language and its models obscures the absolute message of the Cross: that Jesus died for the *outright* forgiveness of sins. (Rom.5:6-11) This completed act of God is replaced by the notion of *potentiality* concerning the availability of that forgiven-ness. The message is that, notionally, God has demonstrated that he *can* forgive, but not that he persistently, systemically and unilaterally has forgiven. Forgiven-ness, the iridescent, climactic truth that is the 'glory' of the Cross, thus has become

conditional upon *appropriateness*. This collapses its ontic significance from evolutionary, transcending action, to one of ritual, but non-systemic, cleansing.¹⁰ Indeed, "we had the experience but missed the meaning," (T.S. Elliot 1968¹¹) and in so doing have altered the meaning of forgiven-ness so that it is not seen as the causal, igniting link to the transcending capacity of Person of relational identity.

The darker undertow in this theology emerges in two aspects. Firstly, it destroys any theology of Immanence. In its fullness, the immanence of God describes him as being relationally present; his presence constitutes the sacred, and his presence perceives the secular aspects of Creatureliness. Immanence means that God holds both extremes within the unity of tension that is the Cosmos, *and* is the illumination of his relationality to the human Person-Creature of relational identity.

Immanence and Process:

Essentially, immanence places God in creative relationality within a Creation that is endemically non-static – that is to say, it is in *process* of Being. In microcosm, this means that nothing can return to being what it was even though it might be possible to recover the outward semblance of what is past. Its macrocosmic truth is exhibited in the resurrection of relational identity beyond bio-death. The immanence of God then describes a continuous, emerging presence, but not a continuously restored past.

Secondly, the introduction of *appropriateness* relates to the balances of what was *previous*, and statically assumes the requirement of their necessary, repetitive, restoration. It conceals the ontotheological, incarnational relational identity of each human Person in its focus upon restoring the individual to a relationship with God characterised by, and confined to, past and immediately existing models of order. In this construct, the eschaton is realised in a narrow concept of benign harmony and static adoration of God: "Those that die in the favour of God are well; those that die out of favour of God, this can do them no good..." (Latimer 1844) Yet forgiveness as observed in Jesus at the Cross (Lk.23:24,43) is not the product of intellectual achievement; it emerges in the dynamic, transcending energy of the Spirit who is Holy, immanently energising the human choice-commitment of Jesus to trust beyond the limits of human rationality into the transcendent purity of God's innocence, and become the crucified one who is both obstacle and fool. (1Cor.1:22ff) The Jesus of transcended relational identity at the resurrection marks "a new epoch in Being..." (Dupré 1993, p.7) exposing what is natural to Personhood in the ontology of God; the cognate iridescence of pure, creative love. Here is seen both Creaturely adoration of God and the cosmos *together with* God.

Instead, bio-death, has remained a feared event, unfair,¹² tainted with immorality, that irrationally bears upon the purpose of human life and its intrinsic characteristic of systemic, personal, conscious relationality. This may be a significant contributory reason for the evident secular anxiety

concerning death in modern Western society and the emergence of the new a-theism posited by Dupré (1993). Whilst fully agreeing with Dupré's view of the character of modern a-theism as excluding of any reality attaching to God, it remains true that human beings are disturbed by the fact of bio-death. The more bio-death is regarded as incapable of constructive meaning, the more prominent become attitudes of cynicism and despair; the same is true of the meaning of life itself as expressed by Dupré "...[the] removal of transcendence fundamentally affected the conveyance of meaning." (1993, p.3)

There is further encouragement for uncertainty and cynicism in Christianity's long application of dualistic terms and models in addressing the nature of humankind. In its propositions and use of body/soul language, dualism denies the intrinsic nature of the human Person; there emerges not Personhood of unified relational identity, but the unsustainable, different integrities of spiritual and material entities, interactive but of different *spheres*.¹³ It is inevitable that pervasive dualism has obscured the immanent *and transcended* unity of Jesus' relational identity, his Personhood, at the resurrection.

Purgatory:

In one respect, the doctrine of Purgatory¹⁴ indicated an expectant view that bio-death was not regarded as a mechanistic moment but as a moral *threshold* in the continuing event of life-ness. The contemporary Roman

Catholic dogmatic theologian, Fr. Richard McBrien, supports the idea of purgatorial suffering as not occasioned by trial by fire. His view that

“... [it is] not suffering inflicted upon us from outside as a punishment for sin, but the intrinsic pain that we feel when we are asked to surrender our ego-centred self so that God-centred loving self may take its place.” (1981, pp.1144-1145)

carries some idea of relational identity beyond bio-life. Nevertheless the doctrine of Purgatory retains some of the confusion of dualism - that at bio-death the disembodied soul enters a waiting period of moral activity for purification until the Second Coming of Christ and the general resurrection of the dead, at which moment it would be re-embodied. The result of interjecting this staging phase of moral filtration remains only to further contradict the evolutionary event of forgiven-ness at Jerusalem.

C. Gittings suggests that the doctrine of purgatory was a halfway stage development in the shifting from primitive belief that death is an event of lesser importance to the subsequent and modern view that the significance of death marks the absolute end of life in all its dimensions, and that there is no afterlife. Her point is well made. In developing the doctrine of purgatory it can be argued that the Christian church actually deliberately *extended* the dimensions of fear concerning bio-death, through the prospect of astringent purgatorial examinations and penances, even before the day of Final Judgement; progressively

“...the Second Coming became associated with the Last Judgement at which each soul would be weighed in the balance, and if found wanting, be despatched to hell.” (1984, p.22)

This is demonstrated in the claims of the Church to authority through the administration of indulgences, penalties and impositions to mitigate on behalf of God the duration and extent of purgatorial discipline. In the final event the Church could pronounce excommunication upon the individual, thus suspending ‘in God’s name’ divine benevolence and jeopardising the individual’s salvation.

But in casting the moment of bio-death as inaugurating a judgement of the soul, the reality of bio-death itself was changed within the Christian message:

“In this new scheme the decisive moment is the death of the individual... Earlier eschatology had kept a balance, or alternatively a tension, between an individual and a corporate expectation... Imaginatively, the whole strength of eschatology now became attached to the individual... attention was concentrated upon one’s personal answer and personal hope of heaven – if necessary after a stay in purgatory. The destiny of the individual was becoming the centre of attention, and the theme of the renewal of all things was slipping into a secondary place.” (Morris 1972, pp.146-148)

The conflation of confusion resulting from purgatorial doctrine was added to at the Reformation by the disallowing of eschatological perspective in funerary rites in which the whole, immediate community would participate.

Predestination:

Together with the Calvinist doctrine of double predestination – that God has already decided who was to be saved and who was to be damned - there continued the undermining of confidence in the systemic nature of salvation itself. These further anxieties concerning bio-death influenced the drafting of revisions to the second Prayer Book of Edward VI (1552), in which the funerary emphasis was upon divine judgement, rather than reconciliation:¹⁵

“Almighty God, with Whom do live the spirits of them that depart hence in the Lord, and in Whom the souls of *them that be elected*, after they be delivered from the burden of the flesh, be in joy and felicity: we give Thee hearty thanks for that it hath pleased Thee to deliver this N, our brother, out of the miseries of this sinful world...” (my emphasis)

The lack of confidence that this wording expresses in the divine *intention* of salvation contrasts with the concepts of the 1549 Prayer Book (1st of Edward VI), which retained the celebration of Holy Communion, and where after the interment, was recited:

“We commend into Thy hands (most merciful Father) the soul of this our brother departed, N. And his body we commit to the earth, beseeching Thine infinite goodness, to give us grace to live in Thy fear and love, and to die in Thy favour: that when the judgement shall come...both this our brother, and we, may be found acceptable in Thy sight, and receive that blessing which Thy well-beloved Son shall then pronounce to all that love and fear Thee, saying: ‘Come ye blessed Children of my Father. Receive the kingdom prepared for you before the beginning of the world.’”¹⁶

In the 1552 Prayer Book, election rather than relationship has come to predominate ideas concerning the status of the individual post-mortem:

“The changes which occurred at the Reformation, both in the doctrines surrounding death and in the orthodox burial service, were extremely deep and far reaching. This alteration in the theological position and practice of the English Church raises the question how the laity reacted to such a fundamental transformation of belief and ritual.” (Gittings 1984, p.42)

The essential and central point about election is that it may be withheld. To obtain any consideration upon the basis of election depends upon either the whim of the one who confers it, or suggests merit rather than relationship as the basis of its award.

In Reform theology election appears as more important than relationship to the extent that systemic relationship was understood as being only within the context of election rather than as a primary purpose of God.¹⁷ This obscured any vision of eschatological, relational evolution in Personhood and this removal of transcendence fundamentally affected the conveyance of meaning. (Dupré 1993, p.3)

What may be observed of the status of the individual post mortem, in late Medieval and Post-Modern Western Christianity, is that uncertainty and, above all, *relationlessness* pervades - as much in respect of the previously lived-in temporal community as between God and Creaturely Persons. It is significant however that, in early medieval and post Reformation beliefs,

the differences in attitudes towards death, and the acceptance of it, lay in the association of each individual – and God - to the *community* of belief.¹⁸

Isolation and Judgement:

Whereas in earlier times the involvement of the *community* in the funeral rituals for the dead denoted the necessity and propriety of their actions, by late medieval and subsequent times the individual at death was isolated in such a manner as to effectively deny community at all. The dead were beyond any supplication of their faith-community, temporal or spiritual. They faced judgement upon the basis of their lives alone, and were denied even the general assurance of God's intention to save them except upon the basis of His secret, pre-determined election. This, then, ontologically denied the existence or reality of a faith community such as expressed by Jesus.¹⁹

Some contemporary theologians have reconsidered the eschatological possibilities of bio-death; Jungel considers the New Testament understanding of bio-death as the event that

“...presents itself as an invitation or offer. We are offered the message concerning the God who in participating in man's death gains victory over death. It is in connection with this invitation and response to it that the difference between faith and unfaith is decided. Faith accepts the invitation. In doing so it projects itself as hope and at the same time undertakes an obligation.” (1975, p.116)

The importance of Jungel's view is in his engagement with relational language, "faith and unfaith", to illustrate the ontotheological *participating* relationality of Creator to Creature in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Death is "...deprived of its power in the name of God..." precisely because "...the life possessed by Jesus Christ is a life which emerges from death..." (1975, p.84) This amounts to recognition of both absolute relationlessness and sublime relationship. Bio-death imposes upon society and the individual a separation in which no relationship is possible; the human person and their bio-life is ended and any new life thereafter is not the former estate revived albeit constituted differently. Jesus humanly experienced that same separation and its relationlessness. However, in the case of Jesus, this relationlessness gives way, through the love of God, to the gift of life anew to the relational identity of Person. The Resurrection is therefore new life-ness, conveyed out of God's judgement to surround with salvic love the disinnocence of the unsustainable, immoral consequences of human choices:

"It is because of love that God is moved to give new life to the dead, to that which is negative and accursed. He does this in such a way that he does not shrink from death, negation or the curse. In order to bring life and death into a new relationship with one another, into a new relationship which merits the name 'resurrection from the dead', God, through love, shares the pain of death." (ibid. p.110)

Intrinsic to all issues of community and relationship is the central fact of *identity*; there is not possible either separate recognition or the emergence

of community, without the uniqueness of individual identity by which each may be known. Individuals in combining together create and form communities in which they are known – or can be known – by one another and themselves. It is in their individual capacity that human beings relate and are related to at the most basic, as well as the most complex, levels; it is in the individual component that self-consciousness and identity are demonstrated. That demonstration is two-dimensional. On the one hand it is evidenced in the physical entity of a body; on the other, it is demonstrated metaphysically in the expressions of reflective thought, character, creativity and the ability to form and conduct emotional relationships.

It is the entire moral matrix of *identity* which is held to be most threatened by bio-death for, as stated earlier, the moment breathing ceases stillness pervades the space of communication. Every hitherto known means of contact, understanding and empathy with that individual fails. There is no longer a 'Person' of living identity. Most importantly, the language of identity and relationship by which self-consciousness is mediated no longer applies as it once used to. In simple definition, 'dead' means to be incommunicable.

At bio-death social identity and status do undergo major change, both ontologically and through the inability of language to provide a dialogue beyond the finite. It is these issues that beset both the individual

approaching death and the community amongst whom the individual lives and expresses Being.

D.J. Davies describes the language associated with death, and death rites as "an adaptation to the fact of death... the human adaptive response to death", arguing this as a necessity

"...from an evolutionary perspective, that death is part of the environment to which the human animal needed to adapt... It is precisely because language is the very medium through which human beings obtain their sense of self-consciousness that it can serve so well as the basis of reaction to the awareness of death." (1997, p.1)

A key proposition that he puts forward is that death is perceived as a challenge to self-consciousness.

What is crucial to the integrity of faith-relationships is that the language associated with death and death rituals does not constitute 'words against death' which conceal, substitute or reduce its ontotheological meaning, and therefore can become fragile expressions of "the baseless fabric of a vision." (M. Goulder, essay in *"Resurrection Reconsidered"*, ed. G. D'Costa 1997, p.48).

Habitual language:

It is accordingly important to examine certain key phrases that recur in the Christian use of language surrounding death, and particularly those of 'rites of passage',²⁰ a term now also commonly used to describe funeral services.

Phrases such as 'gone but not forgotten' and 'I am not far; I am only in the next room', express radically different integrities to 'He has risen!' (Mk.16:6a) Of the language employed by Christian churches in the arena of death, a contemporary suspicion arises that much derives either from sentimentality or the necessity of institutional religions to exert controls over adherents for the purposes of retaining power to direct their lives.

Davies makes the vital point that

"...the identity of the dead and their network of links with the living have changed and the issue of death itself is addressed [in the present time] through what happens to the body." (1997, p.39)

This raises again the key question whether Christianity comprises a powerful setting of 'words against death', or is expressing an entirely new understanding of *life-ness* beyond the parameters of mortality that challenges the language of 'survival theology'; are sin and bio-death linked?

It is precisely the issue of 'body' that occupies a majority of Christian depiction both of life and after-life. Descriptions of good, indifferent and severed relationships, moral standards, acceptance, judgement and annihilation have historically been expressed in relation to anthropological sentience. What is 'good and acceptable' is shown as sublime contentment; what is lacking or entirely outwith a 'holiness standard' is shown in various degrees of physical affliction and violent torture. Davies remarks that

“The traditional Christian emphasis upon sin, divine mercy and an afterlife in heaven tended to devalue earthly life, probably on the basis that it had been the arena of sin rather than a sphere of pleasure.” (1997, p.188).

In this regard, fundamentalist Christianity proclaims in salvation an anthropological restoration of the faithful into the initial sublime and utopian state of relationship between God and humankind (Gen.2). This is held to have been interrupted by the human fall into sin and, in consequence, death entering the scene of life (Gen.3). This ‘Creationist’ position presumes that such a situation indeed existed. However modern science has alerted human thinking to creation as expressed in the process of evolution, to which there is yet no boundary or conclusion and therefore no previous absolutes.

Whilst an extreme claim for salvation may predominate in fundamentalist belief, it is also evident that in much Western doctrine, Catholic as much as Protestant, eternal life and resurrection are represented as having to do with a literal revival and reconstituting of the material body – suitably purged and cleansed. This seems to be a reflection of the strength of ideas that require a bio-body for there to be Person of relational identity.

Davies describes Paul Tillich’s position in this as preferring

“...to emphasise the resurrection of the body with its acknowledgement not only of the positive significance of the material creation but also of each individual’s uniqueness.” (1997, p.119)

Davies, however, also cites William Temple's view of the resurrection to be of central importance:

"Man is not immortal by nature or of right; but he is capable of immortality and there is offered to him resurrection from the dead and life eternal if he will receive it from God and on God's terms." (1935, p.472)

In this use of the phrase 'capable of immortality', Temple would seem to hold back from too confined a definition of bodily composition, especially in his allusion to the resurrected Jesus who is the archetypal example of life received on God's terms.

Ramsey argues against the association of physical body with resurrection; commenting on studies of resurrection, he observes that "certain pre-suppositions have occurred", together with "some highly questionable propositions". Of the Resurrection of Christ, he comments,

"It is here that the real distinction lies. The real issue is not between a 'bodily' and a 'spiritual' event...The issue is rather between two different beliefs about the Gospel." (1961, pp.54-55)

Ramsey refers to the work of P.N. Waggett, S.S.J.E. who wrote,

"The resurrection of the body may sometimes be called the 'physical resurrection', but the phrase is likely to discredit the fact it points to. The Resurrection is a victory of spirit in the region where death now rules." (ibid. p.109)

He (Ramsey) suggests that modern thought cautions against

"...setting limits to the possibility of a bodily life that is both continuous and yet utterly different," because "science and theology concur in reminding

us that our present experience of a body cannot set the limits to what a body may be." (ibid. p.114)

His eschatological view provides a strong defence for the use of traditional language, but with the proviso that it is not used within limited definitions or to mark boundaries of dogma.

The manner of the transition between the present and future states reminds us that they are of different constitution. The present is finite and capable of rendition into the interpretation of time, whereas that of the future cannot with integrity be even theoretically proposed. Here too, the language of rites of passage has become (and possibly always has been) easily capable of ambiguity and inappropriate meaning. For example, the phrase 'eternal life' can be claimed as denoting time unbroken and without ending or endless relationship. The distinctions are important because our consciousness of self and our relational structures describe not only identity but also place; it is not possible to occupy identity without occupying place. We exist in *relation to*. At death, the corpse may be identified as *a body*, but it is a body without living identity and will shortly decompose from its once unique features.

The *relational place* to which the dead 'go to be with God' is described in the mainstream of Christian language through the employment of metaphors to describe *relationship* after life: 'to be with God in heaven' paraphrases a common conjunction of ideas concerning identity – the

deceased has not ceased to be; they are participant in a necessary relationship, a *moral* engagement. This non-geographical eternity is represented in the same model terms as could describe being 'in London'; in the 1552 Prayer Book, 'heaven' is simultaneously suggested as being an extra-terrestrial oasis of bliss precisely because it is outwith "the miseries of this sinful world...", and within the presence of God.

In summary, it is not impertinent to suggest that there exists no uniformity in the historical outworking of a Christian doctrine of death and resurrection, nor clear understanding of the Personhood of relational identity of the individual post mortem, although there have existed since earliest time *expressions* of a central belief and doctrine that is markedly different from Platonic thought.²¹ Pannenberg observes that the Platonic concept of immortality of the soul "did not attribute eternal value to the individual" as the soul was not identical to the individual "because the soul undergoes a series of re-embodiments..." (1977, p.16) However, it would be particularly true of the general position of post-Reformation theologies concerning death, judgement and resurrection that, if death is seen as an act of judgement upon the moral worth of an individual, then there is created an inescapable moral dilemma in consequence of death.

In contrast to post-Reformation Christian attitudes towards the status and worth of the individual, is the Jewish concept that "the individual is the place where the righteousness of God is to be revealed, even beyond this life." (ibid.

p.16) Pannenberg describes the essential and new paradigm represented by Christianity as being the principle of individual freedom, which both includes and extends this earlier Jewish understanding.

Freedom and salvation:

Freedom, then, is associated with God's salvic actions in Jesus, and pertains both to the individual and to society. This has direct implications for the central, two-dimensional historical Christian idea of the Human Person, deriving in part from the Old Testament. The first is that Man is created in the image of God and has retained that image. The second is that the nature of mankind has been *reduced* by the invasion of sin.

Post Reformation Protestant theologies go further in asserting the nature of man as having been *organically altered* by the invasion of sin, in consequence of which humankind has lost the image of God. The distinctive Christian element of salvation, in Pannenberg's thinking, is that humankind has been reconciled to God in Christ, and in consequence *both* historical ideas of human personhood are modified. Significantly he sees freedom as standing against imposed dogma and the imposition of conditions to divine approval of human worth as often depicted by the Christian Church.

Two further issues require particular consideration in any new deployment of pastoral and liturgical language concerning bio-death. The first concerns

the historical, *dualistic linkage* of soul and body as discussed earlier. The second concerns the historical *religious confinement* of conscious identity to literal embodiment. In consequence of contemporary testimonies of near-death experiences and out-of-body experiences, this requires reconsideration. The essential issue raised is whether personal, conscious identity does continue to exist apart from its embodiment.

Considering Wittgenstein's contention that

"...a primary source of philosophical confusion is the popular tendency to ignore the everyday use of the language we speak, and the context in which we learn to utter the phrases we use..." (2009, p.4),

such historical dogmas and their language justify the objection that if an entity is correctly described as 'dead' it is logically invalid to describe that same entity as also 'alive'. Wittgenstein's own position is that if we pay attention to the meaning of the words involved we will realise that "...death is not lived through", but that "...the world in death does not change, but ceases." This strongly suggests that the Christian Church needs to modify its language describing life and bio-death. The historical anthropological language of contrast cannot survive science or an age of scientific reference; it relies upon a naturalistic world view which becomes superstitious in the dialogue with science:

"any viable concept of a future life has to talk in terms, either of the immortality of the soul, or of a resurrection which does not entail the resuscitation or re-creation of our present bodies." (ibid. p.6)

Doctrinal concepts, dogmatic insistence, the language of imagery, the clinging to established thinking all combine to form the requirements of orthodoxy and conformity. The compulsive elevation of both as the God-approved Christian vocabulary of faith can be seen to prevent rather than encourage the exploration from new evidence concerning the state of being and the encounter with new expressions of relationship between God and humankind. This is the mindset that brought about the confrontation of the institutional Church with Galileo; an insistent dogmatic conviction that the nature of reality is 'known,' and that will not admit any appeals from/to new evidence.

Relationality, the nucleus:

It is often that new evidence leads to the recovery and reinterpretation of older evidence, and points again to the phenomenon of Relationality as being the nuclear building block of community with God and one another. This determines that the currency of relationship cannot be mediated or regulated by formularies of traditional language or confined to doctrinal *stasis*. The Church should neither fear this nor deny it for God, though present, remains *other*, as does each individual Person; there is no conformity of human life and identity; we are *individual*, and uniquely so. In plurality we are community, not clones; living beings within whom life-ness and relationality themselves are continuously changing, and in this mobility it is the living experiences of God – rather than doctrinal formularies such as the historic creeds of the Church – that are the

grammar of faith and trust, and the systemic characteristics of a relationship with God that understands time as *presence* rather than linear progression, and bio-death as a moral event within that presence.

The central point here is that presence arises out of the Being of God; life exists because of the immanence of God. Whilst it is possible to describe *material presence* against a linear and finite framework of measurements whose metaphor is 'time', it is not possible to compute, determine or restrict the moral phenomenon of relationality as ultimately according to that scale. Bio-death as a moral phenomenon within the *ever-presence* of God cannot be re-interpreted as attaching to immorality, or as marking the end of the relational *presence* of God.

The pastoral ministry, teaching and example of the Christian Church requires that this living relationship be vigorously re-engaged without the restraints of traditional language or thought processes. An aspect of this, prayer for the dead, was addressed in the report of the Anglican Archbishops' Commission on Christian Doctrine:

"It would seem that the turning of a sinful person – even of a person who desired the consummation of the vision of God - into the divine likeness cannot be an instantaneous process if human nature and free will and the continuity of the individual personality across the divide of death are to be respected." (1971, p.20)

There are wider echoes of the substance of this recognition:

"All true relationships are mediated by Jesus Christ and are part of one and the same Body. If these beliefs are true...it would seem to follow that relationships would continue to grow and develop, in love, as part of the Body, beyond death. Otherwise we would be saying that the Body of Christ is split into two unrelated Bodies, that Body which interrelates in this earthly life and that Body, the communion of saints, which interrelates in the next life." (D. Schoeninger 1984, pp.53-54)

This has resonance with E. Schillebeeckx:

"The breeding ground of belief in life after death...was always seen in a communion of life between God and man... Living communion with God, attested as the meaning, the foundation and the inspiring content of human existence, is the only climate in which the believer's trust in a life after death comes, and evidently can come, to historical fruition." (1980, p.797)

Concerning zoetic life, this is supremely true, but in general terms there exists no body of teaching, worship material or liturgy that addresses these dimensions after the manner suggested by Jungel, Ramsey, Badham and Badham, and others.

A central position that the modern church must break down concerns the association of bio-death with punishment for sins. As has been demonstrated, this has direct implications for the historical tendency to encourage belief in order that people might become good, and like Jesus, survive death: "...He died to make us good/that we might go at last to heaven..." (Methodist Hymn Book 1983, 178), or else if disobedient, face the threat of extensive punishment or at the least some deprivation from God.

Jesus in context:

Retelling the story of Jesus must include not only his experience of death but also its context in the pilgrimage of his faith as the Son of Man, a journey of discovery. The vital characteristic of pilgrimage lies in continuous symbiosis of the energies of faith and journey that result in the discovery of new perspective and possibility, and an authoritative re-interpretation of established knowledge. It is entirely possible otherwise to make of pilgrimage a repetitive memorialising of custom, tradition and doctrine, exemplified by Pharisaic conservatism - a journey in the exercise of retention. The danger of this to pilgrimage arising out of dynamic faith lies in the implosion of its intentions in consequence of the alteration of meaning. Thus 'pilgrimage' can become an act of static devotion to God in the faithful repetition of historical revelation and interpretation. Thus it can become the active bulwark to change protecting against new interpretation, and this further inhibits the recognition of meaning.

The context of the story of Jesus is the incarnation of God. Out of this arises a different meaning in faith pilgrimage. Previously the faith pilgrimage of human Persons was characterised by their *desiring* to become increasingly deserving of God's favour, and expressive of the hope of that sublime attainment. In Jesus, faith pilgrimage is characterised by *responsive knowingness, the incarnate knowledge* of cosmic unity and innocent love.²²

The otherwise dramatically revised New Zealand Prayer Book retains a distorted model of pilgrimage in its baptismal wording: "Through the deep waters of *death* Jesus fulfilled his baptism. He died to set us free." (1989, p.385) Here death features prominently in the language of the most significant point of the Christian faith pilgrimage – its publicly witnessed beginning. It is represented as the *causative* act of salvation, whereas it is Jesus' *enacted will to forgive* that secures the victory of perfect love over the corruption of dis-innocence.

Salvation in the context of immorality:

The environment of the demonstration of God's judgement of love upon humankind is that of immorality. The pervading immorality of injustice expressed in its violent result is echoed in the Personhood of Jesus whose innocence is pervaded by the dis-innocence of human choice to reject the immanence of God. From the innerness of that immorality, at the point where Jesus *feels* forsakenness (Matt.27:46) forgiveness remains the enacted Godliness of the Son of Man. Jesus himself enters bio-death in the knowledge of disinnocence *and* forgiveness. It would be otherwise difficult to attach any meaning to Jesus' opening prayer at the point of his crucifixion "Father forgive them..." (Lk.23:24) or any connection between that and his explicit commitment to the supplicating thief, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise," (Lk.23:43) other than his (Jesus') knowledge that forgiveness is intrinsic to belovedness.

It can be seen from the story of Jesus that, explicit in its record of the events at his baptism, is his knowledge of belovedness as incarnate to the bio-life context of his pilgrimage of faith as the Son of Man. The records of the synoptic gospels agree the testimony of God "my beloved Son,"²³ with Mark and Matthew adding the qualifier "in whom I am well pleased". John's gospel reinforces that the Holy Spirit is endemic to Jesus' Personhood and relationality: "he on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain...is he who baptises with the Holy Spirit'....this is the Son of God." (Jn.1: 32-34)

What has been presented in this chapter is some of the body of evidence that demonstrates the crucial and limiting consequences of institutional Christianity failing to interpret and re-interpret the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. In the contexts of Christian pastoral ministry and the language of worship, this has dislocated the vision of the new nature of Being-ness that is now the property of Personhood and relational identity. In chapter 4 it was suggested that the unique distinction of human Personhood is moral identity and that relational capacity is the sign of moral identity, the definitive sign of Human.

The circumstances that bring about the death of Jesus demonstrate that in human Personhood there is the capacity for choice that allows the misuse of relational capacity to alter the morality of thoughts and actions in such a way as to change the meaning of Being from that of Community to isolated individuality. This condition of Being is the commencement of

relationlessness and it is this that corrodes the capacity for transcendence in that survival is threatened by the isolation of relationlessness. Ultimately, relationlessness destroys the meaning in Being.

A significant common factor in the case examples detailed in chapter 3 was the realization in each person of forgiveness as an historical event in the cosmos, and as the entire context of their life-ness. The possibility of an entirely different meaning in bio-death to what they had hitherto either assumed or believed, was opened up.

The enduring characteristics in the constructed narrative of 'Miriam' (chap.3) were a belief that forgiveness was conditional upon merit, and that bio-death was to be feared in consequence as it ended the possibility of achieving greater merit.

Modern a-theism

Dupré identifies modern a-theism as bearing upon believer as much as unbeliever. In the believer

“...the secret flame of faith [is] secret....because it has become hidden by its total incongruity with a radically secular environment. Even to the believer himself the flame of his faith has become secret, since it no longer enlightens his whole life.”

In the unbeliever, “...because the question whether we believe in God or not, retains little or no practical bearing upon our lives.” (1981, p.14)

However, continuing, significant disagreement within Christian churches concerning life after death and the judgement of God, between those who believe in Christ's continuing ministry to those who have died and those who do not, is relevant to Dupré's identification of a-theism stimulated by incongruity. Thus:

"Some Anglicans believe in Christ's continuing power beyond death to cleanse us of our sins and bring us into the closer presence of God. That is why those of the more Catholic tradition pray for those who are dead. Evangelical Anglicans, who emphasise that eternal life depends on decisions of faith taken in this world, see no justification in the New Testament for such prayers with regard to those who have died, apart from prayers of thanksgiving." ²⁴

It is therefore not now possible to reverse the confusions and opacity that have been historically introduced by Christianity into the theology of death and the concomitant pastoral praxis, by altering language or by creating 'user friendly' funeral liturgies.

It is the whole re-construction of the theology of Personhood and of relational identity as having transcendent meaning that may enable the recovery of evolutionary, moral meaning in the event of bio-death.

END NOTES:

- 1 Capital punishment remains extensively in force; in some communities – e.g. Oklahoma, U.S.A. – state executions are witnessed by selected individuals other than the officiating personnel. These other parties may include individuals who have been victims, or family of victims, of the prisoner. I have found no developed theology that challenges this on the grounds of its contribution to corrosive dis-innocence.
- 2 As for example with the Soviet Gulag system and Nazi concentration camps.
- 3 This is equally true of the intention in long term imprisonment.
- 4 In the Middle Ages, the proposition of Purgatory was occasioned as a period of purification.
- 5 "On Suicide" Time magazine 25/11/1966, pp. 48-49.
- 6 This contrasts both with the majority of traditional African belief, as discussed earlier, and also with the beliefs of Islam – *vide* Eklund (1941). It does conform to Parmenides's claim 'Being is or it is not' – *vide* L. Dupré (1993).
- 7 All are from the BCP – this remains the essential legal, authorised form in England for public worship and pastoral ministry, to which the 2000 ordering of Common Worship (by licence) is subordinate. (The emphases in the following quotations are mine.)
- 8 Dante's *Inferno* being a widely influential example; others are to be found in the liturgical rubrics of the English Prayer Books of 1552 & 1662.
- 9 Later he revised his belief in this; a significant shift entirely ignored by later theologians.
- 10 By this is meant that God would have to repetitively commit his act of forgiveness, in order to respond to human requests to be forgiven. The Cross is held to be the point at which the meaning of forgiveness has become changed - it marks an evolutionary point in the capacity of the Cosmos, and of human Personhood, to love cognately and iridescently *together with* God.
- 11 T.S. Elliot 'The Dry Salvages', second stanza, The Four Quartets, line 45.
- 12 "Unfair" in that if God is omnipotent, knowing the heart of every person, and desiring their good, he should prevent their wrongdoing. The proposition ignores the gift of freedom to choose, and its concomitant relational involvement in responsibility.
- 13 By this is meant physical and organic structure as contrasted to the numinous.
- 14 The major theological development of the Middle Ages.
- 15 Celebration of the Eucharist was also banned.
- 16 However, this prayer retains the understanding of separation of sheep and goats at the Second Coming – Matt.25:31-46
- 17 The issue of election dominates Reform theology and it is beyond the purpose of this thesis to engage the arguments advanced in the voluminous writings on the subject. In referring to the well expounded doctrine of election, the intention is to contrast the freedom of evolutionary development with the limitations inherent in a pre-determined process.
- 18 The identification of *community* as synonymous with belief is one of Gittings' (1984) most significant and persistent themes.
- 19 As explicit in the High Priestly Prayer, Jn.17.
- 20 In coining the phrase "rites of passage", Van Gennep intended a description of identity changes in *social* status. These, he suggested, followed a three-stage process embracing *disengagement* from the previous status, a *transitional period* to learn aspects of a new identity, leading to final *reincorporation* into new status. This is not what is meant by the wording of the Credal dogmatic concerning Jesus "who died, was buried and on the third day arose again..."
- 21 These are variously expressed in Paul's first letter to Corinth, the Apostolic Creed, and discussed by Kelley (1973)

²² The nature of God is perfect love, innocent of all but absolute love that creates and sustains life-ness.

²³ Mk.1:10-11; Matt.3:16-17; Lk.3:22.

²⁴ Extract from "Funerals", Church of England website:
<http://www.cofe.anglican.org/lifeevents/funerals> accessed 16/6/09

Chapter 9

TOWARDS A NEW PASTORAL RESPONSE TO MEANING IN PERSONHOOD OF RELATIONAL IDENTITY

The preceding chapters have considered bio-death as a moral and evolutionary event, the significance of which is uniquely specific to meaning and purpose within the cosmos of God, and to Personhood located within Creatureliness. Central to this has been a consideration of Meaning in the death and resurrection of Jesus as Son of Man, and of whether that meaning finds expression in the contemporary language and praxis of institutionalised Christian churches. These issues have been considered from four perspectives.

Relational identity:

The nature of humanness is defined as Personhood of moral relational identity, to which bio-form is intrinsic but not in itself what defines Person. This construct offers a viable alternative to the anthropological language of 'body/soul', and the dualism these terms establish as comprising the nature of human beings. In that it does not presuppose or require the limitation of relational identity to the life-ness of its material bodily form, it allows also for the greater understanding of meaning in the evolution, within the

cosmos of God, of self-conscious, morally relational human Personhood and the significance of bio-death as adjunctive to that.

This thesis suggests three essential characteristics by which human beings are uniquely defined and endowed: *moral personhood of relational identity, freedom to make choice and the necessity to receive and give love – that is, to be known*. It suggests that each of these is a teleological sign of the relational journey into discovery, understanding and participation in God's creativeness. It suggests that this is the purpose for human Personhood whose identity evolves from the vital Breath blown *into* a creature to form Person who is relational to God and the cosmos (Gen.1:26-2:7) and freely able to cognately express moral relationality. This construct is consonant with that of biblical narratives in both Testaments. (Gen.2 and Jn.17) The Hebrew scriptures represent that the reduction or removal of any or all of these characteristics drastically alters the Personhood and relational identity of human beings. The consequence of King Nebuchadnezzar being driven from among men is a model of Creatureliness without Personhood:

“[He] ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws...” (Dan.4:32-33b)

The New Testament accounts of the resurrected Jesus concern the bestowal of new life-ness to his Created identity and Being-ness. His Personhood of moral relational identity retains its form, but in structurally different *appearance*.¹ There exists no conclusive reason why the inaugural

sign of this could not have been the absence of Jesus' bio-body from the tomb,² because the reality of relational identity extends beyond empirical boundaries. This does not deny the pertinence of Gareth Jones's assertion that the bodily resurrection of Jesus 'is not a linguistic question.' (1996, p.45) However, it remains true of the substance of relationality that it is never summarised or concluded in a single characteristic or sign – and therefore cannot be contained empirically. The texture of its meaning is to be found in the inter-responsiveness of its participants; as such, the narrative of the empty tomb is that Jesus' story is not finished.

Bio-death as evolutionary:

The meaning of bio-death is that it is evolutionary to the life-ness of moral relational identity, the evidence for, and nature of which, was displayed in Jesus' resurrected being. Central to this meaning is that the unity of Jesus' relational identity³ exists entirely in new life-ness. It is not just that he appears among the disciples; it is that this new life-ness within his relational identity is characterised by the innocence of forgiven-ness. This is the nature of the new Adam, the transcended Person: "The old has passed away...the new has come." (2Cor.5:17) The resurrection of Jesus therefore requires that the story and enactment of Christian faith continuously reflects forgiveness and belovedness for the emergence in bio-life of the new Adam in the pilgrimage through bio-death of evolving Personhood and relational identity.

Immorality and forgiven-ness:

The *circumstances* of Jesus' bio-death are immoral, and invest Jesus with the knowledge of and association with dis-innocence. That is the immediate context of his prayer and enactment of forgiveness. The crucifying cohort of soldiers and the crowds pro-actively with them are forgiven "...because they do not know what they are doing..." (Lk.23:24); the thief who knows that he has immorally abused his life and that of others and that he can undo none of it, is forgiven. Both instances stand in contradiction to Jewish tradition and law of that time, as well as subsequent Christian theological development concerning the sequential relationship of repentance to forgiven-ness.

It follows that the language of Christian ministry and worship must progress out of the meaning in these absolutely completed acts of God in the incarnation, baptism, death and resurrection of Jesus. To do other must contradict their existence within the cosmos to the extent that their meaning is reversed into conditionalism. Evidence for this reversal having occurred lies in examples of historical language of Church liturgy that is consistent in its portrayal of necessary struggle to *obtain* forgiveness: hence people are

"to acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness...[and]confess them...to the end that we may obtain forgiveness of the same..." (BCP p.17);⁴

"Spare thou them, O God, which confess their faults..." (ibid. p.18);⁵

“He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel...” (ibid. p.18);⁶

“In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, Who for our sins art justly displeased.” (ibid. p.332)⁷

The integrity and mission of Christianity is intact only if it systematically speaks and acts from the context of forgiven-ness. That is to say God’s completed act of forgiveness establishes *forgiven-ness* as enabling of transcendence within the relational identity of Personhood. To press the analogy that Gareth Jones has used, forgiven-ness carries the same message as did the leaf that the dove returned with to Noah. A new possibility for life – a new ‘world’ of existence – is revealed.

Pilgrimage into and through bio-death:

Pro-active response to bio-death and dying, interpreting both as specific ontic occasions within personal relational identity as deriving in the Personhood of God, establishes a new environment for understanding and entering into bio-death. The idea of entering into bio-death rather than being overtaken by it ascribes pro-active expectation and meaning in the event and, consequently, intentional participation in its processes. Conversely the reality of being overtaken by bio-death results in various forms of reaction *against* its progression so that little relevance is seen in the Christian message of forgiven-ness and life after death. In this context, Christianity seems only to offer a palliative reaction to the attrition

of bio-death that, as Davies (1997) has suggested, produces only words against death.

Words 'against death' may be entirely described as active inertia for two reasons: they set Christian ministry as a series of futile reactions to soften the fear of bio-death, and they set Christian theology and belief as an elaborate speculation against the superior empirical evidence of the lifelessness and relationlessness in a corpse.

Re-forming Christian⁸ pastoral response as pilgrimage into and through bio-death:

The context of pilgrimage is significant both to the relational identity of Personhood and to Christian identity as personally explicit of baptismal relationship with God. As such, Christian pilgrimage may be described as a journey of relationship with God, in the context of human Personhood of relational identity; it is endemic to the community of faith, and lived out in the communities of human society, 'with the help of God'.

In this context, the character of Christian pilgrimage may be best understood as mirrored in the life of Jesus; its character is belovedness, its environment is incarnational. Pilgrimage is thus not an event external to the Person – it is 'my' event in community with God, pro-active not reactive, within the process of discovering *how* and *where* 'we' translate God into 'our' life-ness.⁹ In the story of Jesus, he does not place the

conclusion of life-ness or identity with mortal death,¹⁰ but within the provision of God. As such, pilgrimage may be understood as progressing the experience of Christian faith in which Personhood and relational identity, dying and the resurrection of relational identity may be understood differently from their secular representation.

Contemporary Western society has significantly isolated dying and bio-death itself from the mainstream of social existence, and in an age of growing medical prowess and transplant technology, mortality is regarded by many as an anachronism. These developments and perspectives affect the personal faith and praxis of overt and more nominal Christians alike, as much as they influence the life-views of a-theists. (Dupré 1981, p.14) To a degree they have stimulated in Christians, as much as unbelievers, a climate of reaction to the historic Christian doctrines concerning life after death and the Resurrection of Jesus that can be compared to the *de facto* widespread rejection by Roman Catholics of official Roman Catholic doctrine against all forms of contraception. In consequence, ecclesial teaching in this matter is regarded as of dubious integrity, and dismissed as irrelevant.¹¹

Of similar effect is the secular perspective on bio-death as the relationless conclusion of the physical processes of dying in which the faculties, through which relationality is expressed, collapse and empirically destroy Personhood itself. Against this the Christian claim of life after death is

regarded as incapable of rational meaning and is thus dismissed as irrelevant.

These are significant issues to be reckoned with in the reconstruction of Christianity's credibility in the matter of death and dying, and additionally so because Jesus did not die a gentle death of natural causes. He was violently executed, and in consequence, for many, his death is not easily comprehended as of any relevance to the majority circumstances in which bio-death naturally occurs, or should occur, and even less to the claimed love of God.¹² "Now where is your God?" (Ps.79:10)

This exposes a prominent reason why there needs to be a detailed Christian return to the meaning in Jesus' death and resurrection as its causes – serious though they are - are secondary to the outcome of God's presence within both. At the centre of the cross is the relationality of God to Jesus *and* the crucifying community whose intention is to destroy Jesus' Personhood through the denial of their mutual, relational identity. The achievement of the Son of Man does not deny God's immanent relationality and love for them, having trusted his own relational identity to be intact in the love of God: "Not my will but yours be done."¹³ In this context Jesus is a conscious pilgrim.

Jesus' pilgrim journey towards that complete realisation originates in sentient, relational trust, the fabric of which is his knowledge of

belovedness, settled and remaining.¹⁴ The context of all else occurring in his life, death and resurrection is the dialogue of his relational identity *as Jesus* with the Spirit who is Holy. The development of relational faith in Jesus is not a process of osmosis; it occurs in the context of an immanent presence – the authority of his baptism by John – and Jesus’ consent to entering its meaning. In this all the Gospels agree. The combination of consent and entering into, in that sequence, is essential to the systemic grounding of a pastoral relationship in which the intention is an authentic journey *into* bio-death openly within the community of faith.¹⁵ The point of Jesus’ coming, consenting to and entering the baptism of John is integral to the life experience of Jesus and the building up of the relational story of God with humankind.

The sequence is also graphically illustrated in the story of Ruth in her commitment to Naomi: “I will not stop following you; where you go I will go...Where you die I will die...” (Ruth 1:16ff) A.G. Auld comments that it is “Eminently suited as a vow of Christian pilgrimage to a master from whom we shall not be separated...” (1984, p.263ff) This is also a story that models the commitment of God to the Creature-Person of his image for, in Jesus, God is saying to humankind, *‘Where you are I will be; where you ‘lodge’ – where you find your securities – I will be content to be there; where you find relationality, I will accept that too; what gods you make in your life I will respect for the sake of loving you.’* And most scandalous to the populist notion of God’s morality, “Where you die I will die.”

The Passiontide hymn "*Ride on Ride on in Majesty*"¹⁶ in the poetic beauty of its words represents "the angel-squadrons of the sky" as looking down "with sad and wondering eyes", and the Father on his "Sapphire throne" as expectant of his "anointed Son"; this is not a portrayal of the God who will die with us where we die, with all the risk that it implies.

In every sense, the place where Jesus dies is as brokenly immoral as the interior and exterior environment of the prodigal son. It was into the environment of lostness that God sent his Son to accept "identity and solidarity with prodigal humanity." In this, God identifies that "The goal of human life is not death, but resurrection". (K Barth 1958 p.157ff) At Calvary, Jesus dies at the hands of men; "God allows himself to be edged out of the world and onto the cross" (D. Bonhoeffer 1959, p122) for the sake of Man's true destiny. We are reminded that God becomes helpless by choice, and Man is helpless because he cannot be any other. Jesus' actions at the Cross make visible the root of meaning in forgiveness as inaugurating an evolutionary environment for new capacity in the relational identity of every Person to consent to receiving God's renewing of their life-ness at the place where they lose life-ness - where they die.

The personal, consensual realization of forgiven-ness interprets the nature of faith relationality into pilgrimage *into* the transcending evolution of Being-ness, and ultimately the consent to enter into the bio-death of their bio-relational identity, trusting the resurrection-sign of new life-ness and

God's purpose. It is essential that neither point (consent and entering) in the sequence is presumed or hastened,¹⁷ as in the story of Jesus it was not. He too experienced transcending relationality in the meaning of God's belovedness, in the context of his own consent to allow – to enter into - its unfolding.¹⁸

Christian pastoral engagement with the perspective of Jesus as pilgrim *into* (rather than victim of) death is central to any reconstructed understanding of entering into the processes of bio-death. In this, revisiting the narrative of baptism as an indelibly intimate sign of 'God-with-me to be always-with-me in the place where I am' connects that vitality with the resurrection-sign of Personhood and relational identity beyond bio-death. In so doing however, the Christian pastoral story cannot extend the narrative witness to Jesus' Person and embodied relational identity beyond what is explicitly attested in the Gospels, and implicit in St Paul's witness to the Corinthian church: "...he appeared also to me." (1Cor.15:8)

Collectively these assert the ontic character and form of Jesus' relational identity beyond bio-death as consistent with that in his human Creatureliness, but also that he is transformed in capacity. He is Jesus, but he is not the same as he was before the resurrection. Jones comments that Jesus "is risen in order to be subsequently ascended...thus [revealing] God's will for humanity and the world." (1996, p.43)

All Christian ministry arises in the expression of God's purpose and its meaning within Personhood and relational identity. This thesis has argued however that Christian ministry has not sufficiently brought the deep meaning and purpose of forgiven-ness into the arena of human fears of death and dying. The supplementary argument in this is that Christian ministry has been to opposite effect, and that this has significantly contributed to the progressive acceleration of dis-innocent scepticism and the rejection of God; the "desert of modern atheism" (Dupré 1991, p.335) How may this be addressed?

Initial priority:

An initial priority must therefore be to restore death and dying to the public domain *within the community of Christian faith itself*,¹⁹ as being non-hostile to the life-ness of Personhood. That means going far beyond a bland reconciling to the facts of death and dying in the sense that death brings relief from the sufferings of this world, but is otherwise unfortunate. What is necessary to recover is the comprehending, accepting belief that death and dying are as intrinsic to the relational identity of Personhood and to the purposes of God's revealed love in Jesus as they are to bio-life.

Within Christianity this requires addressing the radically different doctrines historically held concerning the ontotheological nature of forgiven-ness. The subtleties of these are multi-layered; one aspect is demonstrated in the section on Funerals posted on the website of the Church of England,

and concerning prayers for the deceased. Both Catholic and Evangelical positions demonstrate core disjunction in the understanding of forgiveness.²⁰ The belief that Christ continues, beyond our death to “cleanse us of our sins and bring us into the closer presence of God” confuses forgiveness with *sanctification* - the process of growing in grace²¹ that is ignited in the *personal knowledge* of forgiveness. A consequence of this confusion is that it dampens the exuberance of new beginning with its subliminal message of continual laundering of the same, old, garment. The essential, transcending, relational identity of the new Adam implicitly characterised by growing in the grace of complete unity with God, as expressed in the words of Jesus (Jn.17:17-26), intentionally forms in bio-life-ness. Indeed is central to the meaning of Jesus being fully God and fully Human.

The belief that eternal life “depends on decisions of faith taken in this world” removes forgiveness from the Cross and locates it beyond the Day of Judgement. This fundamentally, immediately and inextricably alters the meaning in Jesus’ prayers and actions at Calvary – they become expressions of intention (possibly even of hope). They do not denote the completed and realised, unilateral acts of God – the love that covers a multitude of sins (1Pet.4:8) - effective for all human Persons. On this basis, there is not any assured knowledge of forgiveness – salvation - until the outcome of God’s Judgement on each Person on the basis of their individual decisions of faith taken in this world, is revealed at the Day of Judgement.

The divided integrities of both perspectives fundamentally affect the conveyance of meaning. Even within the community of faith, the possibility in Christianity is reduced to an expression of hope and loving one's neighbour in faith; but not as conveying any substantial, different, and immediately accessible meaning for, or transcendent process within, human Persons in this world and beyond.

It is the loss of transcendent process that ultimately and deeply has altered and confined the meaning in death to its empirical presence: "Death is defined by the physical, by a body ceasing to function; and funerals are defined by the need to dispose of that body..." (T. Walter 1997, p.203)

It has been proposed that pastoral ministry to the dying gains the widest benefit when it enables the community at large to share in the pilgrimage of the dying person - and for the dying person to know that. In the case of James, the Christian social customs of Central Africa²² normatively allowed for the church community to know of his illness and that it would be terminal. As with any situation of illness intercessions for his recovery were explicit and frequent within his and many other congregations.²³ In this dimension ministry was open and extended,²⁴ but of mono-dimensional focus upon his physical recovery. At the end, prayers for his dying were that he might be peaceful. The traditional and sincere theology of his Church was that he was 'being called home', but in the sense of a

summons rather than pilgrimage. In all of this there was reflected entirely orthodox and sincere Western Protestant theology and pastoral practice.

For all involved in these intercessions, including James himself, there was no sense in which it would have been Christianly appropriate to have considered prayer and preparation 'into and through' death, nor of the dimension of pilgrimage together to the event itself, and there existed no liturgical structure within his Church by which that could have been overtly commenced. In consequence, though there was considerable Christian prayer and ministry surrounding James, there was no means or pastoral mechanism for reflection, sharing and exploring meaning in death. Death in a direct sense, remained the 'elephant in the room'; there was no sense of a community united in companionship with James on a journey into his dying and death.

In general, response to the question 'For what are you praying?' the answer was *"For God to allow him to live..."* When it was clear that James was close to death, the question was re-framed: 'What are you now praying for?' the most frequent answer was, *"We do not know what to pray for, because God is not answering; but still we must pray."*

With James himself, consideration of dying and death as pilgrimage in the context of forgiven-ness had altered his perspective on bio-death theologically and interiorly. He recognised however that it was not possible

to share that change with his fellow Christians. His home congregation regarded his death, at least in part, as a sign of their spiritual failure: "*We must try to understand how to pray better.*" This is possibly a commonly held though unvoiced feeling amongst Christians in Britain and elsewhere. However, "Faith is not about sets of ideas but about ways of being that may involve some element of surrender." (Stanworth 2005, p.223)

The experience with James demonstrates that it is not sufficient for death and dying to be brought out of the isolation of applied Western-style privacy. Death and dying are visible in African culture, but that did not enable those committed to prayer and ministry to James to see or feel themselves as a band of pilgrims *together with James* with bio-death as his destination, purpose and faith commitment.

The recognition of community as necessary to holistic dying is essential in the restoration of death and dying *within the community of Christian faith itself*. The recognition of dying as intrinsic to mortal, transcending Beingness, and as inspirational to the journey of faith pilgrimage into and through bio-death, is then essential to the restoration of death and dying in the public domain. The birth of new Adam commences in this life.

Christian faith may best relate to this pilgrimage journey as inspirational and relational, optimistic of new life-ness and dimension in Personhood and relational identity, and to the cosmic meaning in Resurrection.

Sacramental community:

“To be concerned with the sacramental...is to be concerned with interpreting human experience at its deepest level, a level which addresses the whole person not simply the intellect.” (Stanworth 2005, p.168)

The relational identity and nature of the community of Christian faith within the cosmos of God who is the source and Being of life, is sacramental. Every expression of Christian ministry reflects the identity of Jesus in its living story of immanent pilgrimage²⁵ in the domain of the old Adam, towards new life-ness in the innocence of resurrected Personhood and relational identity of the new Adam.

The most complete expression of pastoral ministry to the dying is realised in placing each encounter with bio-death close to the centre of community life and worship, where each Person within the community of faith can add their consent to its occurrence and the Christian hope within it and become a companion in pilgrimage towards its realisation.

In the recognition of dying as intrinsic to moral, transcending Being-ness, the Person in whose relational identity the process and experience are occurring is affirmed in their sense of belovedness, forgiven-ness and meaning to God. In that is the deepest meaning of moral Personhood and relational identity.

Many actions – such as planting a tree - express the presence and hope of life-ness. To elect to be a companion is another; that Abraham can be called the “friend of God” (Jas.2:28) places God in the role of companion. Psalm 23 reflects the security of knowing the companionship of God in the shadow of death – because it has been God’s choice to be there together with the Psalmist. Jesus invites his disciples to come with him as his community of friends;²⁶ he and they will by choice be together. Jesus becomes the thief’s companion to paradise - an action that demonstrates choice.

Companionship is, then, enacted commitment that fully justifies the description given by Stanworth of sacramental activity as being:

“concerned with interpreting human experience at its deepest level, a level which addresses the whole person not simply the intellect.” (2005, p.168)

The implications of this are significant for any reconstruction of pastoral ministry to the dying, some of which were demonstrated in the structure of ministry to Pat from the onset of the terminal period of her cancer, through her funeral and beyond amongst the congregation.²⁷ Of these, the most constant pastoral consideration was to enable as many as possible to play an active role in companionship with Pat and one another.

Inclusivity:

The conduct of ministry to Pat was based on the view that the whole gathering of the baptised is a sacramental community in whose members

rests the authority of the Holy Spirit to minister in the name of Jesus, and to mutually and pro-actively be participants in that ministry, as appropriate to each Person. In the context of ministry to the dying, this represents an example of ministry *within* the Christian body breaking out and restoring death and dying to the mainstream of visible Christian integrity and *seelsorge*,²⁸ and each Person within the congregation becoming a *seelsorger*. For the clergy and those licensed to minister publicly, this offered the opportunity to abandon the mantle of 'specialist' ministry as well as the desires and habits of control. Simultaneously, it affirmed amongst all the baptised²⁹ the authenticity of their prayer, hope, insight and value. (If this begins to seem hopelessly idealistic or impossible to undertake because 'there simply isn't the time', that can be no bad thing for it must force the whole Christian community to confront the habit of clericalising and regulating public ministry into dying and death.)

At the heart of Christian pilgrimage into and through each Person's dying is learning *how* to inclusively interpret and represent its Christian meaning in ways that are relevant to each situation, without the imposition of doctrinal caveats, or pretence to certainty or expertise: "Where you go I will go...Where you die I will die..." (Ruth 1:16-17) witnesses to commitment and also to change. As the world changes so do the immediate contexts of Christian theology. This necessitates consenting and entering-in to difference; and for Christian ministry to reflect God. Jesus expresses this by his new commandment: "Love one another..." (Jn.15:12)

As ministry to Pat continued, most members of her congregation grew closer to one another, more prayerful, more seeking greater knowledge of Christian faith, more strengthened in the knowledge of Belovedness and forgiven-ness, more open in sharing of their own fears of death, more confident to abandon traditions and models of the past, and significantly more willing and able to talk to friends and strangers about Christian faith. All these expressions were in fact mirroring the character of Pat's own faith development, and were directly encouraged by her example. It is probable that none of these responses would have emerged if there had been no 'mark' within the community of the congregation to describe Pat's approach to her bio-death as a pilgrimage. To have merely given notice of her change of health, in order to focus particular attention on intercession for her, would have changed nothing. What enabled the change was the meaningful linking of dying with pilgrimage, and marking it within the life of the faith community in the context of the Eucharist. In this way, Pat's dying became the *religious* concern of the congregation.

Whatever dimensions the pastoral ministry of Christian Churches has historically extended to their members, the evidence of canonical regulation, liturgical language and the Christian iconography of death usually point negatively – or at best ambivalently – to the judgement it heralds: " It (death) is necessary, and therefore it is not intolerable... It is a law of God, it is a punishment of our sins, and it is the constitution of our nature..." (Taylor 1847, p.99)³⁰

The idea of forgiven-ness as the basis for pilgrimage into and through bio-death, and for both as being sacramental expressions of the immanence of God, has been lost far back. So too has been an understanding that death and dying are not simply to do with the Person in whose life-ness they are occurring.

Billings makes the point: "Dying is something we do for ourselves; we cannot ask someone to die on our behalf."³¹ (2002, p.39) The reality is also that dying and death are considered things we do *by ourselves* – they are a private matter.³² In this context, dying and death can never be part of the dynamic of the *community* of faith, and this isolation also contributes significantly to the loss of their meaning; expressed by him as "the end of the religious death". (p.46)

Paradoxically, the idea that dying and death concern the individual alone is reversed by one of the most influential prayers offered at the time of death:

"Go forth, O Christian Soul, upon thy journey from this world... In communion with the holy Apostles, Confessors and Martyrs, and all the blessed Saints, and aided by Angels and Archangels and all the armies of the heavenly host..." (South African Prayer Book 1954, p.470)

The imagery of the community of the baptised, with the mythological creatures of heaven gathering to accompany a Soul departing this life becomes seriously attenuated if there is no community of similar

companions beforehand within the earthly community of the baptised. To assemble the earthly community of faith as a similar pilgrim body of accompanying companions is, then, to restore dying and bio-death as religious experiences within that body, and because the Christian faith community is in the world, the action is evangelistic.

In the case of Pat that experience was initiated at the centre-point of the congregation's worship as a holy communion, the Eucharist.³³ At this gathering, and within the context of the liturgy itself, Pat consented and entered her pilgrimage journey into death. In response, she was anointed at the altar by her priest and representative members of the congregation with everyone-else standing and joining in prayer.³⁴ The inclusion to the liturgy was entitled "Thanksgiving for life and prayer for the future", and was in two parts. The first, offering thanksgiving for her life, concluded with a prayer she had written for the occasion; the second was explicit of her coming bio-death and included the anointing.

The text (Appendix I) is given to illustrate the combination of language and action as an example of inclusive, contemporary recovery of religious meaning in dying and bio-death. It expresses the necessity for companionship through the processes of dying. It conceals nothing, but holds everything in the context of the immanence of God. Given the opportunity afterwards to discuss this process, most of those who had been present believed it was both appropriate and effective, but that they

would not have known where to start. Their response supports Billings' suggestion that "teaching about the Christian understanding of death is either not being well done or is not being done at all" and also that "it is no longer enough simply to reassert old orthodoxies." (2002, p.125)

The central, inclusive reality of death and dying is that every Person will have the experience. One of the immediate issues to emerge in discussion following Pat's service was that Christian dialogue on dying and death should be multi-layered – that is, presented and engaged in ways that are accessible to everyone.³⁵

The impact of Pat's service upon the immediate social community – much of its detail was circulating in local discussion by the following day – was that the local community felt included in that most peoples' hopes and fears about death and dying were felt to have been addressed by the Church in ways they themselves would have wished for. A corollary to this was that many expressed satisfaction that *"it sounded real, not just religion."*

Compassion:

One of the universal presentations of dying is weakness of physical body, of mind and of intellect also. These symptoms easily evoke sympathetic, caring response to the Person, to the degree that one can be blinded to the vital reality of reflective, relational identity that is uniquely Personhood.

This thesis has proposed that the unique distinction of human Personhood is moral identity characterised by reflective relationality as being the ontological basis of recognition and acceptance of self, and the relational consequences of individual decisions. In this representation, attenuation of the means by which human beings relate to self, others and all else is threatening to Being-ness itself.

The process of bio-death involves significant changes physically and mentally that reduce human relational ability – for example, the void of recognition that commonly occurs in the progress of Alzheimer’s disease.³⁶ Without the means to give effect to relationality,³⁷ a Person cannot express their Being-ness, and equally cannot be shared with, cannot be ‘a living being’³⁸ in the social community of other Persons.

In this is the deep significance of loss of faculties; relational identity itself becomes incommunicable and in that condition, progressively un-relatable. The whole of *immediate Personhood* is affected by the eclipse of life that attenuates the spiritual and all physical currencies of reflective relational consciousness, expression and community.³⁹ In this respect, Jesus’ cry from the cross “why have you forsaken me”⁴⁰ reflects the crisis of un-Being-ness, the erosion of Personhood, so that what it consists in – moral relational identity – is denied expression or recognition, rather than it evidencing a crisis of faith. By this stage on the Cross, in both physical and moral dimensions, Jesus is rejected *by* men, and denied recognition by the

public; this prevented him from relating to them meaningfully and parallels what is experienced in the progressive debilitation of the dying and their loved ones.

Jesus' cry articulates bereavement in its fuller meaning; it is the expression of experiencing disarticulate Personhood. It is possible through interpretation of the cry from the cross in a narrow context of atonement theology,⁴¹ to radically deflect attention from the significance of God being known to the cosmos in the Creature-Persons of his image, that "... the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." (Rom.8:19) At another level, this is a reminder that philosophically, Being consists in more than existing *per se*, and requires to be expressed in the community of Being-ness that arises out of the immanence of God. At this deeper experiential, moral, and seriously impacting level, it is to do with meaning in the nature of Human as the Creature-Person of the image of God. The consequence for the human Jesus of human rejection, and his inability to express his relational identity to them, is the manifestation of apparent forsaken-ness by God himself; it bears upon the meaning in human Personhood of moral relational identity within the cosmos of God, but **not** that God has forsaken Jesus.⁴² Likewise this is true for all of humanity.

This suggests the deep meaning in all the processes of dying to be that Person becomes bereft of Being-ness, of making or receiving the vital

expressions of Personhood. Pastoral response in these situations requires compassion embracing those deep consequences of an inability to express Personhood; a situation beyond that which Stanford points to, where "...there is no ground underfoot and when all life's familiar landmarks have shifted..." (2005, Preface) Stanford's perception describes a consequence that is external to the deep significance of relational incapacity. It is not just that all previous means, physical and intellectual that are *expressions* of relationality, are progressively no longer functional; it is that they are of Personhood *itself* being eclipsed. That which *is* the Personhood of moral relational identity is eclipsed as Person and becomes no longer able to give or receive of essential Being-ness which is the synthesis of *life-ness*⁴³ and the moral *support*⁴⁴ of life.

It is, as Sheppy describes, that both biotic and zoetic life are coming to their mortal ending that is also a calling "into a new order of being." (2003, pp.41-42) This thesis suggests that resurrection consists in new life-ness ('a new order of being'), being given by God to the Personhood of relational identity.⁴⁵

It is axiomatic that identity is an abstract concept if it is invisible – if it has no substantive recognisable presence. Resurrection of life-ness must, therefore be the renewal of life-ness within the unique, once-created⁴⁶ Person of moral relational identity and presence. The significance of human denial of moral relational identity is, then, to prevent the imaging of God;

to deny both his Immanence and transcendent Being. One consequence of this is to fail to perceive in the story of Jesus that transcendent evolution is the *telos* in Personhood, to which the vital sign of resurrection points. This is also descriptive of bereavement as the condition of uncertainty, and points to the need to consider bereavement as *primarily located in the one who is dying* - and extending beyond the dying person to their community of family and friends - *because* the processes of bio-death progressively extinguish the present bio-life of Personhood of moral, reflective, relational identity.

This thesis suggests that material bodily form reflects and expresses identity, but that the phenomenon of Personhood itself does not originate in its existential Creatureliness. This attaches a different significance to bio-death as the ending of physical Creatureliness, but not the extermination of Personhood of moral relational identity which originates in the authority of its Creator, the Holy Spirit "the Lord, the giver of Life".⁴⁷

Religious language and traditions have been demonstrated as organically linking dis-innocence and sin to the corruption of death; whereas dying and death are to science and medicine, the cause and product of the degradation of matter. Medical response to death and dying has been (both clinically and through psychotherapy) the development of palliative care systems that relieve pain and enable Persons to reach some acceptance of their mortality. Both responses support the dignity of Person

but do not of themselves address the spiritual issues arising out of Personhood of moral relational identity.⁴⁸

Contemporary secular response is to attach no practical meaning to God in the environment of everyday life.⁴⁹ In this, morality, or moral dimension, is reduced to the subjective, and awareness of the nature of Personhood is obscured through the denial of moral, reflective, relational identity.⁵⁰

Religious response has been to continuously 'awaken' human beings to their corrupted nature, and to attach access to salvation as progressing out of their admission of guilt, and subsequent repentance. This has nurtured guilt and concealed the nature and phenomenon of salvation as the unilateral act of a God whose will is to love.

Lloyd has made the point that

"...people in the late twentieth century continue to experience death and bereavement as certainties, whilst their 'helpers and guiders' are fraught by uncertainties of identity, role and task." (1995, p.2)

A single issue suggests itself from this: The uncertainties of role, identity and task may arise from either ignorance or denial of what is transcendently involved in dying and beyond.

The importance of this for pastoral response is that the processes of dying, and bio-death itself call for compassion, and a clear recognition of the

differences between sympathy and compassion.⁵¹ In the context of ministry, 'sympathy' describes the responsive reaction to a condition of need, whilst remaining external to it. 'Compassion' is both recognition of and entering into the circumstance of the need as a companion within the experience.

In the context of the pastoral considerations that this thesis describes in the ministry to Pat, the congregation became a compassionate body of pilgrim faith through their consent to enter with her into her pilgrimage into bio-death. Within, and together with, that community she could be weak as well as strong; challenged in faith through pain or an inability to pray; at times confused and afraid, at others, radiant and sure of her belovedness.

Amongst all, there was the experience of paradox – encounter with the presence of God and transcendent love, and the existential realities of moving vulnerably towards bio-death on the basis of faith not dogma; the practice of "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Heb.11:1) This suggests that compassionate ministry requires of its pilgrims their recognition that a Person "can die at peace only when [they] could have continued to live at peace with others," (Jungel 1975, p114) and the courage to remain consenting to cognate trust in the immanence of God.

It also raises serious questions concerning the teaching and understanding of baptism, as it is from this commitment that all Christian life experience and ministry intentionally proceeds. Discussion of the various reforms that may be required in the Western Churches regarding pastoral care and responsibility in baptism is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, pastoral development of baptismal identity in genuine on-going discovery and understanding of the meaning in the life of Jesus, and participation *within* Christian faith and ministry, must constitute a priority.

The examples given of pilgrimage into dying and bio-death suggest that human encounter with dying and bio-death in this context enable an altogether different and inclusive pastoral response, in which the story of Jesus and the story of contemporary Person may be drawn into a synthesis of experience, need and discovery.

Together with reconsideration of 'Human' as consisting in Person of moral, relational identity, the pastoral examples of ministry suggest that there exist real answers to the crisis of mortality, and that their further development and application are central to human well-being and Christian faith and mission.

A catechumenate⁵² or a *koinonia* of the Dying?

The recognition of catechumenate bodies is well established in Christianity, but entirely within the environment of preparation of adults for initiation

(baptism and confirmation), and of those converting from other faiths. In a broad application of the term, couples gathered together for marriage preparation could be described as a catechumenate body.

There is no history of gathering people into a *koinonia* (fellowship) of the dying, as distinct from Persons collectively preparing for martyrdom.⁵³ In previous times when dying and death were more visible within society, or when religious death was customary, it is possible that what is here being suggested was in various ways accomplished through more integrated Christian activities. It is however doubtful. One reason for this would be that, until medical advances in the last century, dying was seldom a prolonged affair and allowed little time available for extended preparation *in the context of dying*. It is probable that this reality dictated that in formal pastoral ministry to the dying, there has always been a more prominent focus on the period immediately culminating in death - the last rites. However it is more likely that *confining* ministry to the dying to the administration of last rites invariably arose in consequence of the Rite commencing with confession of sins, and their absolution - which could be administered by only the ordained clergy (and remains so).

The general observations reflected in chapter 1 suggest that Christian churches should now consider specific study courses on dying and death in the context of general pastoral teaching, and also establishing fellowships for the dying that would in effect draw those in terminal conditions

together as a catechumenate. It is probable that there exists within the general body of Christians – at least in England – a considerable reservoir of tolerance for this development in Christian ministry; what would be required are a serious reconsideration of all dualistic language and metaphors in the Christian teaching on the nature of Man, and a radical re-focussing on the meaning in Jesus' manner of death, his prayers and actions on the cross, and the resurrection appearances, in the context of his entire life and teaching.

In such a process, however, it would be essential that Christian ministers and communities recognise that the historic approach of 'one size fits all' must be abandoned. There are radically different needs in ministry to the dying – such as the status and nature of the Person's faith or, frequently now, of no single faith – that must influence how Christian ministry into bio-death be conducted. The absence of religious denominational belief⁵⁴ does not alter the individual's Being-ness as Person of relational identity nor the ontic root of identity as in the Person of God. In the understanding of Personhood presented in this thesis, the restoration of innocence in resurrection cannot be presumed to be withheld by God, because they are not a baptised Christian.⁵⁵

The success of the "fellowship of the dying"⁵⁶ conducted from an English parish during the 1980s, supports further development of such groups as part of parish or congregational programmes. A simple course on the

Christian meaning in dying and bio-death, with suggestions on praying for oneself and others could be conducted in various ways. With the 'Group of Five' each person had a copy, and its content was discussed when each was visited weekly (if possible⁵⁷). The term 'pilgrimage' gave a description to what they were embarked upon, and also imparted a sense of rolling purpose. Significantly, their inability to physically meet together appeared to intensify their encouragement and caring for one another. All reported they found the opportunity to discuss their coming death in a spiritual context had answered deep concerns and uncertainties that they would never otherwise have been able to voice. All saw their fellowship and companionship in dying as of equal practical value to the medical support and counsel given by their doctors. Their spouses and/or families expressed similar views, significantly even when they personally had no Christian belief.

This experiment demonstrated the value and practicality in such pastoral outreach, but again highlighted that the particular ministry into dying and death should commence as soon as possible after diagnosis of a terminal outcome. Ministry to the dying, late into their journey towards bio-death, lacks the necessary time for deeper *koinonia* to evolve.

Some difficulties highlighted:

This fellowship came into being in consequence of those dying having little meaningful contact with their professed body of faith (with the exception of

Helen), yet all having been spoken of as needing spiritual help. This is not an uncommon experience in parish ministry, but in responding there is always the difficult balance between inappropriate 'religious' intrusion into a normatively secular lifestyle and too little, superficial contact.

Developing a fellowship of *like* sufferers, with non-traditional⁵⁸ Christian input, and the majority of engagement and discussion conducted entirely between the members, showed that effective Christian ministry can be brought to people on the periphery of visible Christian involvement. However, their distancing (with the exception of Helen) from any *community of faith*, and that they were nominally of different denominations, meant that it was impossible to inaugurate and develop their pilgrimage in the same way as was done with Pat (and ideally could be the pattern).

Two issues emerged in this. Firstly, that those comprising the fellowship needed to be encouraged in their own spiritual connections – to relate to themselves and one another as members of the community of the baptised, *and also* to recognise that their small fellowship was their actual and authentic community of faith. Adjunctively, they needed extra encouragement and help to see themselves as able to authentically pray and care for one another, although not active church-goers. It was significant that they desired to pray and care for one another but were

inhibited initially because they had had historically no model of non-clerical ministry.

Secondly, the ambivalent feelings of members of their immediate and close families emerged especially once the fellowship had become really established. There were concerns expressed in two families that their relative was being drawn away from them when there was so little time left together; at various times in all the families there was concern that their relative was being *"given all sorts of false ideas about dying."* These concerns needed to be addressed as they arose.

Beyond the family situation, difficulty was encountered in two of the cases with staff from a leading cancer charity providing intensive home care. In both cases, hostility was expressed towards the dialogue of the fellowship in that they feared it was *"encouraging people to give up being positive about beating cancer"* - a reaction that justifies Lloyd's comments concerning the confusion surrounding ministry to the dying.

"...people in the late twentieth century continue to experience death and bereavement as certainties, whilst their 'helpers and guiders' are fraught by uncertainties of identity, role and task." (1995, p.21)

Re-examining bereavement:

It has been suggested that the onset of bereavement commences in consequence of present hope - and thus also future possibility - being

clouded or dissolved through relational incapacity, into perceived hopelessness. As such, bereavement is widely encountered through the life story of the Person and is readily recognised as significantly bearing upon the relational capacity of the Person in circumstances such as compulsory redundancy at work, or severe change such as the loss of a home. However, the recognition of bereavement occurring within the Person in the context of dying is more diffuse. The approaching end to bio-life is so different from other situations of loss, and to be dying is so overwhelming of bio-life-ness, that all attention is fixed upon the practicalities of caring for the dying. Ensuring their comfort and managing medicinal and palliative programmes, often in the context of a reluctance to admit the proximity of bio-death itself, can result in the experience of bereavement within the *dying* Person not being recognised for what it is.

It has been earlier suggested there are only two contexts in which bio-death occurs: as sudden in which eventuality the dialogue is centred only upon the survivors, and as anticipated over a period of time. This latter situation offers the possibility for earlier dialogue concerning dying and death that may engage all parties involved. The foregoing examples have all been of anticipated death; it is recognised that the character of pastoral response in such instances will be considerably different to that occasioned by unexpected death. However, whether sudden or slower, bio-death occurs in the context of dis-innocence in the Personhood of moral relational identity. From the example of Jesus' reaction to dis-innocence at his death,

bereavement of relational identity is shown to be a significant feature of the dying process. The meaning in the cry from the cross (Mark 15:34) is that the Personhood of relational identity is significantly eroded in consequence of dis-innocence, and, eventually, in the inability of biological form to sustain life-ness beyond a finite term, Personhood is deprived of relationality at bio-death.

These processes suggest that bereavement is primarily located within the Person in whom the accelerating processes of dying are located; the meaning to Personhood in each progression of dying is the disjunction of relationality, and deprivation of relational identity. That is, the *dying* Person is becoming bereaved of bio-life in identity and helpless to maintain dignity. In this context, the compassion of a surrounding pilgrim community may in their companion journey towards bio-death, protect and soothe the fading bio-presence in the reassurance of love and protection of dignity. Dying is often an undignified process, in which compassion is most necessary, to carry and cover the vulnerable dying Person. Here the extended pastoral dimension of caring can replace lost dignity through the affirmation of remaining Personhood.

The relocation of bereavement as primarily operative within the life-ness of the *dying* Person offers new opportunity to address the needs of those who will remain. Amongst them it is usual to encounter both guilt and anger as they struggle with conflicting emotions of powerlessness to prevent dying

from occurring, and relief that they are not suffering the same reduction of life. When, following the bio-death of their loved one they in turn are traditionally described as 'the bereaved', and in this customary use of language (similar in African culture), set apart as those who have suffered all loss, it is most often very difficult to express their heartfelt relief that bio-death has ended suffering in their relative or friend. When, however, bereavement is understood as primarily located within the Person dying, demonstrated in their diminishing ability to express life-ness – to have a full capacity to live relationally – it becomes possible to draw family members into an equally vital pilgrim companionship around the dying Person, and become pro-active in ministry towards bio-death. In the context of professional home care and nursing, this dimension of involvement may be a vital element in the upbuilding of family community through an event that is frequently destructive of family cohesion and relationships.⁵⁹

Arising out of the given examples of restructured pastoral engagement with dying and bio-death, and the relocation of bereavement, the following questions were identified:

- Do family perceive the one dying to be experiencing bereavement?
- Do carers perceive the dying individual likewise, or simply as 'dying'?
- Do those involved allow_ their own emotions and responses to be influenced by the dying person; what do we allow or expect to receive ourselves in ministry *from* the dying?

In relocating the primary occurrence of bereavement as within the dying Person, the possibility of *receiving* ministry from that Person was demonstrated in the cases of Helen and Pat. In Pat's case particularly, her sharing of the meaning within her relational identity of the progressive loss of her faculties both informed and encouraged awareness of moral relational identity as Personhood and of bereavement as expressive of the reduction of its bio-life.⁶⁰

The foregoing has demonstrated the possibilities of a new pastoral response and Christian understanding of meaning in bio-death to be evolutionary to the Human Creature-Person of reflective Personhood of moral relational identity, pointing to the emergence within the cosmos of Homo sanctus.

Of this, the resurrection of Jesus reveals the transcendent capacity in Personhood. The three case examples have indicated this dimension to be capable of cogent encounter and expression in a pilgrimage approach to bio-death, anticipating the restoration of innocence to the once-created Personhood of relational identity through resurrection in new life.

END NOTES:

- ¹ To use the terms likeness or embodiment risks sustaining the focus on a bio-body as necessary to the existence of other than mythological life beyond this life; the tyranny of empiricism.
- ² Absolutist denial that it could have occurred concern the more fundamental rejection of the existence of an omnipotent God, or of a God at all.

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- 3 He is not spirit speaking without form.
- 4 Extract from the call to confession, the Order of Evening Prayer.
- 5 Extract from the general Confession, the Order of Evening Prayer.
- 6 Extract from the Absolution, the Order of Evening Prayer.
- 7 Extract from the opening prayer at the graveside, the Order of Burial of the Dead.
- 8 The context of this thesis is Christian pastoral theology. It recognises that Christian pastoral ministry must be available to those of other or no religious faith.
- 9 A good metaphor would be the translation of food from being *consumed* to being *incorporated into* bodily life-ness.
- 10 Mk.8:31; 9:31; 10:34. Lk.18:33; Jn.11:25-26
- 11 *vide* Dupré " [of] little or no practical bearing upon our lives." To some Christians of other denominations, the Curial position further reduces their view of Rome's Christian credibility.
- 12 M. Bloch's (1992) identification of violence as intrinsic to religious process is relevant to this.
- 13 Lk.22:2; Mk.14:36b; Matt.26:42
- 14 *vide* Jn.1:33a
- 15 Consent is of course necessary to each pastoral engagement; however its necessity is more significant within the ministry towards bio-death as, by definition, the available timespan is unlikely to be repeated, and there is such a body of confusing and errant historical obscurity to overcome.
- 16 Henry Hart Milman (1791 – 1868)
- 17 This bears directly on the common anxiety of Christians to bring about commitment to Jesus.
- 18 The narrative of the Gentile woman to whom Jesus at first refused ministry (Matt.15:22-28; Mk.7:25-29) illustrates the process of Jesus' own evolving recognition of meaning in the belovedness of God.
- 19 That is to include the whole body of the baptised, as well as clergy and those authorised to conduct public ministry.
- 20 However, praying for the dead is not inconsistent with the understanding of the Communion of Saints.
- 21 On the principle of Occam's razor, see Col.3:3-17 as interpreting the meaning of 'growing in grace'
- 22 This is also true of most sub-Saharan Africa cultures
- 23 As detailed in the case outline (chap.3), he was disturbed by the ceremonies conducted by Traditional Religionists, though unaware of the occasions on which they were held.
- 24 As is usual in Central Africa, prayer for him was taken up in other congregations and Christian denominations.
- 25 By this is meant the story of forgiven-ness and belovedness that is told to the whole cosmos in the Incarnation of the Son of Man.
- 26 *vide* Matt.4:19; Mk.1:17
- 27 Some might argue that the particular, favourable circumstances that enabled ministry to Pat to be developed were not representative of what is usually the case. The circumstances are not the significant factor; rather it is the reinterpretation of the meaning in Jesus prayers and actions at the cross, and the deep meaning in the sign of the resurrection.
- 28 (German) The cure of souls. From this, the term *seelsorger* describes one who brings that care to the sheep they are called to serve.
- 29 In Church-speak, designated 'the laity'

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- 30 Bishop Taylor's writings have been used because of the historical influence they have exerted on the spirituality of the Church of England and, to an extent, the wider Anglican communion.
- 31 Billings qualifies his comment as describing death as an event we cannot "postpone...or choose some alternative."
- 32 In recent years, the development of the hospice movement, and the influence of the ministry of people such as Dame Cicely Saunders, has brought new regard for the dignity of the dying, but not generally in the ways referred to concerning *accompanying* the dying into their bio-death.
- 33 The congregation had been previously told of Pat's medical diagnosis, and asked if they would be prepared to join in this way with Pat in pilgrimage into her bio-death. All had agreed.
- 34 All the children and teachers from Junior Church were present, and children were encouraged to come closer to see and hear better.
- 35 Pat and her husband had shared a period of preparation for dying and death that had focussed on pilgrimage.
- 36 Another example is solitary confinement. This remains the most destructive weapon of deliberate dehumanisation.
- 37 This is relevant to all circumstances of bio-death, but of entire immediacy when that death is sudden, such as in a road accident or catastrophic trauma.
- 38 De Chardin (1971, p.18) "Life is not an epiphenomenon, but the very essence of phenomenon."
- 39 Human Beings *are* more than the sum of what they eat.
- 40 Mk.15:34; Matt.27:46
- 41 That is to understand its meaning as revealing of Jesus' burden as the sacrificial victim of God's refusal to look upon sin.
- 42 Not that God has absented himself, *forsaken* Jesus, making of him the sacrificial victim for human sin.
- 43 That is, cognate, relational, and creative self-consciousness.
- 44 Because in Creature-Person of moral identity, God is imaged to the cosmos, the unique property of Personhood is the capacity to relationally nurture all life for the sake of life itself. This images the moral action and nature of God.
- 45 This has resonance with Sheppy's meaning in "zoetic" life, "...*life in terms of our destiny or calling.*" (2003, p.41)
- 46 'Once-created' denoting that relational identity is not exterminated in bio-death and is not re-created in resurrection, but transcendently evolving further in new life-ness.
- 47 Nicene Creed
- 48 *vide*: Lloyd (1995); Stanworth (2005)
- 49 *vide*: Dupré (1993)
- 50 'Respect' killings; for example that of Ben Kinsella (20/6/08). Crown Court verdict 12/6/09.
- 51 Although it is not productive to rigidly demarcate between the two, there is compassionate awareness in sympathy, and sympathetic response in compassion.
- 52 A catechumen is one undergoing instruction for the Christian faith, or one undergoing elementary instruction in a subject.
- 53 *vide* Musurillo (1972, pp.137-139) for an account of the martyrdom of Pionius and companions.
- 54 There is significant evidence from UK census returns and independent Christian research to indicate that whilst many eschew denominational connections, they nevertheless profess a belief in the existence of God. The 2001 census in Botswana indicated that over 70% of the population claimed Christianity as their faith, and overall, 98% of the population held to religious belief – including traditional religion.
- 55 What is more easily highlighted through the abandonment of dualist doctrines and language is how Personhood of relational identity is enabled to recognise the relational Personhood of God as conveyed in Jesus.

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- ⁵⁶ The 'Community of Five', see chap.3
- ⁵⁷ Dictated by their health and treatment regimes.
- ⁵⁸ That is, avoiding the sin-death-judgement-punishment route
- ⁵⁹ In pastoral ministry, the encounter with family feuding stimulated by a situation of dying and death, is frequent.
- ⁶⁰ Significantly, there was no expression of guilt, and a great reduction of the sense of helplessness in the face of death, amongst those close to Pat and who would survive her.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

Five themes have run through this thesis, of which the major one concerns a reconsideration of identity through bio-death and bereavement, and consequent pastoral implications of this for Christian Ministry. In developing the theme of identity through bio-death, it has been necessary to consider four other significant factors; dualism, Personhood, dis-innocence and forgiven-ness. It has been suggested that each of these in various ways, bears directly upon the content, character and integrity of Christian mission generally, and most specifically in the ministry to those who are dying and those who surround them.

In this concluding chapter, the issues arising in consequence of dualism, Personhood, dis-innocence, and forgiven-ness will be reviewed before turning again to reconsidering identity through bio-death and bereavement.

Error in dualism:

The ancient concepts of dualism hold that Man consists in a combination of physical and metaphysical 'bodies' in this life, and in death there occurs the radical separation of their combined elements. This concept is active in Christian thought and language to the present time, and is more than an

issue of linguistics. The imagery of phrases such as “we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice,”¹ and “May the eternal God bless and keep us, guard our bodies, save our souls and bring us safe to the heavenly country”,² though poetic, perpetuate the difficulty of identification with a split entity.

In considering the intention and meaning in the words of the first example from the context of the Eucharistic liturgy, “we offer you our souls and bodies to be a living sacrifice,” a rephrasing such as ‘We each offer you, the wholeness of who we are, seen and unseen’ could convey the intention in the prayer more understandably and with greater realism for the petitioner.

To articulate ‘We each offer the wholeness of who we are...’ is, it is suggested, more associative to the Person ‘I’ am aware of being, ‘seen’ (what I am able to show), and ‘unseen’ (what I am and cannot show). My *wholeness* includes weakness, fears, joys, truths and concealments, success, all that I am as I am, now. This articulates the different, united aspects of our Being and resists the separate entities of dualism. But to offer “our souls and bodies” expresses an undertaking that is more mythical than actual, and forces a subliminal uncertainty of different integrities; the ‘soul’ is spiritual, the ‘body’ is carnal. Such language and imagery frustrates understanding and therefore inhibits authentic personal discernment, assent and entering into.³

In proposing that the Being-ness of Man is located after bio-death in a separated, metaphysical entity – the 'soul' - released from its containment within a physical body which perishes in bio-death, dualism establishes Man as of divided integrity in which there can be no systemic unity or relationality. It has been suggested that this not only denies Christian claims of the *community* of God-with-Man, but has also succeeded in containing the dialogue of Christian exploration of meaning in the death and resurrection of Jesus within moralistic interpretations and application of pre-concluded ideas about the nature of sin, forgiven-ness, and the character of the Judgement of God.

The significance of Personhood:

The singularity of human Personhood consists in conscious, reflective relational capacity and necessity. The submission of this thesis is that the core of divine revelation to humankind is that Personhood extant in bio-life is transcended through resurrection by God; this is his desire and purpose. Man therefore not only reflects the image of God in the unique Personhood of relational identity, there is eschatological purpose to Humankind that is revealed in the Resurrection of Jesus. Consequently, it is argued that the scientific/anthropological description of Man, *Homo sapiens*, is insufficient to contain theological beliefs concerning the nature and spiritual properties of Man's Personhood and identity. Arising from this view is the suggestion that a clearer distinction of Man would be as *Homo sanctus*. The designation is relevant to scientific and religious language, and suggests

the continuation of evolution within Man. It seeks to describe the ontological identity of Man as the Creature-Person who is 'Homo sanctus'. The ascription of 'sanctus' - from the Latin for holy - means "belonging to, derived from, or associated with a divine power."⁴

The implication in this understanding of human Person suggests the energies of Personhood to be consistent with the evolution of transcendent relational identity in which

"Man discovers that he is nothing else than evolution become conscious of itself. The consciousness of each of us is evolution looking at itself and reflecting upon itself..." (de Chardin 1959, p.221)

Identity in Resurrection:

Jesus' resurrection in Personhood of relational identity emphasizes that relationality requires expression that is recognizable to itself, *as* itself, and beyond itself, as being that unique Person. This is essential to the existence of authentic meaning in the Christian claim that Jesus has "in fact been raised from the dead" (1.Cor.15:20) into new life-ness.

This thesis has considered resurrection as 'uniquely revealing the *completeness of identity of Person*, as in the example of Jesus, who is not a survivor from death but endowed with new life-ness through the creative power of God'. His resurrection demonstrates 'a moral transition of the Person into a new state, but of unchanged identity', and Personhood. This

interpretation suggests that Christianity and secular anthropology reconsider the Incarnation as an authentic sign of the continuing evolution of Person⁵ and of bio-death as relevant to it.

Recognition of dis-innocence:

The term dis-innocent is introduced in this thesis to describe the pervading condition of Personhood once deprived of the transparency of natal innocence. Dis-innocence enables in each Person the rationalisation of acts of sin: "Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another." (2Sam.11:25a)⁶ It is less easy for the character of dis-innocence itself to be concealed from self-knowledge. It was dis-innocence that Nathan identified to David as being his interior condition; this led to the conspiracies in the death of Uriah the Hittite and David's relationship with Bathsheba: "You did it secretly..." (2Sam 12:12)

Dis-innocence is not intended, however, to axiomatically imply pro-active guilt arising out of direct authorship or intentional commission of an act of sin. It is possible to become dis-innocent in consequence of the activity and influence of others as did Jesus at his crucifixion.

This thesis has suggested that the significance of *dis-innocence* as the underlying condition out of which sin is propagated, has been insufficiently recognised within Christianity. In consequence of this greater attention has been given to the denunciation of sin and correcting the effects of sinful

acts and attitudes, than has been given to understanding the meaning of dis-innocence. The overall result of this neglect can be likened to the misalignment of an artillery piece; no matter how assiduously the weapon is fired thereafter, it has no organic effect upon the necessary target. In the same way, focusing on the occasions of sin does not effectively deal with the organic nature of dis-innocence. Indeed it is possible that its real significance is obscured when dis-innocence becomes regarded as the *consequence* of sinning rather than as the organic *cause*.

Critical to the argument of this thesis is that the character of innocence is of the nature of God, and intrinsic to the Personification of creatureliness and the evolution of moral Being-ness. Contrastingly, dis-innocence causes the reduction of that nature within Personhood to the effect that the capacity for Person to evolve within and beyond the limitations of bio-creatureliness into zoetic life-ness, "life in communion with God" (Sheppy 2003, p.42), is progressively dulled. To describe such a Person as a sinner is to be content to underline the obvious expressed in the focus of prayers such as:

"We turn from the wrong that we have thought and said and done, and are mindful of all that we have failed to do, For the sake of Jesus, who died for us, forgive us for all that is past and help us to live each day in the light of Christ our Lord"⁷

which address the *symptoms* but not the *underlying condition*. The sum of such prayer may be described as words against actions. There is no

obvious reason to the petitioners that their life conduct and their admissions should be relevant to Jesus. The inner clouding of Person-Being-ness in dis-innocence is not addressed.

To engage with dis-innocence, it is suggested that a more explicit expression of what people know within themselves to be the realities of their relational identity, would enable a more illuminating admission of what is actual, insufficient and untruthful, for example:

"We know that we have broken the truth in what we have thought and said and done; we admit there are many things we have failed to do. We desire not to be like this, and to follow the path of Jesus into truth and life-ness."

Such a form of words would be more directly connective with the reality of peoples' lives; most individuals have no difficulty in recognizing dis-innocence in themselves – the knowledge of thinking and doing things that most would not wish to be publicly exhibited, demonstrates this.

It is suggested that the traditional focus on sin represents for many an external, judgemental commentary on their behaviour. This is, of course, itself equally a demonstration of the destructive nature of dis-innocence, but it indicates the futility in concentrating upon the correction of the external symptomatology of dis-innocence without attending to its cause:

"So you...outwardly appear righteous to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity." (Matt.23:28)

The story of Jesus describes life in communion with God within the immediacy of bio-life, and its continuing fulfillment through his resurrection, into his ascension. Innocence in Being is the characteristic of Jesus' Personhood, in which the true nature of the crisis of dis-innocence is articulated outwardly by the nature of his death and inwardly by his extreme expression of isolation from the moral source of Being. Yet in memorializing his death, Christian worship language demonstrates its systemic failure to engage the ontic meaning of dis-innocence: The phrase "For the sake of Jesus, who died *for us*"⁸ conceals that his death was also *because* of us - the elective actions of Persons of relational identity to destroy his *Personhood* of relational identity.

The wider examination of historical religious and secular language associating death with the corruption of sin, and as the due punishment of righteous judgement, has demonstrated the extent to which the Christian Churches have dis-innocently fostered a fear of bio-death, and effectively separated the operation of forgiven-ness from the context of usual life.

This thesis suggests that reconsideration of the death of Jesus in the context of dis-innocence (rather than as the iconic expression of the sin of mankind) enables a clearer understanding of the significance of dis-

innocence. In so doing, the nature of the forgiving love of God is also more sharply exposed as Immanent in the context of chaotic threat to life-ness. Jesus elects to offer his Personhood of innocent relational identity in order that the true nature of dis-innocence be exposed as characterising the ultimate relationlessness of the Cross. So enervating is this of his moral Personhood as he experiences dis-innocence himself that he cries out from its forsakenness, and in its shadow, dies. The Gospel accounts record two separate and interlinking experiences in the context of his desolation.

The one, "It is finished" (Jn.19:30), expresses his awareness of the irreducible love of God for the crowded Persons who are dis-innocent to the extent of resisting moral compassion in the face of destitution; even their self and intra-corrupting dis-innocence has been unable to prevent God from loving them – of 'going where they go' and remaining with them where they are destroying life-ness, forgiving them there. Jesus of Nazareth knows that there too he is forgiven with them, and that the battle within himself to retain the will to love as he knows God does, and so to stem the cancer of dis-innocence he has taken into himself from the deniers of God, is won. In his dying, forgiven, humanity, Jesus is able to know the love of God for them in their dis-innocence.⁹

The other experience, 'Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit' (Lk.23:46), expresses Jesus' consent to pro-actively enter into – *commit to* - the processes of bio-death, to surrender his spirit, his life-ness, in faith that

God will receive his Personhood of relational identity into zoetic life-ness. Jesus pro-actively *commits* this act of faith, and in that context, commences the act of *entering into* bio-death. He does both in the context of existential dis-innocence.

The case examples detailed in chapter 3 illustrate the importance of enabling the dying to understand that their humanness and the patchwork of their faith does not alter their belovedness to God. In this, Jesus' experience of dis-innocence and forgiven-ness is an essential reassurance and comfort, and a necessary example of God's forgiveness remaining in all situations.

Two further examples from the New Testament serve to illustrate the matrix effect of dis-innocence upon Personhood of relational identity: the secrecy of Herod's meeting with the Magi and his concealed intention in the words "...that I too may come and worship him..." (Matt.2:7-8), and Jesus' insistence that the cause of sinning is of greater systemic malevolence to the ontological nature of Personhood than are the symptomatic acts of sin, and sinful attitudes: "I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt.5:27ff)

In both examples, the opacity of guile and concealment has supplanted the transparency of moral innocence as the tendency of Personhood. Pastorally, the encountered effect of this is the matrix of guilt and anxiety

and the difficulty many Persons have in believing they are worthy to be forgiven, and in fact have been.

This is in no way to dismiss the rebounding effects of sin and sinning that contribute to further consolidation of devolutional dis-innocence within the Being-ness of Personhood. It is, however, to emphasise that the activity of God within the Christian pilgrimage of faith is the sustained immanence of love to enable within people the *desire* to reverse dis-innocence. The suggestion of this thesis is that in this desire, the evolution into new Adam has begun.

Forgiven-ness

The distinction between forgiveness and forgiven-ness has been noted through this thesis, chiefly in indicating the necessity to distinguish sensitively between the two. Again, this is not a matter of linguistics. The words employed in the New Testament to describe the action of forgiving embrace in their meanings letting go and cancellation of debt. The sense of the action is that when it is done, it *is* done.

The New Testament writers considered that the supreme act of forgiveness was completed by God in Jesus at the cross; forgiveness *is* established:

“...while we were yet sinners Christ died for us...” (Rom.5:8), and

“...in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things...making peace by the blood of his cross...you

who were once estranged and hostile in mind...he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death..." (Col.1:19-22)

These texts demonstrate a consistent understanding of what has been accomplished at the death of Jesus; their perspective is that what remains is for human beings to pro-actively believe and progress in the forgiveness that has already been established by the actions of God.

That forgiveness is consistent in the purposes of God is demonstrated in the recorded words of Jesus on a previous individual occasion: "My son, your sins *are* forgiven" (Mk.2:5); the divine action at Calvary explicates the *scale* of its prevenience and application to all humankind, from that time onwards.

However, in much contemporary colloquial Christian understanding, forgiveness is an experience that lies ahead, to be accessed by those who truly repent. Examples from the words of absolution within various liturgies demonstrate the focus:

"Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent..."¹⁰

"He pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel..."¹¹

"Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him..."¹²

The New Zealand Prayer Book (1989) contains different wording for the absolution at Occasional Services and the Eucharist:

"Almighty God, who pardons all who truly repent, forgive your sins..."

(p.38)

"Through the cross of Christ, God have mercy on you, pardon you and set you free. Know that you are forgiven and be at peace..." (p.408)

Although the words of absolution in the Eucharistic liturgy of New Zealand are significantly inclusive, irenic and pastoral, they speak of mercy and pardon but not specifically about *established* forgiveness. The hearer is to believe s/he is in the immediacy of the moment, forgiven and able to be at peace. The other examples all express forgiveness mediated by true repentance, or historically, by true repentance and unfeigned belief in the Gospel. The consistency of conditionalism in liturgical expressions of forgiveness can be seen as reducing its application from the universal (all have been forgiven) to the particularity of true penitents, and also specific occasions - when it is petitioned.

Contrastingly, there is no record in the ministry of Jesus of any similar caveats to his bestowal of forgiveness. It is reasonable, therefore, to nurture and encourage Christian faith on the basis of *consenting* to the actions of Jesus as conveying the moral phenomenon of forgiveness, and thereafter *entering into* the experience of new life-ness that is the meaning of forgiven-ness.

Central to the dialogue of this thesis is the perspective that forgiven-ness is not the environment of restoration of the old; it is the condition of

opportunity and the ground of Being for new beginning, and of evolution. In consequence of this, it is therefore necessary to challenge the general, colloquial representation of forgiveness as depicted in church worship language and pastoral praxis, in order that *forgiven-ness* might be experienced as the environment of new beginning. This is axial to the process of understanding the meaning in the resurrection of Jesus. The ontology of forgiveness determines that forgiveness must always exist ahead of its encounter and in the context of Personhood; each consent to that encounter is made in dis-innocence, and each entering into the experience of forgiven-ness represents also a pilgrim step away from dis-innocence.

To become aware of those realities is also to become aware of the nature of the judgement of God - that the Creature-Person of his image is worthy to be loved.

In the three case examples of pilgrimage into bio-death, the meanings in belovedness and forgiven-ness were as nearly as possible explored in parallel, and as pointing to relational identity as consistent with the Personhood of God, and as identifying Human to be the Creature-Person of God's image.

The life-ness of God creates life-ness; in this the Personhood of God is moral. In the ability to consciously reflect upon life-ness, Personhood

demonstrates the moral relational identity of Person. This thesis suggests that relational Personhood in new created life-ness is resurrected into the evolutionary journey of transcendent relational identity.

Reconsidering identity:

It has been suggested that a proper theological description of Man is *Homo sanctus*; this designation encourages new reflection on the cosmic meaning in the Creature who is also Person, whose Personhood is of relational identity expressed in unique individual charism and in the numinous of his innate reflective and moral capacity to express, receive and protect life-ness.

Consideration has also been given to the significance of bio-life as one context of Being-ness in an evolutionary process of increasing relational Personhood of capacity and community with the moral source of Being – God. In this perspective the incarnation of the Son of Man indicates a new relational capacity to be unfolding in *Homo sanctus* – the ending of the fear of bio-death through the dawning understanding that it may be lived through. Of this, Jesus is the pioneer example. The life of Jesus is also an indication that the evolution of Personhood of relational identity is achieved in the context of moral life-ness - that is, the community of God.

The story of the Son of Man is the account of recognizing, assenting to and entering into the zoetic experience of expanding identity. In Jesus the

revelation of belovedness, the wilderness struggle to enter into its meaning, the relational healing and forgiving of Persons, the experience of transfigured identity, the expression of belovedness and purpose in the communion of thanksgiving and forgiveness, the entering into the contra-community of dis-innocence and its symbol of power – the threat of bio-death, the trust that that Personhood of relational identity has meaning and purpose beyond its bio-form life-ness; all occur in the process and context of discovering that it is out of God that Man's Personhood emerges and remains.

In describing the identity of Man as *Homo sanctus*, there is revealed a clear association between Christianity and the search for meaning that inhabits human searching and discovery, and particularly in the seeming purposelessness of bio-death.

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that the experience of Christianity has been suppressed through the vital meanings in Jesus' life, death and resurrection becoming moralistically interpreted, and therefore as necessitating a life of radical moral eradication of sin. The enduring characteristic of this interpretation is the representation of God as angered, and the nature of his Judgement as yet to be revealed. This has concentrated the focus of Christianity upon the overcoming of sin in the life of Man at the cost of enabling Man to recognize the immanence of God and the significance of Personhood as moral presence.

This thesis has offered a contra argument; that the root of meaning in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus lies in God's belovedness of Man, and that these events form the whole expression of God's judgement of Man as worthy to be loved without any restraint. Nothing "...will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:39)

Some implications for pastoral mission:

Representing Man as *Homo sanctus*, whilst at the same time recognizing the objective description of *Homo sapiens* does not constitute a reformulation of the central concept of dualism, but rather that both terms describe the Creature who has become Person. The emphasis is upon Personhood; this thesis has suggested that the emergence of reflective Personhood contradicts the primal laws of survival in that it demonstrates moral reflectiveness.

Survival is existential; it is not possible to know what survival means existentially to a third party.¹³ Whereas survival requires an ability to discern threat, and implement the means by which to survive it, it does not require compassion, or the ability to reflect philosophically or morally on the meaning in life-ness.¹⁴ The instinct for survival is characteristically represented in all higher forms of creatureliness; it is in the context of *Creature-Person* that survival is perceived differently. Hence the significance of a healed femur as both a subjective and objective sign of Personhood as much as it may be the first sign of civilization and of

Personhood contradicting the primal laws of survival - objective risk assessment and thereafter fight or flight. In Personhood, there is the potentially 'fatal' dimension of compassion.

This thesis has suggested the origins of Personhood as arising in God, and that the characteristics of Personhood are the defining signs that differentiate Man as Creature-*Person* of moral relational identity. They are evident through the relational capacities and needs of every Person, but are not objectively quantifiable. A further point that arises out of this construction concerns the moral freedom of God as equally descriptive of his uncreated Person and the Creature-Person of his image.

God is free to make decisions including those of life-ness, expressed in the words of Jesus,

"No one takes [life] from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again..." (Jn.10:18), and in the words of St Paul, "For freedom Christ has set us free..." (Gal.5:1)

The freedom of choice in the nature of God is thus present in the nature of the moral Creature who is *Person*, who has in Personhood the moral freedom to make choice and to be influenced in that to the degree of diminishing Personhood itself. Whilst it remains true that dis-innocence is fueled by cyclic sinfulness, the significance in this is that the effects deepen the rootedness of dis-innocence.

It is in the context of Personhood of relational identity that dis-innocence has been represented as of such prominent importance to the deep understanding of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and of the necessity for Christianity to recognise dis-innocence as the systemic cause of sinful acts and intention. To do so is also to point to innocence as being the endemic character of Personhood.

The tragedy of dis-innocence, climactically expressed in the compassionless killing of Jesus, is present in all Humankind. The miracle of life-ness in the resurrected Jesus is demonstrated in his restored innocence; his Personhood is resurrected in new and innocent life-ness, in his full relational identity. This is central to the relevance and authority of the Evangel. The essential and irenic focus of the pastoral mission of the Christian Churches should therefore be to insistently nurture the illumination of innocence as indigenous to Personhood.

In the context of ministry to the dying, representing bio-death as heralding the possible continuing evolution of Personhood in relational identity, the case experiences of this thesis have shown the identification of dis-innocence to have greater meaning for the understanding of relational identity than the historical focus upon sinfulness. These examples also demonstrate the extent to which fear of bio-death may be reduced as Persons are able to recognise their identity in the context of relational Personhood and their forgiven-ness, and the restoration of innocence in

Being-ness. This strongly suggests that the pastoral task of Christianity in this specific area of ministry is to enable Persons to encounter their identity in the belovedness of God. It was earlier suggested that this should be considered a priority within the Christian community of faith itself.¹⁵ This bears directly upon the credibility of the claims of Christian Churches to be the agents of God's mission amongst *all* people, at the heart of which is the discovery of personal belovedness and irreducible identity. The wider results of the body of faith being pro-active in ministry to the dying and of that event being entered into as a pilgrimage have indicated that others of no religious connection are also encouraged to dialogue in this traditionally taboo area.

In the light of this, it is suggested that the Christian Churches in Britain review their theological perspectives and pastoral praxis, as demonstrably from liturgical texts the historical underlying errors and insufficiencies of dualism and qualified forgiveness are continuously perpetuated.

Of first importance must be the recognition that every Person has deep spiritual needs arising out of their Personhood originating in the nature of the Being-ness of God. In consequence, the unique characteristic of emergent Personhood is moral relational identity in the likeness of God. In this lies the nature and capacity of innocence and its relevance within the nature of Personhood. It is the human capacity for innocence that defines dis-innocence as malevolent to human self-perception of Personhood as

Homo sanctus, and destructive of an awareness of the immanence of God. In this, the story of the Son of Man is the revelation of innocence and the transcendent identity of Personhood as intrinsic to the relationality of God to *Homo sanctus*.

Ministry to the dying and those around them should be developed and conducted on a multi-faceted basis yet without Christians compromising the meaning within the core experiences of forgiven-ness and the resurrection of Jesus.

Three areas of encounter may be described:

1. Preparation for bio-death as commencing a particular journey into the event: this was the context of three of the case examples given, and could equally embrace those close to the dying person and in whom bereavement will continue. This allows for the exploration of pilgrimage into bio-death and the involvement of a worshipping community as a companion body, as was fully possible in the ministry to and with Pat.

2. Encounter with those caught up in the situation of bio-death that has been either sudden or unprepared for in consequence of its approach being un-admitted. This was the context of the constructed case narrative, and is probably the predominant situation in which death is encountered in pastoral ministry. In these situations, the crafting of a funeral service may be the platform for immediate and any future ministry. In the

contemporary context of a-theism, it is necessary for Churches to develop forms of service that compassionately express the meaning in Personhood, and relational identity. The focus within the central section of one of the supplementary prayers in the funeral service of the ASB (1980) expresses this well:

“...we remember with thanksgiving those whom we love but see no longer; and we pray that in them your [God’s] perfect will may be fulfilled...” (ASB p.335)

The synthesis between the physical reality of bio-death as the product of biological form being unable to sustain life-ness, and the expression of new life-ness in the resurrected Personhood of Jesus, is an important focus. This in turn offers reassurance that death is a moral event. Viewed from the perspective of the Resurrection, the circumstances and causes of bio-death are distinct from death itself. This enables a new understanding of bio-death as a moral event from which it becomes possible for Person to receive anew the moral energy of God, which is life in full identity of Being. In turn this suggests that the purpose of relationally moral life as being the pilgrimage into ultimate community with God. This is the Good News that bio-death may be a pilgrimage encounter, even when the innocence of bio-life is lost in consequence of human imperfection. The event of bio-death in this context reaches beyond the redistribution of matter and energy within the universe of God’s continuing creation, into the associative joy of the Created knowing, with God, the wonderfulness of creating life.

3. Non-religious death, or death of a believer in God who is not Christian: this too is the situation of many Persons, and may be pastorally encountered either before bio-death occurs or in consequence of it. It is in these situations that contemporary Christianity is least sure of its ground. In consequence, the danger is that there will be offered either the most saccharine of 'words against death' or the most insensitive witness to the uncertain status of the dying or deceased Person in the mind of God.

It is suggested that these situations most require the Churches to develop theology and pastoral praxis that compassionately express the meaning in Personhood and relational identity, and in appropriate ways, share the Christian understanding of the meanings in the death and Resurrection of Jesus. Thus, necessary to every context of dying and bio-death is the ongoing Christian engagement with the meanings in the story of God in Jesus as the proclamation of belovedness and cosmic purpose in Personhood of relational identity. These are words of life-ness.

The personal stories of the bio-death of James, Helen and Pat, and the 'Group of Five' are also the accounts of the discovery of the extent to which a Christian approach to bio-death as a pro-active pilgrimage into dying, raised in other people a desire and boldness to speak about the hidden things of death, and for many, once again begin to believe and hope in the resurrection of the dead.

END NOTES:

- ¹ Extract from alternative final prayer, "Holy Communion rite A" in *Alternative Service Book* (1980) p.173. ASB is no longer licensed to be used within the Church of England, but remains in use elsewhere.
- ² Extract from prayer in "Ministry at the time of death" in *Common Worship*, (2000) p.378
- ³ See also discussion of this inhibition to engagement in Chapter 6
- ⁴ <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/holy>
- ⁵ de Chardin (1960, p.63): "Christ is realized in evolution"
- ⁶ *vide* the account of David and Bathsheba, 2Sam.11:1 -2Sam.12:23
- ⁷ Form of the Confession in the funeral liturgy, Occasional Services, Pastoral Services in *Common Worship* (2000). p.261
- ⁸ *Ibid.* p.261
- ⁹ Three inseparable actions form the matrix of the Calvary narrative: *Jesus embodies and expresses the immanence and character of God's love for all people. * Jesus desires them to know of that immanence and character. *Jesus existentially experiences the power of God's love to lift Personhood out of dis-innocence and moral disintegration.
- ¹⁰ Form of words in recent Church of England, and Anglican, modern language liturgy e.g. ASB 1980, p.121; *Common Worship* 2000, p.261; *An Anglican Prayer Book*, Church of South Africa 1989, p.106
- ¹¹ Form of words for the Absolution, Occasional Services, *BCP* (1662) p.3, and the *South African PB* (1954) p.3
- ¹² Form of words in the Eucharistic liturgy, *BCP* (1662) p.252, and the *South African PB* (1954) pp.236-7
- ¹³ It is possible to describe a group awareness of survival as existential to that group, but that cannot have the same meaning as with an individual.
- ¹⁴ This is altogether different from the instinct to protect kindred or species as dictated by genes, after the theme of Dawkins's assertions (1989)
- ¹⁵ *vide* pp.259 ff

APPENDIX I

THANKSGIVING FOR LIFE AND PRAYERS FOR THE FUTURE

All: He asked life of thee, and thou gavest him a long life: Even for ever and ever. Ps. 21:4

Minister: O God, maker of all things, Creator of life; we praise and thank you this day for Pat's life for her happiness and for all the opportunities she has had; for her baptism, confirmation and growing faith, for the love she and Alex¹ have together, for their many activities and love of your creation.

All: We thank you Father also for this time Pat has to prepare for the pilgrimage that is ahead; for the freedom and opportunities the diagnosis of her illness has given to her; for the skills of medicine to comfort her in times of physical pain; for the knowledge she has of your love and her forgiven-ness.

With Pat we pray in gladness for your uplifting; for wisdom and strength; for discernment and patience, and for the daily outflowing of the Holy Spirit within her whole Being.

We commit ourselves to this pilgrimage with her for as long as it may take; with her we too ask for wisdom and strength for the journey; for discernment and patience, and the daily outflowing of the Holy Spirit.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

Pat:² Dear Father, I thank you for all that you have shown me and given to me. Help me to honour these living gifts of your love, and to complete this year of anniversaries in joyful thanksgiving for my confirmation and my marriage. Grant me strength to keep these anniversaries in my pilgrimage with you. I give myself to this journey through death. Amen

PRAYERS FOR PILGRIMAGE
THROUGH DEATH

Minister: Lord God Almighty, your thoughts are not our thoughts, neither are your ways our ways. We stand in awe and humility before the mystery that is in life and death. Grant Pat growing faith and courage as she takes up this call to pilgrimage into death and beyond.

All: Give to her clearer understanding of herself day by day, reveal your will to her; cast out fear and doubt; give her the gift of hope through all the changes that lie ahead, that in quietness and trust she may daily know her rest in you, and through her mortal death, your resurrection.

**She asked life of you, O Lord.
Give to her length of days for ever and ever.
Amen**

[The anointing with oil according to the rites of the Church, by the minister, Alex, and representatives of the congregation. All laid hands on her for the following prayer.]

Minister: Pat, walk strongly on this pilgrim journey; remember that our Lord Jesus has walked this road; he knows it well; you need have no fear that he will not be near; no fear that he will leave you to travel alone. Neither be afraid that your faith will not be sufficient. Christ knows you by your name; you are sealed in his faith. Rejoice then, as do all the angels and the saints, for Christ our Lord has prepared himself for you, and for this time.

All: Amen

Person: We commit you to God's mercy and care.
He will bless you and watch over you.
He will be the light of your journey.
As he is now, so, always.

[The concluding prayers of the Eucharistic liturgy follow]

¹ Pseudonym

² written by Pat herself for the occasion

APPENDIX II

A Dying Person's Bill of Rights¹

1. I have the right to be treated as a living human being until I die.
2. I have the right to maintain a sense of hopefulness, however changing its focus may be.
3. I have the right to be cared for by those who can maintain a sense of hopefulness, however changing this may be.
4. I have the right to express my feelings and emotions about my approaching death in my own way.
5. I have the right to participate in decisions concerning my care.
6. I have the right to expect continuing medical and nursing attention even though 'cure' goals must be changed to 'comfort' goals. I have the right to be free from pain.
7. I have the right to have my questions answered honestly.
8. I have the right to be cared for by caring, sensitive, knowledgeable people who will attempt to understand my needs and will be able to gain some satisfaction in helping me face my death.
9. I have the right not to be deceived.
10. I have the right to have help from and for my family in accepting my death.
11. I have the right to discuss and enlarge my religious and/or spiritual experiences, whatever these may mean to others.
12. I have the right to maintain my identity and not be judged for my decisions which may be contrary to the beliefs of others.
13. I have the right to die in peace and dignity.
14. I have the right not to die alone.
15. I have the right to expect that the sanctity of my human body will be respected after death.

¹ Adapted from Donovan, M.I. and Pierce, S.G., Cancer Care Nursing, New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts.1976.

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