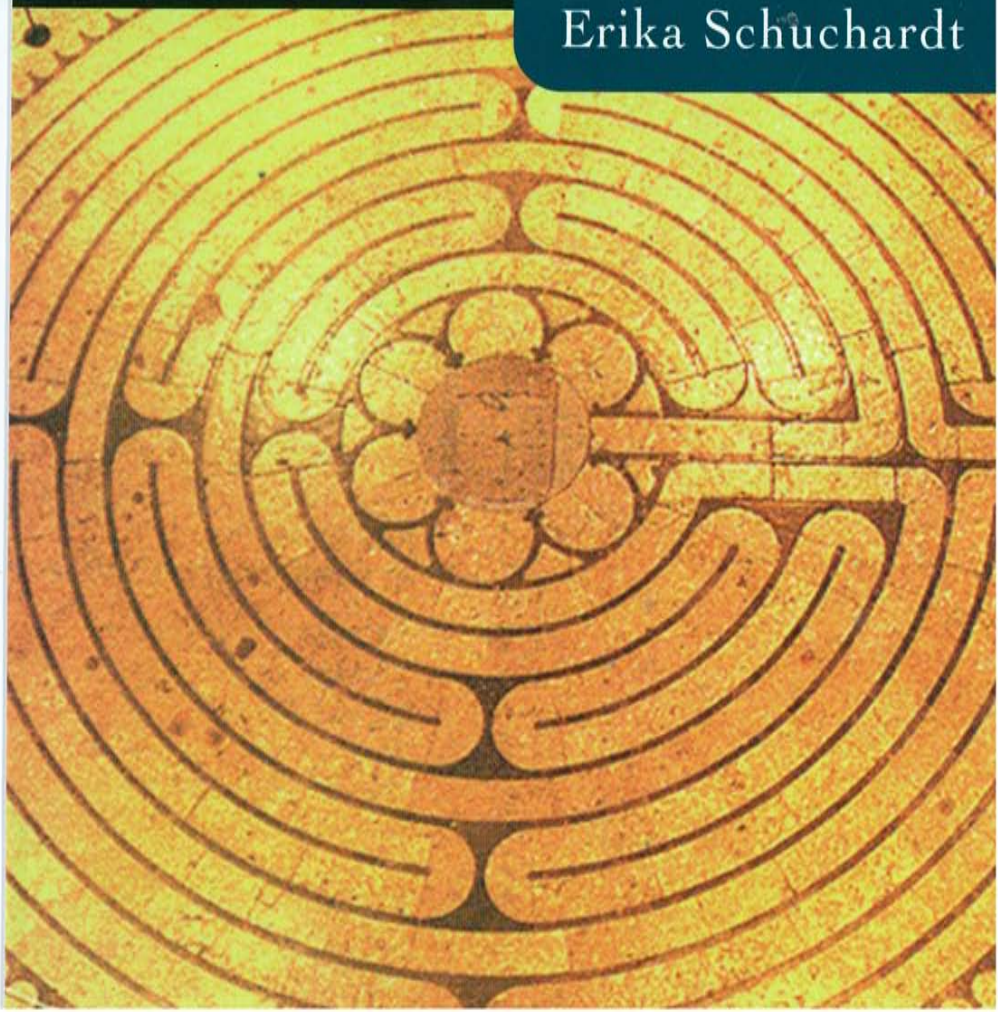
Why Me?

Learning to Live in Crises

Erika Schuchardt



Footprints in the Sand

One night a man
had a dream.
He dreamt he was
walking with the Lord.
Across the sky
flashed scenes of his life.
For each scene,
he noticed two sets of
footprints in the sand;
one belonged to him,
and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of
his life flashed before him,
he looked back at the
footprints in the sand.
He noticed that many times
along the path of his life there
was only one set of footprints.
He also noticed that it had
happened at the very lowest
and saddest times in his life.
This really bothered the man and
he questioned the Lord about it.

"Lord, you said that once I decided
to follow you, you'd walk with me all
the way. But I have noticed that during
the most troublesome times in my life,
there is only one set of footprints.
I don't understand why, when I needed
you most, you would leave me."

The Lord replied,
"My precious child, I love you
and I would never leave you.
During your times of trial and suffering,
when you see only one set of footprints,
it was then that..... I carried you."

Margret Fishbeck Powers

Why Me?

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Learning to Live in Crises

Erika Schuchardt

WCC Publications, Geneva

Translated from the original German:
Warum gerade ich? Leben lernen in Krisen
Fazit aus Lebensgeschichten eines Jahrhunderts

First North American edition: *Why Is This Happening to Me? Guidance and Hope for Those Who Suffer*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1989 – ISBN 0-8066-2309-8

Financial support for the publication of this book was provided by Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland – Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany

ISBN 2-8254-1436-0

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Cover design: Marie Arnaud Snakkers

Diagrams © Erika Schuchardt

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Website: http://www.wcc-coe.org

Printed in France

This book is dedicated to
my sister ANNELIE STEGEMANN, née Schuchardt,
12 March 1944-14 August 1983
who died as a result of a tragic accident,
to her children THORSTEN, TANJA, CHRISTIAN
and to her husband ULRICH.

Philippians 4:4
Rejoice in the Lord always

With respect and gratitude I remember my ancestor
Pastor Dr HERMANN SCHUCHARD,
who created a home for the disabled, the sick and those rejected
by society and founded a brotherhood and the institution
of further education in "God's city on the hill" –
HEPHATA near Treysa, in Hesse, Germany

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since 1900 -2034

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Foreword

In many parts of the world, people long for freedom, liberation, peace; they also yearn to cope with innocent suffering, to overcome illness and deep wounds in soul, mind and body. In the present context of increasing violence and brokenness, healing and reconciliation appear as core elements of the gospel and of Christian life and witness. The member churches of the World Council of Churches (WCC) strive to respond to their healing mission in the different realms of international, regional, community and personal life. Dr Erika Schuchardt's book offers a unique insight into the way people struggle and cope with profound personal suffering, and it gives guidance for a pastoral approach to people in spiritual need. In a surprisingly open manner, biographical sketches from all over the world report people's experiences of both suffering and faith, their crises with diseases, disabilities, persecution, solitude, separation and death, and the individuals described speak with striking honesty of spiritual frustration and heartbreak as well as of wonderful faith experiences and renewed trust in God.

Erika Schuchardt, who has been for many years a member of church bodies including the Evangelical Church in Germany and the World Council of Churches, has developed guidelines on coping and working through crises. Her approach is based on the analysis of more than 2,000 life-stories from many different social and geographical contexts. Through lively biographies of persons in situations of crisis – a kind of "theology of life stories" – and by using penetrating religious, psychological, cultural and educational insights, she demonstrates how persons suffering from illness or disability can become part of a free and truly human community. She acknowledges that for Christians, too, there is no way around suffering, but that there is a way forward through suffering together with Christ. Distance from the source of comfort may not be an indication of God's absence, but may lead towards a hidden presence in which we can approach God anew in patient discipleship.

In her book, Erika Schuchardt challenges the churches and puts her finger on the dilemma of insufficient pastoral care: it is not God's fault if his "ground staff, people like you and me", are failing. At the same time, she knows of many positive experiences involving chaplains or

church members who accompany people in crises. This is a book about faith, a book that teaches pastoral care and a handbook of theology embedded in life-stories from many parts of the world – an essential guide for everyone concerned that the churches respond faithfully to Christ's call to become healing and reconciling communities.

Geneva, 2005

Samuel Kobia
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

'The Loving-Pair' – Accompanying Each Other
Lovers - companying each other as a Healing Process
Thereby the Partners are Transformed to Reconciliation
Ernst Barlach: 'The Loving Pair', Hamburg 1922

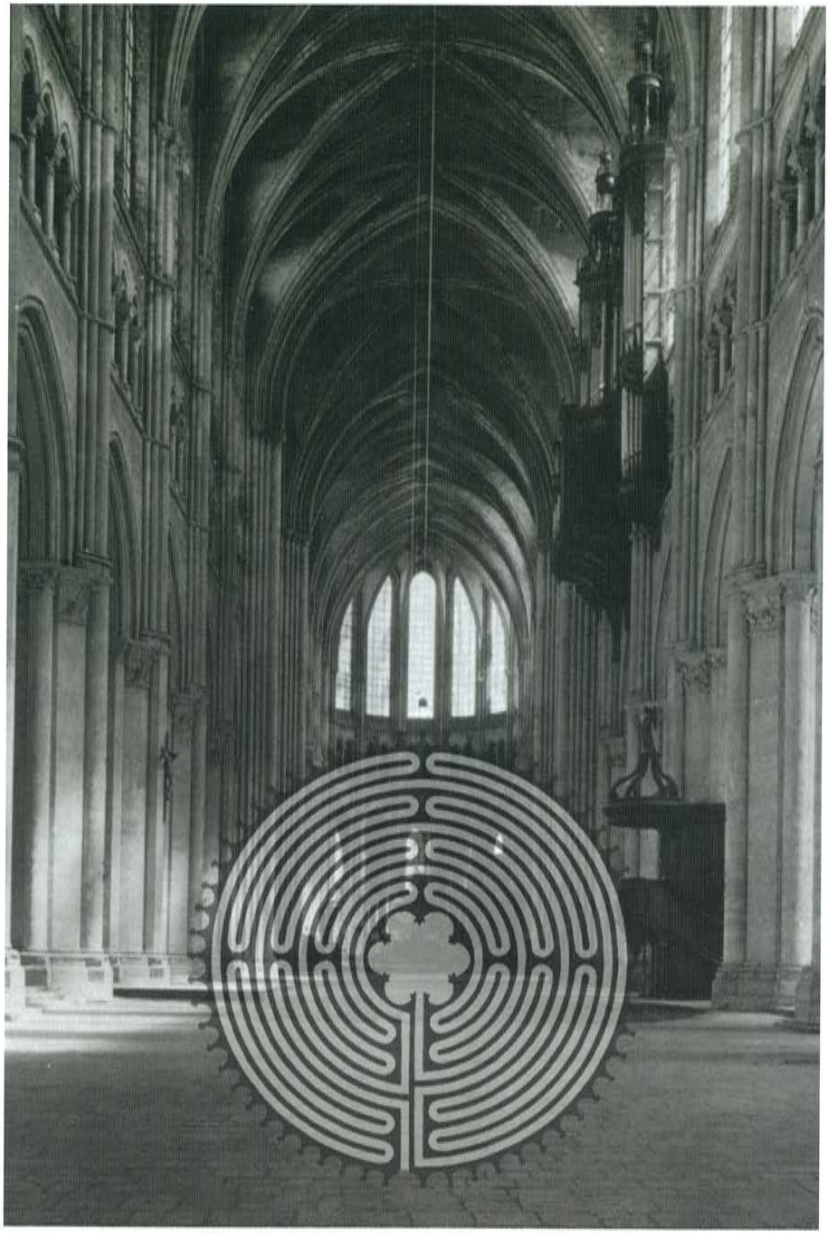
On the Illustrations in this Book

In analysing more than a thousand life stories of suffering people, I found recurrent patterns and regularities that I have formulated in the *model for working through crisis in eight spiral phases.*

The search for a way to illustrate the model led me to the picture of the spiral, with its ascending and descending rings, merging and coiling into one another. It was not until much later that I became aware that in this I had expressed an archetype (see C.G. Jung). Figurative and structural representations of the snail, the labyrinth and the spiral are ancient symbols for mankind's path through life and the journey of the soul, and their symbolic power extends to the present day.

One example is the breath-taking aesthetic image of the 'silvery metallic-gleaming' double spiral for ascent and descent in the glass dome above the old Reichstag building in Berlin – often interpreted as a symbol of the reunited Germany, rising from the shadow of our past to open itself up to the light of new ideas (see p. xv).

The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
Complementary spiral in the glass dome above the old Reichstag,
Norman Forster, Berlin 1999



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
The Spiral Labyrinth from Chartres Cathedral, 11th century,
Floor mosaic; diameter 12.87m · length of path approx. 250 m

Preface to the 12th Revised and Expanded Edition

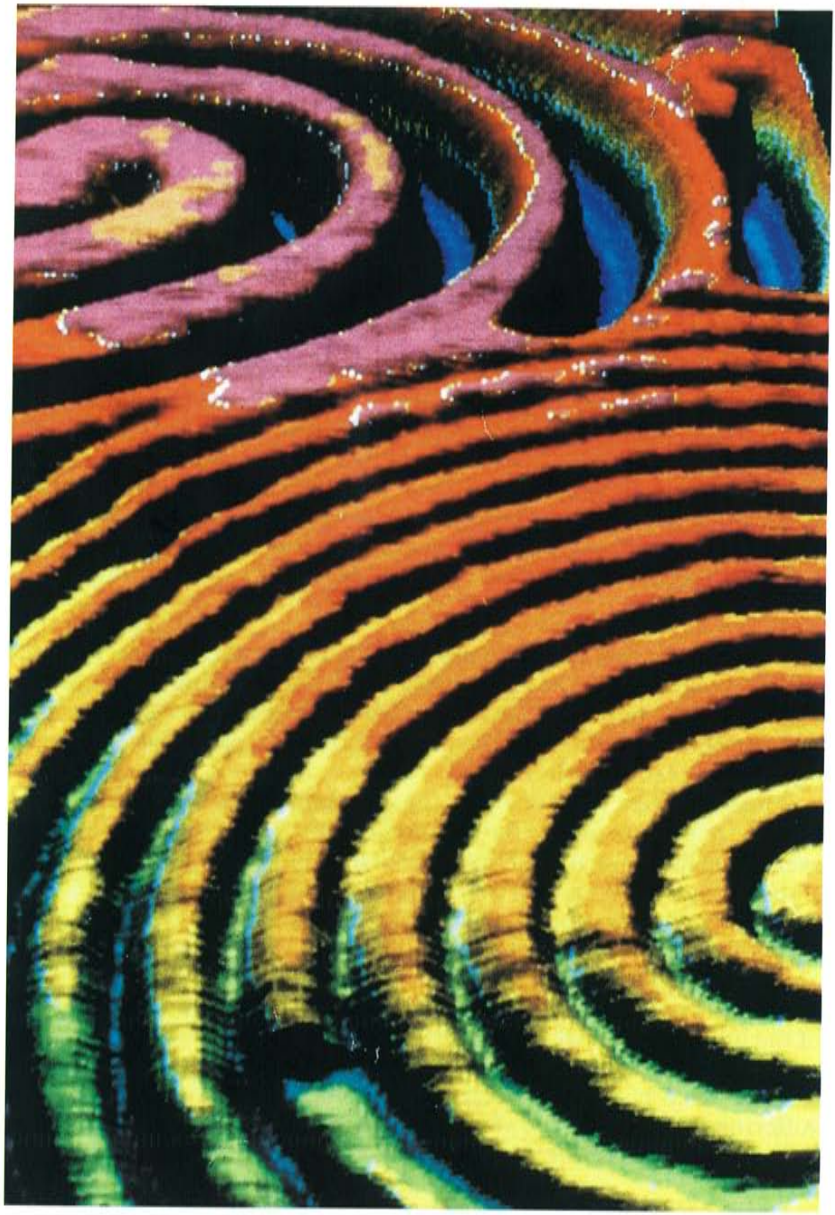
Since this book was first published, I have had many contacts and exchanges with my readers. So today, I can acknowledge with joy and gratitude that my book has been accepted and passed on and is still in demand as a piece of bibliotherapy. I would like to thank my publisher, Dr Arndt Ruprecht, for encouraging me to revise the book once more for a jubilee edition – 20 years after its first publication – and thereby to hand over the "classic" in an updated version to the public.

We all know that every spring is a new beginning, as soon as darkness, icy cold and winter storms yield to the reawakening of nature. But only gradually, in the arduous and often despairing course of an apparently futile search, do we discover that every life crisis can become a new beginning for the people affected.

Sooner or later, everyone asks the question, "*Why me…?*" Seldom if ever do we venture to turn the question round: "*Why not me…?*" We take everything for granted until that sudden life-changing moment when the stone begins to roll and the crisis affects us personally.

The story of Sisyphus, in which he keeps on rolling an enormous stone up a hill, has absorbed us for over 2,000 years. It is an image of human endeavour and constant failure. Yet we can also interpret the Sisyphus myth positively: it is a good thing that the rock does not stay at the top of the hill, because that would mean standstill, stagnation, the end. The attempt, driven by hope, to roll the stone up again points to our human calling not to become paralysed, but to stay alive even through life's suffering. The task of Sisyphus is the quest; the path itself becomes the goal. Doesn't the saying, "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*", refer to this too?

I have walked with many people on their path through crisis, illness, disability and dying. On the one hand, by compiling well over 6,000 life stories, set out in the biographies of people from all over the world from 1900 to the present day, and on the other hand, through the ordinary, everyday support of people in crisis.



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
The basis of the global biosphere is "respiration", which "brings life" to the light of the sun. Here, the spiral appears as a crystalline form in the illustration of the key process of oxidosis, Max-Planck-Institute, 21st century.

As a consequence, the suffering human being also became the subject of my academic work. The result of my research, in particular of the analysis of the biographies of the sufferers, is the discovery of "*working through crisis*" – a process of learning illustrated in the image of an ascending spiral with eight spiral phases. This image helps us to gain a new understanding of what it is to live through crisis and how to support someone in the process. It is a unique way of learning from one another. To share the experience, the suffering and the shape of difficult life journeys brings us shared happiness. This is the secret of "the law of Christ", which says: "*Bear each other's burdens.*"

Not even Christians know the way past suffering, but we do know a way through it, together with Christ. Of this we can be sure: darkness is not the absence of God, but rather His hidden presence. If we walk with patience, we shall seek and find Him all over again.

The number of publications on the subject of people in crisis rose dramatically in the last third of the 20th century. There was also a change in the reasons for writing: a double shift from *disabilities* through *long-term illnesses to critical life events* such as separation, persecution, dying and death.

Against the background of the encouragement of *life-long learning* and the institutionalisation of continuing adult education, the 1970s saw a dramatic rise in the number of people writing to disburden themselves of their life's troubles. The idea of equal opportunity drew attention to people with *disabilities* and other disadvantages. In the 1980s, people affected by *long-term illness (cancer, AIDS, psychological disorders)* began to speak up. In the mid-1980s, *in-depth analysis of the Holocaust* began, and this has continued until the present day, although so far it has been conducted largely by the victims. In the "*Talk Show and Big Brother culture*" of the 1990s and the turn of the century, the taboo topics of "*coming out*" and "*sexual abuse*", began to be discussed in public. Now grave new crises in human life are forecast in biomedicine and genome research. (For dates, figures, diagrams, see illustrations on pages 12-15 and 24).

It will be interesting to follow these new developments. And in the age of the internet, which in the 21st century gives every user of the Open Public Access (OPAC) system immediate access to any new publication, it will even be easy. It seems hard to imagine that up to 1987, the title of every book had to be laboriously copied by hand from bibliographies and cellar archives.

Even in an information and communication society with its fun factories and 'childishly simple' digital technologies, the number of people suffering from disorders is increasing steadily. In its twin function as a medium for those writing to disburden themselves and a source of advice and support for its readers, this book will have a continuing role in crisis management. Its contribution is to set out the *learning process of working*

through crisis in eight spiral phases that I discovered, and to bring together the unique voices of many thousands of people in crisis so that they may be heard.

Hanover/Berlin
Spring 2001

Erika Schuchardt

This new edition of the book in English with the title *Why Me? Learning to Live in Crises* is published as a contribution to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development 2005-2014.

To support those who suffer, even those in socially hopeless situations, is an important part of our introduction to faith. And when we learn in a crisis situation, that learning remains with us always.

I am happy to be able to share new insights on both these aspects in the English language.

Hanover/Berlin
Spring 2005

Erika Schuchardt

For their help in the revision of the jubilee edition, I would like to thank:

Martin Kunz, German Library Frankfurt/Main
Ibo Lessing-Bornmüller, Photography
Norbert Link, dpa (picture of the Reichstag)
Max-Planck-Institute (picture of oxidosis)
Norbert Stolze, Scans, editing 'Scanco'
Adrean Teske, graphic design
Renate Völkner Vree (setting of the bibliography)
Ruth Walz (picture of Faust II)

Introduction

Should we rejoice that several editions of this book have already been published and that this revised edition describes yet new causes of suffering? Or should we lament this? The suffering among us knows no end. This doesn't just shock many people; it terrifies them. I am grateful that this book in particular continues to make its way. It is a thorn in our flesh, but it stops us from closing our eyes or looking away. Above all, it is a source of help for those who feel helpless when they see people around them suffering.

The firsthand accounts included by the author make it very clear that sufferers are not in the first place looking for solutions and explanations. They can accept their suffering more readily if they put it into words, unvarnished and uncensored, and share those words with others. Grief, aggression and rage often isolate the sufferer. But we also see that relationships with people who stay close to them become important to them. It is often hard not to flee from the anguish of the afflicted. To resist this temptation is to come face to face with our own fear, and that is a first step to drawing close to those who suffer.

These biographies tell us something else important. In the suffering we can encounter God. We need to hear this, at a time when we all have to learn to seek God in new ways. In a sense, God is experienced as a stranger, silent and mysterious. But time and again, we are told a mystery: the suffering suspect that God does not forsake them. They may complain against God or accuse him. It is one of the profound discoveries in our faith that we do not have to put up with God's silence. "*...enduring the silence on God's doorstep until he comes*" – these words of assurance impressed me.

In their crying out to God, some people saw before their eyes the image of Jesus Christ on the cross. They gained a whole new understanding of his powerlessness, his pain, his cry for God. "*Why me...*?" – that is also the question the suffering Christ asks on the cross. And because the cross does not have the last word, but cross and resurrection belong together in our faith, again and again suffering people have been infected with hope.

This book helps us to create and sustain relationships with one another. It also helps us, time and again, to risk anew our relationship

with God. I hope that the book will be read by many. Through it, we may discover what the Church is: the community of those who see one another.

Karlsruhe,
Sept. 1992 / August 2001

Regional Bishop *Dr. Klaus Engelhardt*
former Council Chairman of the EKD

In an age of ongoing industrialisation, in which religious traditions break down because the links between the generations have broken, there are also unfortunately many gaps in handing on techniques of living. Many people no longer know about the contexts and connections of healing. The religious rituals for dealing with sickness, misfortune and catastrophe previously practised in the family context must now find new replacements. The revised edition of Erika Schuchardt's book performs an important task by bringing together, presenting and clarifying exemplary life stories.

The author deserves great respect for the work she has accomplished. I hope that the updated volume will find an even wider readership among those seeking and giving advice.

Hanover,
November 2000

Präses *Manfred Kock*
former Council Chairman of the EKD

From the speech by Bishop Wolfgang Huber, chairman of the Evangelical Church in Germany, on the occasion of the award of the crown cross in gold to Erika Schuchardt, Berlin, March 2003

Tonight we are experiencing another stage on the way of a remarkable book by a remarkable author... First published in the early 1980s, this book was shortly afterwards awarded the literature prize... The author should be congratulated on an extraordinary work, which was written for the conditions of the time but which in many respects has not lost its importance for us today.

The book is based on serious theology and yet is oriented to praxis. It introduces us to more than 2000 life stories from the 20th century, coming both from experience and from research or literature. It leads us into the darkness of disabled people who today are concerned by crises

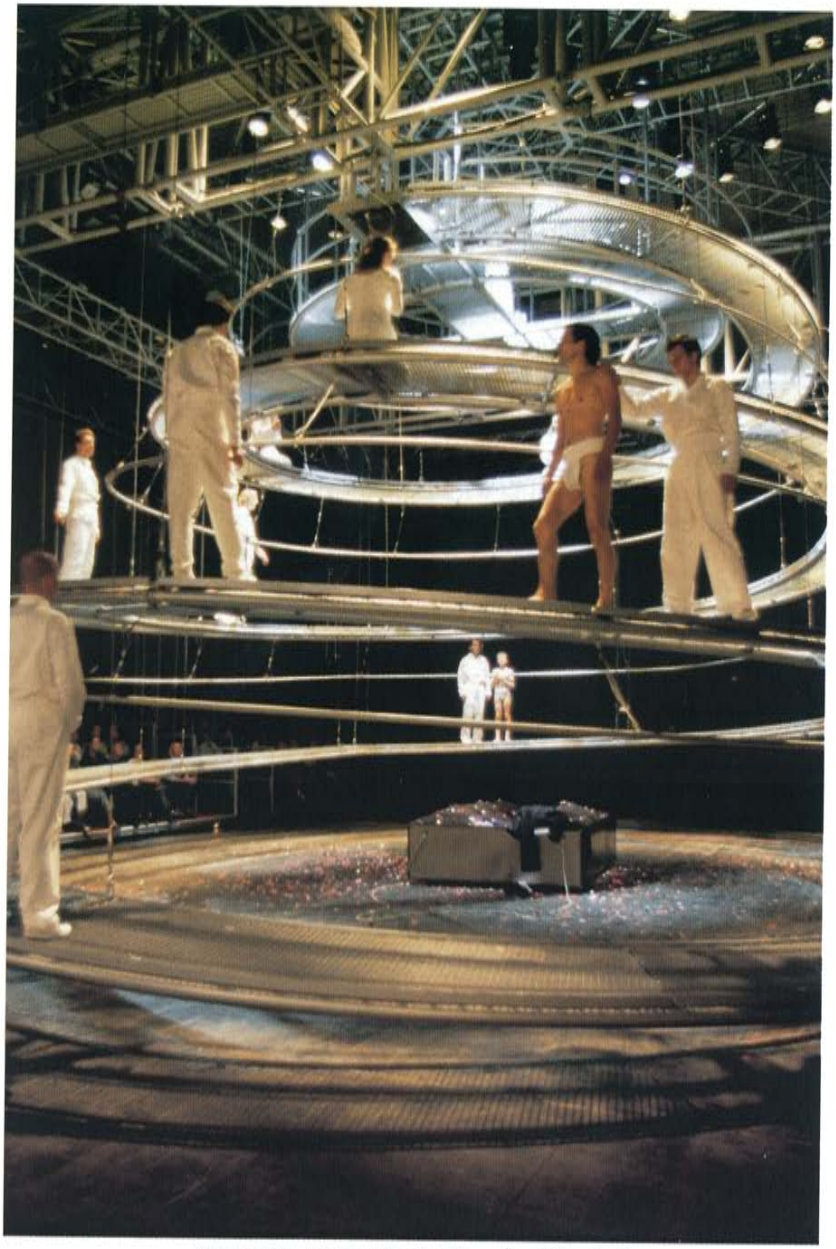
all over the world and society's reaction to them, and at the same time from that darkness into light…

Erika Schuchardt has developed a universal model for dealing with crises, which is important and useful for both the theory and the practice of pastoral care.

To be able to express lamentation to God and perhaps also against God, to be open about it and not hide it – this is probably the most important achievement of this book.

Agression is one of the phases of the spiral on the way to overcoming crises. The aim is the accompaniment and capacity of solidarity with others – a "sym-pathy", a suffering with others. In my opinion, this is not an arbitrary consequence of Christian faith but an explicit expression and implementation of reality. I read Erika Schuchardt's book not only as an invitation to psychological reflection but as a truly theological book.

I mentioned earlier the events of 11 September… when lamentation became a symbol for dealing with difficult situations in life. Since then I have been looking for hope, for which I find a lively expression in Erika Schuchardt's book. It not only tells stories of suffering at the time of pssion, but it also shows the paschal light in those stories of suffering and at this time of passion. For this I express my gratitude.



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
Spiral of Redemption - final scene from Faust II,
Production by Peter Stein, EXPO Hanover 2000

The Signal: A Reader's Letter, 2001

It is not enough to help a frail person up, you have to support him for a while on the way, until he can manage on his own.

Chinese proverb

This saying has often crossed my mind since I was discharged from hospital. So many visitors came to see me while I was a patient in the ward! But most visitors are sure that once you are discharged from hospital, you are fine and will somehow be able to manage on your own. In the first stages of the illness (or other crisis situations) they are all there – and probably will be there for your funeral. But what about support in the meantime?

Erika Schuchardt shows in her book how important that support is for people affected by serious illness or other crises. In the ideal case, we, the suffering, are supported by our family, our partner and some friends. However, everyone can become a source of care if they are prepared to get involved, to listen to the afflicted, to be of practical help in everyday life, and to signal to them: "*You are not alone, you are still a complete and valuable person in my eyes.*"

I just have to demand that the person accompanying me go through all the phases in the learning process of working through crisis described in Erika Schuchardt's book together with me, the sufferer, bear with my fears and disabilities, my helplessness, and not try to console me about my suffering: "*Everything has a meaning, see your sickness as an opportunity.*"

Of course people grow even in extreme situations, but from the point of view of an afflicted person I have to say: "*I would have quite liked to do without this 'opportunity', my life had meaning before the crisis as well.*" Instead of helping us, such phrases alienate and isolate people in crisis: "*I knew nobody would understand...*"

In reading the book it became clear to me that it is precisely their doubts and fears, their admitting of their own helplessness, that makes caregivers credible in the eyes of the sufferer.

A hard stroke of fate often leads us to lose our faith in God. It seems as though all our pleas for a way out of our situation are in vain; and

what about God? "*How can you do this to me? What have I done to make you abandon me like this?*" I too had an embittered argument with God, but as long as I can accuse God he is still present in me. Through accusing God and being allowed to accuse him, many sufferers and their families find their way back to the security of God.

It shows me that we are not abandoned. We begin to feel our will to live and the ever-growing zest for life that springs from this. We are cared for and accompanied on our journey back to life, even if, perhaps, to a life with sickness.

Erlangen / New York,
Spring 2001

T.S. (26)
medical student

Faces - Experiences of People Affected by Crises and Their Families
- see Dedication p. V -

1. People in Crises and Their Families

"How could that happen?" – "How could God let it happen?" – Why is it happening to us?" – These questions have been asked again and again whenever people suffer a stroke of fate.[1]

Harold Kushner discovered on his son Aaron's 3rd birthday that the boy was suffering from an incurable illness and would live at most to the age of 12. After his son died, he wrote about this crucial time in his book "*When bad things happen to good people*":

> "This is not how the world is supposed to work. Tragedies like this might happen to selfish, dishonest people whom I, as a rabbi, would then try to comfort... How could it be happening to me, to my son?"

Han Suyin, known to us through her many books – "*A Many Splendoured Thing*", for example – could only watch when a protracted illness turned her grown-up step-son Peter into a nursing case. She expressed her pain in the book "*A Share of Loving*".

Anna Bastian, at the age of ten, finds out that she has incurable liver cancer. In her story "*Niemalsland (Never Land)*" and in the book "*Tränen unterm Regenbogen (Tears under the Rainbow)*" she shares with us her journey to the boundary of her existence.

Hans Jonas, awarded the Peace Prize by the German Book Trade, is burdened by the thought of a "silent God" who stood by and watched the unspeakable misery of Auschwitz victims, one of them his own mother. He interrogates this thought in his book "*The Concept of God after Auschwitz – a Jewish Voice*".

In a similar way thousands of people like you and me have experienced crises – both sufferers and their families. Fate strikes them like a bolt of lightning, cutting right through the middle of their well-ordered lives, and they break down. There is a rent in creation that tears them apart.

Anyone who has frequent opportunities to talk to sufferers, their families and partners, or perhaps even to live with them, discovers that, time and again, what they are looking for most is understanding and fellowship. Frequently their unrealisable expectations are directed at Christians, for "*The church should be there for us, after all!*"

There is much evidence to demonstrate that the church wants to serve "the wellbeing of the suffering":

– In 1975, at its 5th Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, the World Council of Churches (WCC) adopted a statement on "The Unity of the Church – Unity of Mankind. The Disabled and the Wholeness of God's family"[2]; the European Churches followed this in 1978 with a memorandum in Bad Saarow, in the former GDR.

– In 1979, the WCC took up the worldwide challenge of the United Nations' Year of the Disabled in 1981, and linked to it a critical question on how the church understands itself. A consultant was appointed, herself a disabled person. Sadly, this post was abolished after the 7th Assembly in Canberra in 1991.

– In 1983, the 6th Assembly of the WCC in Vancouver, Canada, proclaimed "participation" and resolved that people with disabilities should be included in the decision-making bodies of the church on all levels.[3]

– In 1984, the 7th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Budapest reinforced the demand for participation.

– In 1993, there was still a gap between decisions on paper and the reality of everyday life. At the LWF Assembly in Budapest I gave a report on behalf of the working group "Participation of the Disabled" that turned out to be provocative for the 12,000 people listening. I began,

> "Was the working group on 'the disabled' itself disabled? ... out of 315 delegates only three (1%) volunteered for this group, the other four were consultants. In addition, all three delegates were themselves directly or indirectly affected by disability ..."[4]

This leads us right to the heart of our study:

- How do people in crisis and those who care for them see the church?
- What are their experiences of human fellowship and the Christian faith?

As lay Christians or ordinary people, they come across the church primarily in their immediate setting. They meet neighbours who are church members and fellow Christians: district nurses, deacons or pastors.

The compilation of the reports on this subject by people in crisis and their families reveals three trends in their answers:

- *First experience:*

  We feel that we are treated as objects in the church's ministry of service, but only rarely as subjects and church members who want to be involved:

  "The church does things for us, but only rarely with us!"

- *Second experience:*

  We hear the proclamation of the gospel as exhorting us to accept a consoling, transfiguring interpretation of our disability or crisis, but

only rarely as a comfort and help in critical clarification, and even less as encouraging liberating confrontation in a critical dialogue.

"The church consoles us with the next world and demands a transfiguration of this world, but it denies and represses our complaint, our cry."

- *Third experience:*

  We see congregations and pastors – spiritual counsellors – in their officially assigned roles, but only rarely as fellow-sufferers and partners who are personally involved.

  "The church hears us, but it can no longer listen to our real questions, so we have to find a way to work through our crises on our own."

People in crisis have not just spoken but also written about these issues. Here are some examples taken from an analysis of over 2,000 biographies.

About the first experience:

We feel that we are treated as objects in the church's ministry of service, but only rarely as subjects and church members who want to be involved.

Luise Habel[5], physically disabled, writes:

"It is a cold and wet October day. The telephone rings. It is the local pastor, whom I barely know. He says, 'Next Wednesday two boys will be coming to see you. They're taking you out around town.' That was all. He didn't ask whether I felt like going out with them, or whether the time was convenient for me. Nothing of the sort."

Her attempt to refuse the invitation by mentioning her impending stay in hospital or the cold October weather was brushed aside with a strange explanation:

"But the pastor is so convinced of his mission that he explains to me at length that his confirmation candidates need to be introduced to the concept of the church's ministry of service, and therefore it would be a good thing for them to take me around town."

Luise then asked him to send two girls who could help with the housework, so that the task would be of more use to her and not just an exercise in the serving ministry. She also made suggestions on how to make good use of the boys by sending them to help people with heart conditions with the gardening. But these suggestions ran up against the pastor's desire to present the diversity of the serving ministry.

"You know, what we mainly want to do is demonstrate to the congregation how broad the range of our activities are."

This stated purpose only intensified her suffering. She felt how threatening the power of an institution can be. Her chapter is entitled "Objects of Charity". It is depressing to see how often we unwittingly portray ourselves as a service industry. The author describes in detail how this was not an isolated case, but a kind of "standing order" for "care":

His successor, whom I had never met, gave me a call a year later. He wanted to send two boys to me for an interview. I told him that we probably wouldn't have a very comfortable discussion, because I didn't feel our local Chris-

tian congregation took much notice of me as a wheelchair user. I'd rather have him visit me before he sent the children for the interview. But he replied that I should just fire away at the congregation."

Predictably, a critical discussion was too much for the two confirmation candidates, especially since they were under pressure to produce a tape. We learn afterwards that the pastor himself could not find time for a visit until three years later. Luise reports:

"His slick way of responding to problems made me so angry that I went over to the attack. I said that one was left alone so much in our congregation – so much that I sometimes wondered whether this congregation existed at all. The pastor answered laconically, 'That is not just a problem of disabled people. There are many lonely people amongst us.' When I indicated that it came close to a scandal if the church knew about this condition but didn't do anything about it, he just shrugged his shoulders. The pastor then told me, in much more detail, how active he was in our town's historical festival. When he left, I was left with the feeling that I had not been able to communicate with him at all. From conversations with disabled people I learned that this was not an isolated experience. The disabled often remain the objects of one-off special projects."

Luise quotes from suffering people in the church's youth ministry and describes the shortcomings of the church as follows:

"The church has failed to truly accept disabled people as complete and valuable human beings. We are objects of pity."

"They don't need the handicapped and don't try hard enough to put themselves in their place."

"Ironically, church halls are always in the basement."

"The church has always conformed to society instead of being a formative influence itself."

A survey conducted by Peter Hämer[6] yields the following "Open Questions for the Church":

1. When will the disabled person be accepted and no longer treated as 'a poor, disabled person'?

2. They say: '...our disabled', '... our residents in our home'. What right do they have to treat disabled people as children? On the other hand, it's: '... our brothers'!

3. When will the church and its staff turn from their reserved and negative attitude towards the disabled? It prevents any kind of partnership or participation with equal opportunities. (Note: Pity is also a way of keeping one's distance!)

6. Christians call each other brothers and sisters. But when Christians say, 'I serve the disabled for Christ's sake', they make them the object of their good works. How can the disabled feel themselves to be brothers or sisters if they are always on the receiving end? Do brothers and sisters not help each other? ...

8. When will people realise that you can't work for disabled people, but only with them?"

About the second experience:

We hear the proclamation of the gospel as exhorting us to accept a consoling, transfiguring interpretation of our disability or crisis, but only rarely as a comfort and help in critical clarification, and even less as encouraging liberating confrontation in a critical dialogue.

> "Whenever I voiced my heretical thoughts, there was always some pious person who would prove to me that God is not powerless. I began to dread these advocates of God's who seemed to know everything... I decided no longer to expect anything from God... At the time, I stopped reading the Bible for years."[7]

Heinz Zahrnt[8] writes about a pastor's visit to a woman who was seriously ill with cancer. The pastor brought her the message that she was chosen "to be allowed to suffer":

> "I recall the story one of my theological teachers, a true Christian, told me about a pastor visiting his mother, who was suffering from cancer. After the pastor left, the son asked his mother how it had been and what the pastor had said. 'Dear lady,' he had said, she told him, 'there are three stages of suffering: having to suffer – being able to suffer – being allowed to suffer'. And the elderly lady added, 'I just kept thinking that he should try bearing my pain sometime.'"

Christa Schlett[9], who has cerebral palsy, describes the visit of a district nurse who saw it as her mission to convince the author that it was her role in life to be ill:

> "... but I resist the common view that suffering always leads to faith. Particularly amongst the disabled I meet the most embittered atheists. Nothing tempts us so much to engage in an argument as the good news brought by elderly community workers, who label us as martyrs in our suffering...
> I could hardly believe it when one of these ladies from our former parish tried to convince me during her visit that it was my role in life to be ill: to be ill, so that other people could realize how well they are. I would like to give her the benefit of the doubt that she really meant what she said ... It's just that disabled people have to be on their guard when their disability is turned into a cult, when their weakness is elevated over against their being human."

Denise Legrix[10], also physically disabled, writes about her resistance:

> "Now and then we would have a conversation ... about our fate, about 'the good that God intended for us'. My pen refused to write anything that seemed untruthful to me. I had to say it again and again: it just didn't make sense to me!"

Andre Miquel[11] reflects on the death of his son Pierre:

> "... I could never accept that I had to give away my son. It is the suffering of the other person, of a dying child, that seems intolerable. That is the great obstacle ... Only God can give away his son, a human being cannot give him away. Just like my wife, I refused to do it. Death took him from us by force. But we did not consent. Is it possible for parents to give their child away? ... We are not God. Abraham is an unusual figure, who often became unbearable to us. We found much more comfort in the book of Job. Even the gospel became at certain times a burden to us."

Ingrid Weber-Gast[12] speaks about her experiences with her psychological disorder, depression:

> "My expectations of preaching have fallen greatly in the course of time. I feel richly blessed whenever a word is spoken that reaches me in the darkness of my disease, but I no longer wait for it. Rather, I come assuming that it will not happen. Perhaps that is a thick skin I hall have grown to harden me against new disappointments – disappointments that are particularly hard to bear in the time of sickness."

And Peter Hämer[13] in his survey "Open Questions of the Physically Disabled for the Church" reminds us emphatically of a common perception:

> 12. What is the church's position on the fact that disability is still regarded as God's punishment (for the parents of the disabled or the disabled themselves)?
>
> 13. The church must stop promising a better life after death. It should rather help to make life worth living in this world."

Christy Brown[14] describes his critical examination of the Christian perspective on redemption in the next world:

> "I remember Lourdes and the people I met on the way to the Grotto, and once again I tried to be like them – patient, cheerful, resigned to their suffering, knowing well about their reward in the next world. But it was no use. I was too human. There was too much of the human being alive in me and not enough of the humble servant who submits willingly to God's will. I wanted to see and know more about life here on earth before I thought about the next world."

In conclusion, I will quote from a very instructive interview,[15] in which the spontaneous response of a staff member of a rehabilitation home sheds light on the gap between the sermons preached in the official institution and the treatment of fellow human beings:

> "We received an unexpected answer from the teacher of a special class. Contrary to the opinion of Siloah's director, her students were actually interested in religion. However, they disapproved of the sermons in the institution – apparently because the board too often side-stepped conflicts with the residents. So that was a definitely negative aspect of Christians."[15]

About the third experience:

We see congregations and pastors – counsellors – in the official roles assigned to them, but only rarely as fellow sufferers and partners who allow themselves to get personally involved.

In her depression, Ingrid Weber-Gast[16] looks for a pastor less as an officially appointed helper than as a caregiver who allows himself to get involved, who in his partnership with her admits that a shadow is cast on his life as well and who learns to drop his own vigorous affirmations in favour of the more moderate, uncertain language of a common quest:

> "I believe that every pastor comes in contact with such people [from marginalized groups], but most of the time only in his role as pastor, as the officially assigned helper, and not as a friend who goes through the experience of this difficult life together with them. That would mean allowing a shadow from

these depths to be cast on one's own life, seeing one's own life inextricably interlinked with those who are to 'die down below'... Their proclamation of the gospel would have to take account of the melancholy of the listeners. Therefore, it should not only communicate trusting confidence, but also speak about the other side, the dark and arduous side."

As father of two mentally handicapped children, Albert Görres[17] asks: What can a congregation do? He dedicates a whole chapter to the topic "The Disabled Child and the Christian Congregation":

"What can the individual and what can a congregation do? Let's look at an example: How does a congregation react to a family taking their handicapped child to the Sunday morning service? Will the parents be spared running the usual gauntlet of curious and disconcerted looks? Will they feel that they are supported by loving understanding for their child? Will the congregation tolerate the occasional disturbance, or will the parents experience this visit to the Sunday service with their problem child as another humiliation that reinforces their feeling of being abandoned with their burden by God and the world: that is, in this case, the pastor and their fellow believers? Sadly, one rarely hears an understanding or encouraging word from the pulpit for the embarrassed young mothers, who either abstain from church-going or have to bring their children, who often are not inclined to behave and be quiet. Even more difficult, however, is the situation for parents with a disabled child who always attracts attention and has trouble learning the rules of good behaviour. Sometimes the parents are told that one should rather stay at home with such a child."

Edith Meisinger[18] had a similar experience when attending a service. In her book "Notes from a Person suffering from Spastic Paralysis" she writes:

"I understand completely: It is not easy for a healthy person to bear the sight of someone who is paralysed. But at this point I would like to address the Christians... In theory, we Christians know all of this – even that Christ has different standards. But what about the practical implementation? Of course I also went to church services with my carer. We took seats in the third-to-last row. A friendly woman came up to us and whispered to my carer: 'Excuse me, would you be so kind as to sit in the last row with the little one, just so that she won't distract anybody's attention from the sermon?' ... The next service was going to be a communion service. My carer was kindly requested to prevent me from taking part."

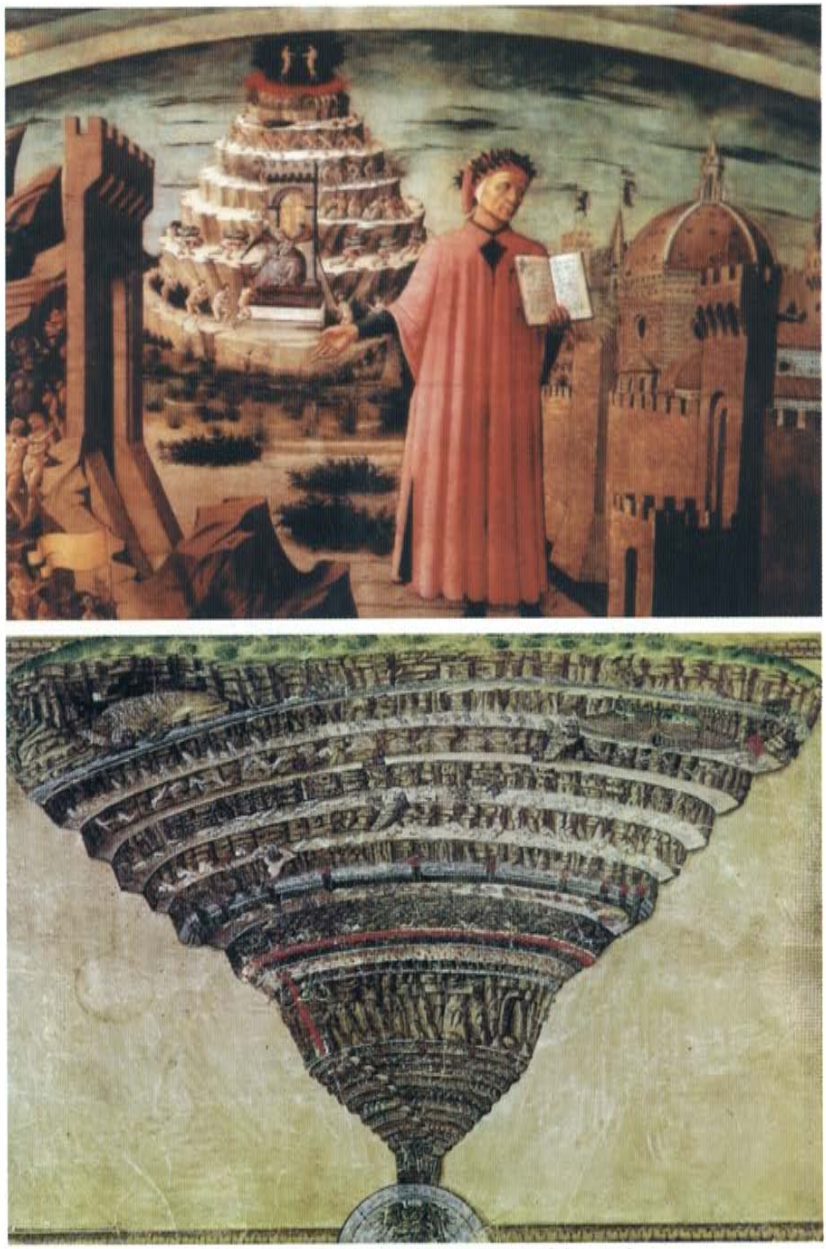
It makes one think that in analysing over 2,000 biographies it seems impossible to balance these negative tendencies with hopeful ones. But perhaps these results can provide food for thought. The analysis shows that:

- A comparatively small number of biographies explicitly mention contacts with the church or pastoral care; one may assume that the church is of little importance in the lives of most sufferers.
- The biographers who mention the church or pastoral care are unanimous in viewing their experience negatively.

- In contrast, these biographers, as well as others, see their own faith experiences as crucial, and significant for their continuing journey (cf. chapter 3: Pastoral Care and Faith in Life-Stories).

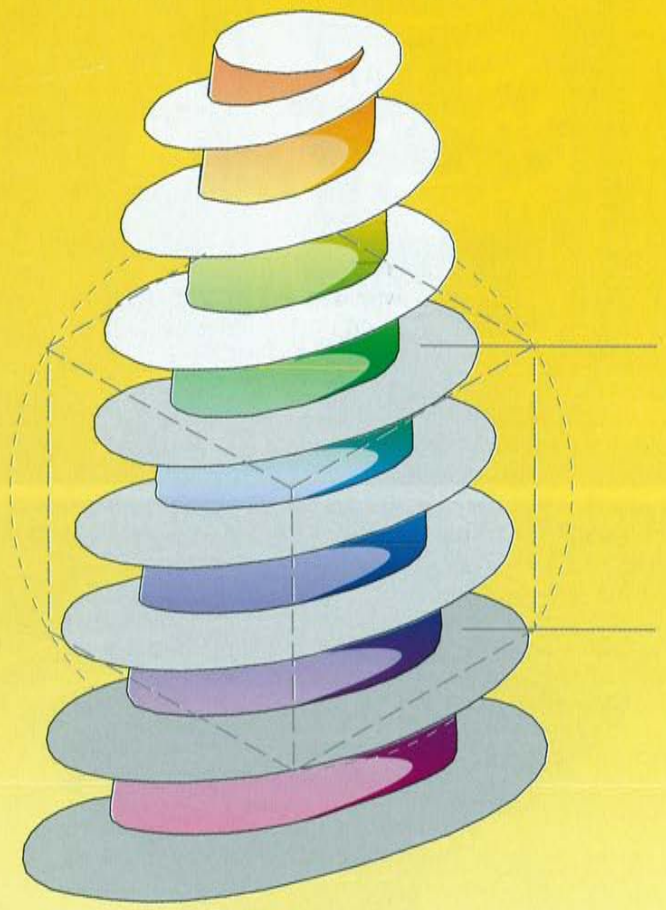
The result of the analysis can be summarised as follows:

- Despite their negative experiences of the church and pastoral care, the sufferers and those who care for them remain committed to their own positive experiences of faith.



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
The Mountain of Purgatory and the Chasm of Hell. Frieze on the subject of Dante's Divine Comedy, Sandro Botticelli, Florence, 15th century

THE SPIRAL – SYMBOL FOR ...



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2. Working through Crises as a Learning Process in Eight Spiral Phases

Our appraisal of the biographies of people in crisis draws attention to the deficiencies in the way we live together and to an apparently lost dimension of "living with" the other. True, sufferers are often accompanied and cared for, but the caregivers are unable to relate to them appropriately. The appraisal also gives clues as to the phases in which help in working through crisis can be given. Here it will be revealing to look more closely at the biographers' motives. What made them write?

Almost without exception they point to their isolation; the biography takes on the role of a substitute discussion partner or companion who is there, who is able to be close, and whom one can trust completely on the difficult journey of working through crisis, i.e., in learning to 'live' with the suffering, the crisis.

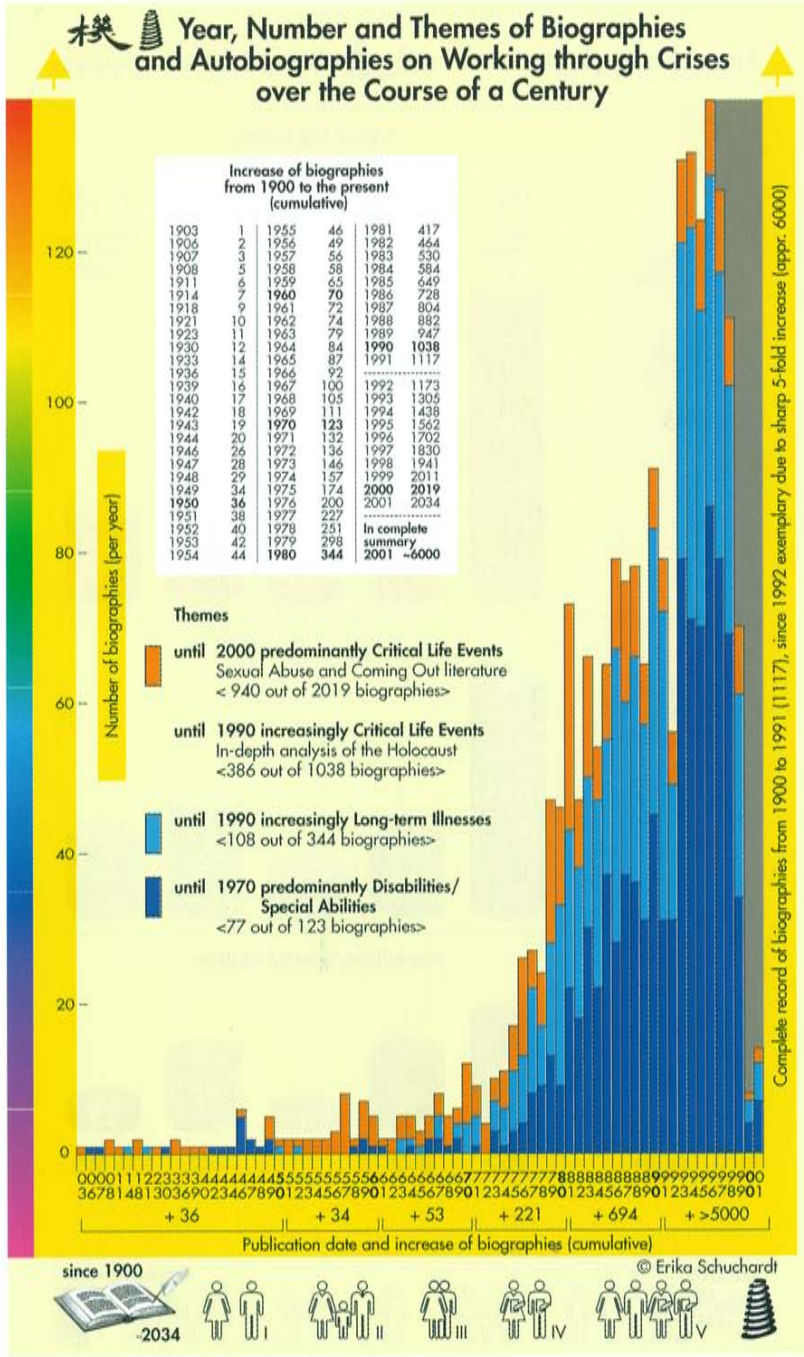
Likewise, the biographers were almost without exception thrown back on their own resources, having to live through their learning process with no support. Hence the deeply shocking result of the research that two-thirds of the biographers broke off their learning process prematurely or had to remain socially isolated for the rest of their lives, while only just under a third reached the goal of social integration. These results accord with the experiences of sufferers with pastoral care described in chapter 1. What all of them had in common was the feeling of not being accepted.

In view of this result, let me ask the question: what can or should the church do? Considering the numerous facts[19] showing that the church actually does quite a lot *for* people in these situations – perhaps, in fact, too much through its service organisation of specialised offices – it would be more precise to ask: how can the churches and their staff do what they do in a more appropriate way, i.e. primarily *with* people in crisis?

How could church members counteract social isolation and help abolish the additional social suffering of the afflicted, with the objective of integrating them into the congregations?

The question of which paths generally lead to social integration and which to social isolation was one of the subjects I addressed in my analysis of the available biographies of sufferers and those who care for them from 1900 to the present day (cf. illustrations on pages 12-15 and 24).


World Map
of the Life Histories
As at
2001
1900
© Erika Schuchardt
Originally German 1334
Translated into German 700
Total 2034
since 1900
-2034
Kanada 7
USA 292
Brasilien 1
Uruguay 1
Irland 2
Norwegen 1
Finnland 1
Schweden 9
Dänemark 6
Großbritannien 110
Deutschland 1172 (davon aus der ehem. DDR 32)
Polen 40
Niederlande 40
Belgien 1
Spanien 3
Frankreich 75
Schweiz 13
Österreich 54
Ungarn 2
Rumänien 5
Türkei 2
Syrien 1
Iran 4
Pakistan 1
Marokko 1
Algerien 4
Italien 15
Israel 20
Irak
Saudi-Arabien 3
Indien 1
China 2
Korea 3
Japan 2
Aus den Nachfolge-Staaten der ehemaligen Sowjetunion 12
Belarus
Kasachsten
Kirgistan
Russland
Tadschikistan
Turkmenistan
Ukraine
Usbekistan
Australien 5
Neuseeland 2
Südafrika 1
I
II
III
IV
V
Albania 2
Algeria 4
Australia 5
Austria 54
Belgium 1
Bosnia 2
Brazil 1
Canada 7
Chile 1
China 2
Croatia 2
Czech Republic 3
Denmark 6
England 107
Finland 1
France 75
Germany 1172
Hungary 2
India 1
Iran 4
Iraq 1
Ireland 2
Israel 20
Italy 15
Japan 2
Korea 3
Morocco 1
The Netherlands 40
New Zealand 2
Norway 8
Pakistan 1
Poland 40
Romania 5
Russia 3
Saudi Arabia 3
Scotland 1
South Africa 1
Soviet Union (former) 12
Spain 3
Sweden 9
Switzerland 111
Syria 1
Turkey 2
Ukraine 1
Uruguay 1
USA 292
Yugoslavia (former) 2


Year, Number and Themes of Biographies and Autobiographies on Working through Crises over the Course of a Century
Increase of biographies from 1900 to the present (cumulative)
1903 1 1955 46 1981 417
1906 2 1956 49 1982 464
1907 3 1957 56 1983 530
1908 5 1958 58 1984 584
1911 6 1959 65 1985 649
1914 7 1960 70 1986 728
1918 9 1961 72 1987 804
1921 10 1962 74 1988 882
1923 11 1963 79 1989 947
1930 12 1964 84 1990 1038
1933 14 1965 87 1991 1117
1936 15 1966 92
1939 16 1967 100 1992 1173
1940 17 1968 105 1993 1305
1942 18 1969 111 1994 1438
1943 19 1970 123 1995 1562
1944 20 1971 132 1996 1702
1946 26 1972 136 1997 1830
1947 28 1973 146 1998 1941
1948 29 1974 157 1999 2011
1949 34 1975 174 2000 2019
1950 36 1976 200 2001 2034
1951 38 1977 227
1952 40 1978 251 In complete summary 2001 ~6000
1953 42 1979 298
1954 44 1980 344
Themes
until 2000 predominantly Critical Life Events
Sexual Abuse and Coming Out literature
< 940 out of 2019 biographies>
until 1990 increasingly Critical Life Events
In-depth analysis of the Holocaust
<386 out of 1038 biographies>
until 1990 increasingly Long-term Illnesses
<108 out of 344 biographies>
until 1970 predominantly Disabilities/ Special Abilities
<77 out of 123 biographies>
Number of biographies (per year)
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
Complete record of biographies from 1900 to 1991 (1117), since 1992 exemplary due to sharp 5-fold increase (appr. 6000)
0000111223333444444445555555556666666666777777777788888888889999999999900
3678148130369023467890123456789012345678901234567890123456789012345678901
+ 36
+ 34
+ 53
+ 221
+ 694
+ >5000
Publication date and increase of biographies (cumulative)
since 1900
-2034
I
II
III
IV
V
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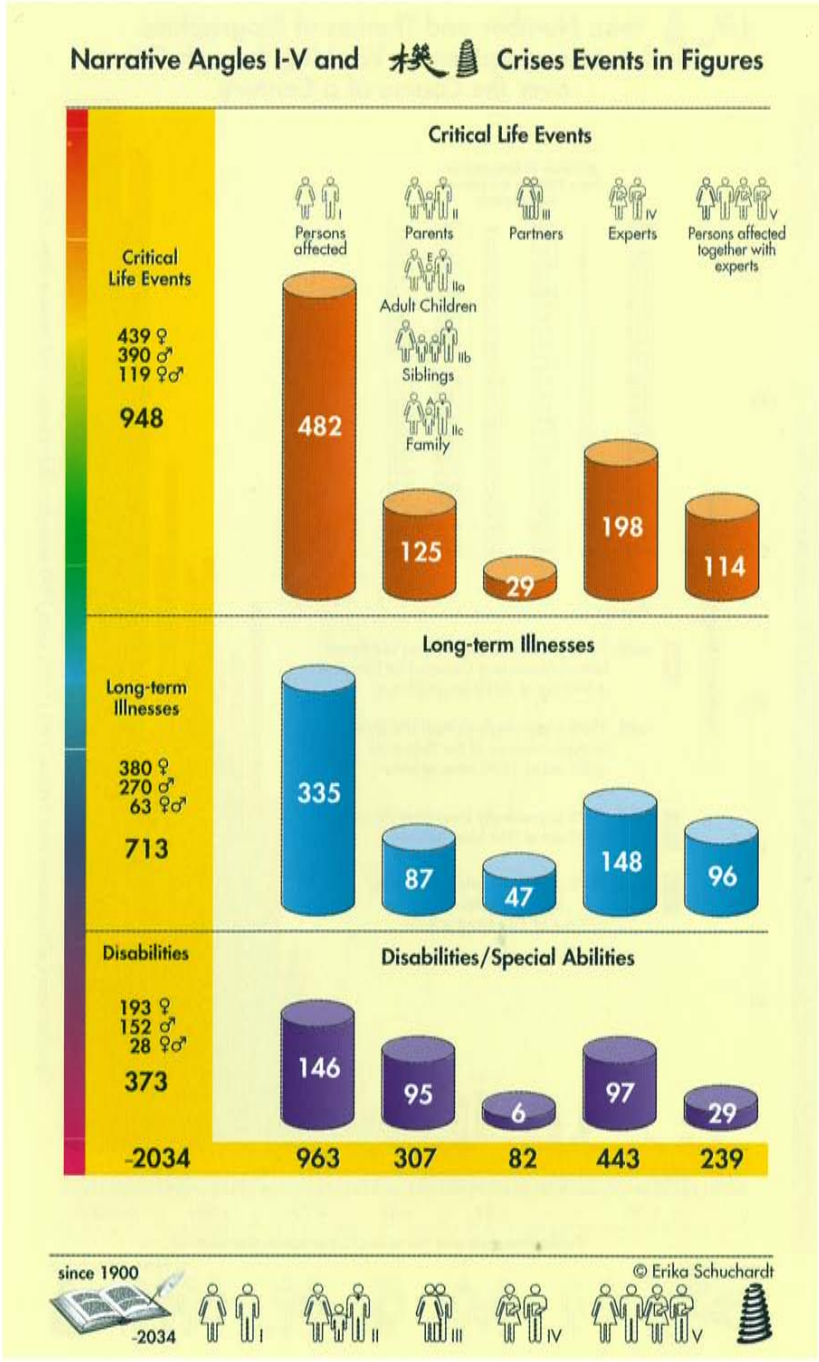
Narrative Angles I-V and 楔 Crises Events in Figures
Critical Life Events
Persons affected
Parents
Partners
Experts
Persons affected together with experts
Adult Children
Siblings
Family
Critical Life Events
439 ♀
390 ♂
119 ♀♂
948
482
125
29
198
114
Long-term Illnesses
Long-term Illnesses
380 ♀
270 ♂
63 ♀♂
713
335
87
47
148
96
Disabilities/Special Abilities
Disabilities
193 ♀
152 ♂
28 ♀♂
373
146
95
6
97
29
-2034
963
307
82
443
239
since 1900
-2034
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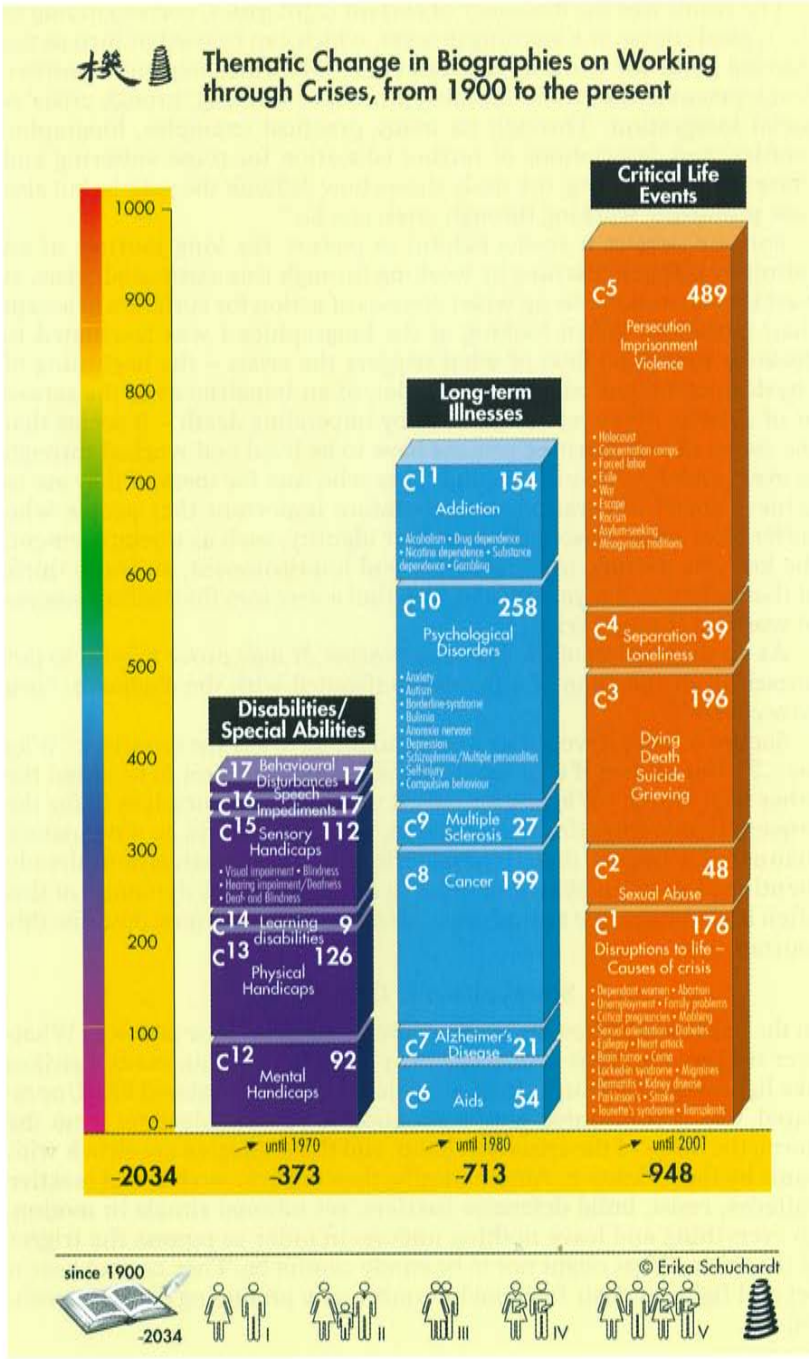
Thematic Change in Biographies on Working through Crises, from 1900 to the present
1000
900
800
700
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
Disabilities/ Special Abilities
C17 Behavioural Disturbances 17
C16 Speech Impediments 17
C15 Sensory Handicaps 112
• Visual impairment • Blindness
• Hearing impairment/Deafness
• Deaf- and Blindness
C14 Learning disabilities 9
C13 Physical Handicaps 126
C12 Mental Handicaps 92
Long-term Illnesses
C11 Addiction 154
• Alcoholism • Drug dependence
• Nicotine dependence • Substance dependence • Gambling
C10 Psychological Disorders 258
• Anxiety
• Autism
• Borderline-syndrome
• Bulimia
• Anorexia nervosa
• Depression
• Schizophrenia/Multiple personalities
• Self-injury
• Compulsive behaviour
C9 Multiple Sclerosis 27
C8 Cancer 199
C7 Alzheimer's Disease 21
C6 Aids 54
Critical Life Events
C5 489
Persecution Imprisonment Violence
• Holocaust
• Concentration camps
• Forced labor
• Exile
• War
• Escape
• Racism
• Asylum-seeking
• Misogynous traditions
C4 Separation 39 Loneliness
C3 196
Dying Death Suicide Grieving
C2 48
Sexual Abuse
C1 176
Disruptions to life – Causes of crisis
• Dependant women • Abortion
• Unemployment • Family problems
• Critical pregnancies • Mobbing
• Sexual orientation • Diabetes
• Epilepsy • Heart attack
• Brain tumor • Coma
• Lockedin syndrome • Migraines
• Dementia • Kidney disease
• Parkinson's • Stroke
• Tourette's syndrome • Transplants
until 1970
until 1980
until 2001
-2034
-373
-713
-948
since 1900
-2034
I
II
III
IV
V
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The result was the discovery of certain regularities, corresponding to the typical course of a learning process, which can be used in turn as the starting point for working through crisis. The final stage of a positive development of the whole 'learning process of working through crisis' is social integration. Through its many practical examples, biographic profiles, and descriptions of further education for those suffering and those not yet suffering, the study shows how difficult the path is, but also how promising working through crisis can be.[20]

For our subject it seems helpful to picture the long journey of an infinitely difficult learning by working through this existential crisis, at least insofar as it opens up wider courses of action for sufferers to accept their situation. When looking at the biographies I was fascinated to discover that regardless of what triggers the crisis – the beginning of physical, mental or emotional disorder, of an impairment of the senses or of chronic illness or disturbance by impending death – it seems that the stages of this learning process have to be lived and worked through in every case by the sufferers and those who care for them, if they are to achieve social integration. It is therefore important that people who suffer from other crises affecting their identity, such as unemployment, the loss of a partner, or persecution and imprisonment, and who think of themselves as not yet affected, also find a way into the healing process of working through crisis.

As an illustration of the learning process, it may prove helpful to put oneself in the position of a person confronted with the diagnosis: "*you have cancer!*".

Sooner or later it would seem natural for us to ask the question: "*Why me...?*". But seldom if ever would we allow the question to be asked the other way round: "*Why not me...?*". If we dare to let ourselves in for the attempt that follows this first question, we experience in an anticipatory manner the phases that I characterised in the investigation already mentioned as *spiral phases*, in order to do justice to the dynamics of this often lifelong struggle to find one's identity.[21] We shall now describe this journey.

Spiral phase 1: *Uncertainty*

In the beginning, when the problem presents itself, there is shock. Whatever triggers the crisis – an accident, a piece of news, an event – strikes like lightning and disintegrates a regulated and well-ordered life. Unprepared, one is confronted with a situation in life that deviates from the norm: the onset of the crisis is at hand, and those affected are struck with panic by the unknown. Automatically, they fall back on learned reactive patterns, resist, build defensive barriers, set rational rituals in motion, do everything and leave nothing undone in order to repress the trigger of the crisis. What ought not to be surely cannot be. They cannot bear it yet and fight for their freedom by continually producing defence mechanisms.

The most notable feature common to all sufferers, as they go round and round in circles in a state of suspension, is 'implicit denial'. This state of '*uncertainty*' is what Kübler-Ross calls 'denial and isolation'. The word 'denial', however, suggests a conscious procedure whereas the term '*uncertainty*' denotes a semi-conscious state or a state of not-yet-recognising, with a tendency to deny the crisis. At the level of expression, this state corresponds to the question, "*What is actually going on?*". Those who are trained in communication analysis know that there is a hidden thought behind the 'actually', a thought one cannot admit yet. There is a latent recognition of the crisis in preparation.

It will prove helpful for pastoral care to describe spiral phase 1 – the initial phase, or the phase of recognition – more precisely. There are three typical intermediate phases that may follow on from one another or persist simultaneously and alongside one another for various periods of time.

Intermediate Phase 1.1: Ignorance

"*What is that supposed to mean…?*" One cannot always expect the worst. These are the trivialising phrases with which any rising doubt is played down. Not-yet-knowing makes space for itself as *ignorance* (1.1), which forms the transition to the phase of *uncertainty* (1). Very soon, however, this ignorance will give way; in the face of increasing signs and changed reactions in one's social environment the clues cluster and condense into incriminating facts.

Intermediate Phase 1.2: Uncertainty

"*Does that mean something after all..?*" Ignorance gives way to uncertainty (1.2). Characteristics of this phase are that on the one hand, the rising doubts can no longer be denied, and on the other hand, their psychologically unstable emotional state prevents sufferers from recognising the facts. It takes much time to learn to accept reality. Uncertainty implies a higher degree of sensitisation; like a seismograph, they seem to note whatever concerns them; all too focussed and therefore over-subtle questions about certainty, about the truth are posed, comparisons and attempts at explanations made, all for one purpose: to deny the uncertainty (1.2), "*No, that does not mean anything!*"

Frequently in this intermediate phase, there are already one or several who know – the doctor, the neighbour, the other patients – in contrast to the sufferers who do not yet know. This creates a changed climate; those who know have a certain responsibility; with their behaviour they set the agenda for a future relationship of trust or mistrust. It is clear that this knowledge has a part to play in the relationship with the sufferer who does not know and has a strong influence on the process of recognition. It is also characteristic that contrary to what one might expect, this growing uncertainty does not produce the ability to accept the truth. Just the opposite happens, and this can only find an emotional

explanation: in view of the threat, the massive defence is strengthened. This is a sign of the beginning of the next intermediate phase (1.3).

Intermediate Phase 1.3: Unacceptability

The question, "*This has to be a mistake...?*" marks the inability to accept the loss of possibilities in life. This intermediate phase can be called *Unacceptability* (1.3) for short. Now the active attempts to ward off the threat of certainty mount up. Another characteristic of this phase is selective perception. Sufferers can only see what helps to nourish their reassuring *ignorance* (1.1); therefore they fail to see whatever might reinforce their doubt. Unremittingly they try to convince themselves and others by force that in falling back on *ignorance* (1.1) everything is nevertheless in order.

Again, a note of some knowledge about the real state of affairs can be heard that strengthens the urge to seek reassurance, expressed in phrases like: "Surely, you also think that...?", or the affirmative negation: "Yes, that is how it is... but...?". This intermediate phase is the last attempt to find escape routes from certainty of the truth. At the end of these three intermediate phases within the first spiral phase of *uncertainty* we encounter the unspoken desire for a cathartic certainty that puts an end to the unbearable tension.

If sufferers are not supported in the process, the discovery of the truth is deferred for an unreasonably long time; the gradual mediation of the truth by putting into words what is already latently known does not happen. However, it becomes clear that this initial phase of recognition influences the entire course of working through crisis. Appropriate support helps to avoid aborting the process of working through crisis, with a tendency to social isolation. This opens up a learning process that offers the prospect of sharing life together.

Spiral Phase 2: *Certainty*

The *certainty* of the loss of opportunities in life already adumbrated in the phase of uncertainty (1) now follows peremptorily as phase 2, articulated emotionally in phrases like "*Yes, but that's just not possible...?*" It sounds like a negative affirmation and looks like the continuation of the denial, and both observations are right!

Even those who have recognised their crises have to deny them now and again in order to be able to continue living. They are prepared to accept the undivided truth, but emotionally and practically they build their lives on the hope against all hopes that the signs will prove to be false or mistaken.

This ambivalence between the rational Yes and the emotional No is the definitive mark of the phase of certainty (2). When it is needed, the ambivalence of the "*Yes, but...?*" pushes itself like a buffer between sufferers and their shock at the diagnosis; it gives them the free space to

pick up their courage and start afresh on their way. And yet every conversation about the real situation in the face of irrefutable certainty is helpful for clarification, because it makes a link between the rational insight and the emotional disposition. The decisive precondition is the readiness of the sufferers. They must signal that they are willing to speak about the real situation; this is the only way to their own discovery of the truth. A gradual communication can enable them to accept the truth and have it put into words.

The question of truth is not asking for objectively valid factual information or for fundamental principles, nor is it answered by a single, isolated act of transmitting a piece of news. It is a much more complex problem of communication between the sender and the recipient. Therefore, it is a question of the medium, of relationship, of closeness between the suffering and those not suffering (doctor, specialist, caregiver).

So the truth is not spoken in isolation or in a vacuum: "You have cancer", "you have a child with Down's syndrome", "you have to expect the consequences of an injury of the spine". It is spoken in the context of the interpersonal relationship in the specific situation. There is, however, an open question: Is the truth acknowledged rationally while feelings are repressed by defence mechanisms, or are the afflicted emotionally in a state to bear it? How do both parties, both sufferers and those who care for them, confront together the fate imposed upon them? That is also a question of the caregivers' ability to cope with stress, a question of their communicative-therapeutic competence and of the inner stability of their personal identity in the face of ultimate or boundary situations.

Sufferers certainly have the right to the full truth, if in the moment of hearing they are in a state to bear the truth and to process it.

Spiral Phase 3: *Aggression*

From these primarily 'rational' and 'externally-directed' phases of *uncertainty* (1) and the still ambivalent certainty (2) follow the 'emotional' and 'uncontrolled' phases marked by vigorous outbursts of feeling.

It is only now that what is understood in the head becomes an experience of the heart and trickles into consciousness: "...I realise only now!" Hurt and shaken to the core, the afflicted cry, "*Why me...?*" The agony is boundless. This dawning consciousness is overcome by such emotional turmoil that sufferers feel that they are choking on it, or – in the very best case – allow their feelings to break out against the people around them. This volcanic protest can most aptly be called aggression (3). Tragically, the actual object of the aggression, the cause of the crisis itself, is impossible to attack. Therefore, the *aggression* seeks substitute objects; anything that presents itself can become a target.

Thus, from the perspective of the outsider, the aggression breaks out without visible cause in all directions and against anything and every-

thing. Everywhere the sufferers turn, they find opportunities to make demands. They themselves are not aware of their search for safety valves through which they strive to release the excess pressure of their feelings, in order to regain their ability to act. But this is the starting point of a new vicious circle.

Just as in the phase of *uncertainty* (1), the early insights of those who know, wrongly endeavouring to spare the afflicted, enhance their denial of their situation, so now, in the phase of *aggression* (3), if their protest is misinterpreted as an outburst of personal defence and not as a safety valve, it leads to even more defence and thereby also afflicts the people around them. As a result, those who are overwhelmed by their suffering see in this evidence that everyone and everything has formed an alliance against them, and feel abandoned and isolated in their actual situation.

This phase reveals particularly clearly the dangers that sufferers are exposed to if left without appropriate support: they either choke on their aggression in passive or active self-destruction or are dragged down into isolation by hostile comments from people around them. A third possibility is that their internalised control of negative feelings leads them to fall into apathetic resignation. We see here the fundamental importance of aggression, as the initial phase of working through the crisis emotionally, for the course of the whole learning process.

Spiral Phase 4: *Negotiation*

The emotional energy released in aggression presses for action. Every conceivable step is taken, almost at random, in order to escape the powerlessness of the hopeless situation. These "attempts to abolish" the situation are produced in unending succession. The stakes are constantly raised. There is bargaining and negotiation. Within the constraints of their values and financial circumstances sufferers identify two roads that, paradoxically, they follow in an unguided fashion and often in parallel: they use the "doctors' emporium" and they look for "miracle paths". The indiscriminate and costly consultation, often driving the family to the brink of ruin, of different doctors, foreign experts or even the most obscure "healer" is intended to buy the hope that it is possible to defer a definitive diagnosis. At the same time, all kinds of "miracle paths" are explored, such as pilgrimages to Lourdes – made by two-thirds of the biographers – having Mass said, the laying on of hands in a service, making solemn promises, signing away one's entire possessions to the church or to humanitarian institutions, or vowing to enter a monastery or to change one's life completely. Mind you, on one single condition, "*If... then surely (you, it, they) ... must...?*" This uncontrolled emotional spiral is to be understood as a last revolt on the part of the sufferers. It can be described as *negotiation* (4). Here, too, we recognise how dangerous the journey can be if they have to make it on their own; it can lead to a material and spiritual "clearance sale".

On the other hand, we can see how many disappointments can be avoided if sufferers in this phase learn to understand their own reactions and to deal with them.

Spiral Phase 5: *Depression*

All bargaining in the "doctors' emporium" or on "miracle paths" is sooner or later doomed to failure. The person who is seriously ill with cancer can no longer evade the knowledge of his impending death. The patient who has been paralysed from the waist down since the accident can no longer deny the numbness of her legs. The mother of the child with Down's syndrome can no longer fail to notice its behaviour and facial expression.

The externally-directed feelings are spent and make room for the internally-directed relinquishing of hopes, which leads the sufferers to fall silent. Frequently they experience their defeat in the previous phases as failure; they lapse into the depths of despair or resignation, "*What for? It's all pointless anyway!*" They are now in the spiral phase of depression.

But grieving and tears are still a kind of language, still signs of experience, signs of injury and violation and passive resistance in the feeling of terrible loss. Not only rationally, but also emotionally now, they understand what is gone for good. They let it go. But they also realise what they still have and how they can use it creatively. Grieving and loss can have so many different faces: being no longer able to walk, not having the desired healthy child, being afraid of the future consequences of loss, the loss of the workplace one can no longer reach and the loss of social standing, the loss of value as a partner, as a man or woman, watching friends slip away, the destruction of one's goal in life... Common to the two kinds of depression that stem from absorbing the experiences of loss and anticipating a future contraction of life is letting go of unreal hopes, a farewell to utopias.

In giving up, and in their anguish at being imminently given up, they initiate the definitive renunciation of all attempts to deny their irreversible loss.

Letting go is accompanied by boundless sorrow, by "grief work". This prepares them to accept their fate; it includes a turn towards change, internally-directed reflection and an encounter with the self. From this finding of the self comes the freedom to distance oneself from the experiences of suffering and to work out the necessary next steps.

Spiral Phase 6: *Acceptance*

The characteristic of this spiral phase is the conscious experience of a limit or a boundary. Having come through, having endured the phases of fighting against whatever was to be found in the spheres of reason and feeling, the sufferers have exhausted their power of resistance. They feel drained, almost unable to act, and yet on the boundary they feel liber-

ated. They have let their reason think through all possible solutions in every direction. They have grieved for their loss in reaction to the present and anticipation of the future. Now they have reached the end, spent, but as if released, set free to open out to new insights. In their openness, their being themselves and their freedom from their selves, 'it' begins to grow.

They notice that they themselves are still there; they feel moved by the fact that they are not alone, that their senses are still functioning; they feel ashamed of having forgotten that they are still able to think and feel, that they are complete human beings. A whole host of feelings and experiences descend upon them, condensed in the discovery: "*I've only just realised...!*" I *am*, I *can*, I *want*, I accept *my*self, I live *with* my individual characteristics. This phase is therefore called acceptance (6). I accept myself with my peculiarity that I am paralyzed in the legs! I accept myself as the mother of a handicapped child! I no longer live in opposition to, but with the crisis. I am a human being like everyone else; everybody has to learn to live with their crisis, with their limits; and everybody lives! I want to live my life and learn how to live!

Acceptance does not mean becoming resigned, nor should it be understood as a pacified mind. *Acceptance* is not positive affirmation or consent. Nobody can willingly consent to heavy losses. But by working through crisis one can learn to embrace the inescapable and by going beyond the boundary of one's consciousness become capable of acceptance.

Spiral Phase 7: *Activity*

The personal decision to live *with* one's individual peculiarities releases energies that until now were needed for the struggle *against* the situation. This creative energy presses towards action. "*I do that...!*" is how this turning point spontaneously expresses itself. Self-directed, and under the full deployment of the rational and emotional faculties, the first steps of the phase of *activity* (7) begin. The sufferers realise that what one has is less important than what one does with what one has!

Their values and norms shift and are restructured, as a direct and indirect consequence of the experiences they have worked through – not outside, but within their effective, dominant system of norms and values. The levels or layers of norms and values remain the same, but as a result of the changed viewpoint, they are restratified.

Certainly, the acting and thinking now change reality itself, but it is primarily themselves that the afflicted change. Through their learning process, they can give a push to 'systematic change', as a result and not as a goal in itself. But change here means gaining the possibility of becoming different through alternative perspectives for action as the result of a new self-definition within set limits, and therein venturing to act independently.

Spiral Phase 8: *Solidarity*

If suffering people are supported appropriately in the phases described above, at some point the desire to act responsibly in society begins to grow in them. They see their individual sphere, their individual peculiarity, in relation to the wider framework of their lives. The disability fades into the background. Their field of action in society pushes itself to the fore and challenges them to act in concert with others. *Solidarity* (8) is the last stage in working through crisis: "*We act, we take the initiative...!*" That expresses a successful working through of the crisis, an appropriate form of social integration. This last spiral phase is reached by few sufferers and few of those not yet affected.

If we compare how the disabled and the incurably ill work through their crisis with how people struggle in unavoidable existential crises, we recognise a common characteristic: there is in the end no solution, in the sense of being delivered from one's burden. The only possible solution is to live *with* what seems unacceptable rather than resisting it and to take on a new task, to be shaped both individually and in solidarity with others.

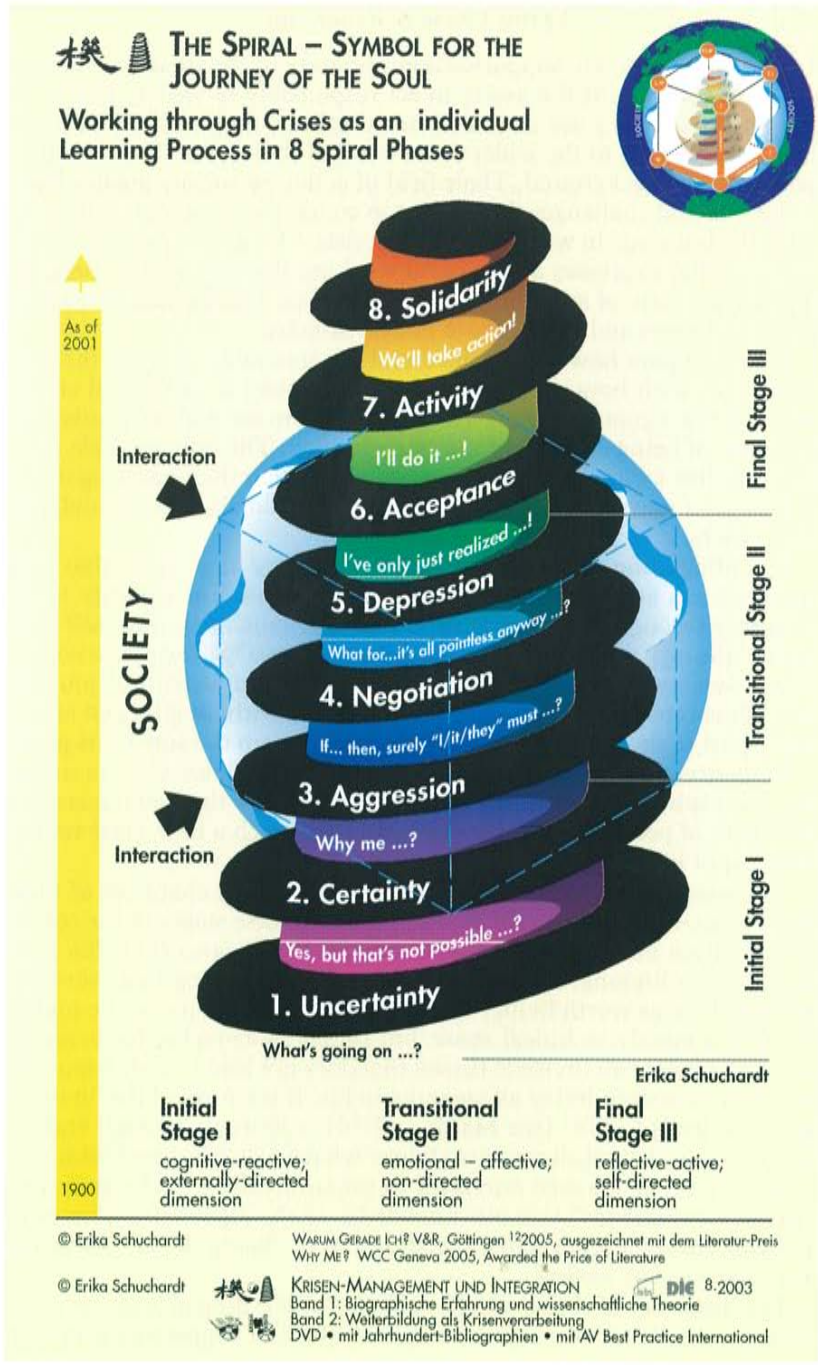
In anticipation of our later conclusions, we may note that this approach can lead to meaning and even happiness. The capacity to act creatively through active participation in a common life is now 'self-realisation' through 'being different' amid the excessive 'performance norms' of our society. Encouragement to see this hard and painful journey through is rooted in the premise that no one is without gifts and everyone is part of the whole, but the whole is more than the sum of its parts.

In these eight phases we see that people in crisis, those who are suffering, must spiral through contradictory experiences – their own reactions and those of people around them – until they reach a new, clear understanding of life.

The *image of the spiral* illustrates the open-ended character of their inner processes as well as the overlapping of diverse stages in the course of their lives and interaction with others. It indicates that this hard education is lifelong, even if they succeed in accepting their severely restricted life as worth living. The spiral should therefore not be understood in a merely technical sense, but rather as a symbol for bringing oneself to follow an invisible thread that does not lead to disintegration, isolation, or surrendering all meaning in life. It is a form of the "narrow gate that leads to life" (see Matthew 7:14), a journey through endless uncertainties, that yet allows us to glimpse what we shall be (see 1 John 3:2).

Why have we allowed ourselves to get so involved in the sufferers' modes of experience? Can our knowledge of the eight spiral phases in working through crisis make the situation of "being ill" or "suffering from cancer" any easier?

The discovery of characteristic traits in the learning process seems to present a challenge to everyone to get involved in supporting people in



WARUM GERADE ICH? V&R, Göttingen ¹²2005, ausgezeichnet mit dem Literatur-Preis
WHY ME? WCC Geneva 2005, Awarded the Price of Literature

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crisis in a more appropriate, more sensitive way – as individuals, church members, counsellors or educators.

Both sufferers and those who care for them are – as described above – people in crisis (cf. chapter 4: Pastoral Care – a Problem for the Suffering). Here is an example: we visit someone who is suffering – a neighbour with cancer, an abandoned spouse, the mother of a handicapped child – and become the target of their *aggression* (3). "Why did you come in the first place?", "Nobody comes to see me!", "They've all given up on me!" Now, as we know about individual spiral phases in working through crisis, we are able to discern whether the aggression is actually directed against us as a person or whether we serve as an object on which they can vent their undirected aggression – affective and uncontrolled – in the third spiral phase of *aggression* (3). Therefore, together with the sufferers, we can look for possible interpretations of their or our aggression. An analysis of the biographies revealed nine different reactions (feelings of guilt, suicide, withdrawal from reality, etc.). Interpretation and reinterpretation can open up an opportunity for change. In pedagogical terms, we can aim at "the possibility of being different" through crisis intervention and crisis prevention. In theological terms: we can help the sufferers to experience the "mystery of the cross and resurrection" through the fundamental experience of *acceptance* (6).

The crucial point is this. We cannot abolish the crisis nor the cross: the cancer, the loss of one's partner and the disability of the child will remain for life; but we can change the conditions, the way in which people are struck by crises or by the cross, and we can change ourselves. This is going beyond the boundaries, transcending the limits of the situation.

By accompanying one another we can break through the additional social disabilities resulting from defective or absent relationships and isolation. We begin to dare invest ourselves in relationships afresh and tirelessly seek to build up ways of interaction. However, this form of support in working through crisis means offering the good news on the part of the church and its staff and volunteers. At this point, we cannot illustrate in detail the learning process with all its phenomena or discuss the implementation of the newly gained insights in offers provided by further education.[22] Instead, we will examine the present insights with respect to the interrelation of suffering and faith.

During the analysis of the biographies I discovered that every person in crisis, regardless of the kind of crisis, has to go through the learning process of working through crisis if they want to achieve social integration.

To illustrate the point, biographical profiles were presented as case studies: The case of a mentally handicapped child in Pearl S. Buck[23], physical disability in Christy Brown[24], sensory handicaps in Helen Keller[25], psychological disorder in Clara Park[26].

It was also established that the third spiral phase of "*aggression*" (3) has a key function as catharsis. The ability to vent *aggression* (3rd spiral

phase) correlates closely with the capacity for *acceptance* (6th spiral phase)[27]. In addition, I was able to show from biographical evidence that the learning process stopped in cases in which the phase of aggression was missing, defective, disrupted or denied. Frequently, sufferers were then left in lifelong depression, (see Käte Keller – sensory handicaps)[28], resignation (see Christa Schlett – physical disability)[29], non-acceptance (see Marjorie Shave – mental handicaps)[30], while in a case in which aggression was aroused by therapeutic intervention, the goal of social integration was achieved when the process of working through crisis was completed; see Richard D'Ambrosio – psychological disorder.[31]

But how do sufferers and their families see their suffering, their crisis in relation to their faith? Or in other words: What part does the Christian faith play in the learning process? Put provocatively: Does the Christian faith have a part to play in working through crisis?

So much can be said at this point: the Christian faith is more than a conditioning factor. It is the plus or minus in front of the brackets of our lives. It is a basic quantity, a constitutive element that changes the attitudes and thinking of sufferers as well as the way they work through crisis. Therefore, the *initial thesis*:

- *Aggression* (third spiral phase) as catharsis has a key function in working through crisis

  is to be expanded by the *thesis*:

- Christian faith can gather up *aggression* (3), recognised as catharsis, in accusation and lamentation before God.

That means on the one hand that Christian faith can enable sufferers to accept their suffering, their crisis, as a God-given task in an affirmative and unquestioning and therefore 'obedient' manner. This is the '*naïve-apathetic*' reaction of the believer.

On the other hand, Christian faith can enable the sufferers to release their *aggression* (3rd spiral phase) against their suffering, their crisis, which means to begin with that they actually allow the aggression, and then give it space, until finally in dialogue with God they learn to bear it together as a means to affirming *acceptance* (6th spiral phase) (cf. Hebr. 5:8). This is the '*critical-sympathetic*' reaction of the believer (cf. chapter 5: A Theological Discussion of Suffering and Endurance).

In the first form of the learning process the believers seem to unconditionally, 'obediently', accept their handicap, their crisis, unquestioning and unprotesting, as 'punishment' or 'testing' from God. Believers, whether they are suffering or not, know themselves unreservedly accepted by God, which enables them to bear the seemingly unbearable as a burden from God and henceforth to live with their crises. In this way, the naïve-apathetic reaction can also lead to *acceptance* (6).

The *biographers* teach us:

- Christian faith

- frees sufferers from their loneliness, leads to dialogue and community;
- gives them a friend they can turn to day and night;
- gives them a conversation and prayer partner, a capable listener;
- gives them a counsellor who does not believe in patent remedies, a caregiver who shares in their search for answers;
- gives a message that I must hear, consider, take up – an offer;
- frees me from myself, for myself, to encounter the "Thou" in prayer, in worship, in the congregation.

- Christian faith can compensate for *aggression* (3) and generate acceptance (6).

In the following analyses of biographies I will examine what effects Christian faith and human caring have in the lives of those suffering from crises of all kinds: disruptions to life, illness, disability.

Working through Crises in Pearl S. Buck's *The Child Who Never Grew*

A Biographical Longitudinal Study

The different phases of working through crisis just outlined will now be illustrated with examples from the autobiography of Pearl S. Buck, the mother of a mentally handicapped child (cf.: "*The Child Who Never Grew*", New York, 1950, translated into German – very ambiguously – as "*Geliebtes, unglückliches Kind*" ("*Beloved, unfortunate child*"), Vienna/Heidelberg 1952.) The Nobel Prize winner Pearl S. Buck lived through her crisis just like any other mother in a similar situation. The way in which she worked through her experiences is exemplary for all the over 2,000 biographers. She reports that she went through a learning process of ten years or more without support. In this respect Pearl S. Buck is representative of the majority of women who report on how they worked through their crises. She demonstrates as an intellectual that working through crisis is less a problem of the mind than of the heart: namely, whether there is a readiness and ability to change one's attitude and behaviour at the level of relationships.

> "To learn how to bear the inevitable sorrow is not easily done. I can look back on it now, the lesson learned, and see the steps; but when I was taking them they were hard indeed, each apparently insurmountable." (p. 27)
>
> "But it is interesting to me and may be of some small importance to some, merely as a process, to speak of learning how to live with sorrow that cannot be removed. Let me speak of it so, then." (p. 29)
>
> "Again, I speak as one who knows." (p. 62)

CRISIS – ABSTRACT AND COMPLEMENTARY THESIS

Crisis and Chance
Two words in English

危機

One symbol in Chinese

Crises – also a hidden treasure

The person –already- affected by crises
is a challenge to the society
and complementary:
The society of the –not yet- affected people
is a challenge for the –already- affected person
in analogy to the complementary structure in the symbol Yin Yang.
Erika Schuchardt

The Complementary Structure as the Basic Precondition of the cosmic and therefore also human existence as depicted in the Chinese Yin Yang:

- **Balance ➡ Living a balanced life ➡ Shalom**
- **Imbalance ➡ Sickness**
- **Separation ➡ Death**

text collection Huiainanzi, 2nd century B.C.

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This is how Pearl S. Buck, with her great narrative art and the infinite love of a mother, describes the life of her only child, a child who will never grow up. She admits that she herself had to learn a very difficult lesson: how to live with a sorrow that could not be removed.

Already in 1952, Pearl S. Buck distinguishes *two phases of her 10-year-long "lesson": the first phase*, in which she fell to pieces as she had to learn to understand "the inevitable knowledge that was forced upon me", and the second phase, in which she "turned... out of myself", accepted her fate as 'given' and recognised that it was her task to live her life creatively.

> "The first phase of this process was disastrous and disorganizing. As I said, there was no more joy left in anything. All human relationships became meaningless..." (p. 29)

The extent to which she found herself again in letting go of her grief is shown in her analysis of her own turn towards *acceptance* (6):

> "I do not know when the turn came, nor why. It came somehow out of myself ... (second phase). It was in those days that I learned to distinguish between the two kinds of people in the world: those who have known inescapable sorrow and those who have not..." (p. 30)
>
> "It was surprising and sad to discover how many such persons there were ... It did not comfort me ... but it made me realise that others had learned how to live with it, and so could I. I suppose that was the beginning of the turn." (p. 31)

So for Pearl S. Buck the "steps of the lesson" began with the *transitional* stage. But if we look at the biography more closely we discover that, as is the case with most of the over 2,000 biographers studied, it took her more than three years to move through the process of recognition in the *initial* stage and to progress from *uncertainty* (1) to *certainty* (2). Bewildered, she writes:

> "I think I was the last to perceive that something was wrong ... She was three years old when I first began to wonder." (p.13)

She then describes how much her discovery of the truth was hindered by the inappropriate behaviour of those around her and by the lack of support. She presents the transition from the interim phase of *ignorance* (1.1) to *uncertainty* (1.2) as a restless search for reassurance from friends.

> "I remember asking friends about their children, and voicing my new anxiety about my child. Their replies were comforting, too comforting." (p. 13)
>
> Pearl S. Buck aptly describes the typical behaviour of the 'irrelevance rule', which made people "act as if" everything was all right. She sensed the "too much" of inappropriate words of deceiving comfort.
>
> "They spoke all the empty words of assurance that friends, meaning well, will use, and I believed them. Afterward, when I knew the whole tragic truth, I asked them if they had no knowledge then of what had befallen my child. I found out that they did have, that they had guessed and surmised and that the older ones even knew, but that they shrank from telling me." (pp. 13-14)

And because of this habit of everyone around her, playing down the gravity of the situation Pearl S. Buck was left in the interim phase of *non-acceptance* (1.3) until her child was over three years old:

> "Thus my child was nearly four years old before I discovered for myself that her mind had stopped growing ... I was reluctant and unbelieving until the last..." (p. 14)
>
> I must have been more anxious than I knew, however, for I remember I went one day to hear an American visiting paediatrician give a lecture on the pre-school child, and as I listened to her I realised that something was very wrong indeed with my child..." (p. 15)

It was only now that she began to talk to doctors, attend lectures, and finally consult a panel of doctors, always with the same ambiguous result:

> "Something is wrong ... I do not know what it is. You must have a consultation of doctors!" (p. 15)

With this *certainty* (2) "that something was lacking", Pearl S. Buck began the agonising journey over continents, the phase of *negotiation* (4) in the *doctors' emporium of knowledge*, in an attempt to buy hope:

> "Then began that long journey which parents of such children know so well. I have talked with many of them since and it is always the same. Driven by the conviction that there must be someone who can cure, we take our children over the surface of the whole earth, seeking the one who can heal." (p. 17)

She describes the end of the journey, when the inescapable truth dawns on her in a single moment:

> "The end of the journey ... came ... in Rochester, Minnesota. We had been sent finally to the Mayo Clinic..." (p. 20)
>
> "Now came the moment for which I shall be grateful as long as I live ... I have to thank a man who came quietly out of an empty room as I passed ... He came out almost stealthily and beckoned to me to follow him into the empty room ... He began to speak quickly in his broken English, his voice almost harsh, his eyes sternly upon mine. 'Did he tell you the child might be cured?' 'Listen to what I tell you!' he commanded. 'I tell you, Madame, the child can never be normal. Do not deceive yourself. You will wear out your life and beggar your family unless you give up hope and face the truth. She will never be well – do you hear me?...' 'I tell you the truth for your own sake.'" (p. 22-23)

As the expression of her immeasurable despair at this "brutal communication of the truth" – the child was now five and the chances of a "gradual discovery of the truth" through those around her had gone – her *aggression* (3), in the form of a *death wish* directed against the child, becomes understandable:

> "Death would be far easier to bear, for death is final. What was is no more. How often did I cry out in my heart that it would be better if my child died! If that shocks you who do not know, it will not shock those who do know. I would have welcomed death for my child and would still welcome it, for then she would be finally safe..." (p. 27)

She then added quite openly:

> "For the sake of others who are walking that stony road, I will say that my inner rebellion lasted for many years. ... Common sense and duty cannot always prevail when the heart is broken." (p. 28-29)

Pearl S. Buck reflected upon the period of *depression* (5) as the first phase of her "lesson".

She described the *two types of depression – anticipatory and reactive* – as her own experience: the *anticipatory* depression of grieving at the unsure future of her child, whose fate it would be to be given up by others in future, and the *reactive depression* of grieving for the bright life that had already been *given up*, and the retreat into isolation:

> "I found myself with two problems, both, it seemed to me, intolerable. The first was the question of her future ... In addition there is the second, the problem of one's own self in misery. All the brightness of life is gone, all the pride in parenthood ... there is an actual sense of one's life being cut off in the child. The stream of the generations is stopped..." (p. 27)

Pearl S. Buck had no rational explanation for her "turn" towards *acceptance* (6) – the beginning of the final stage, which was presented as the second phase of her learning process. But she described how intensely and repeatedly she experienced the phases of the spiral model:

> "The first step was acceptance of what was ... But practically the step had to be taken many times. I slipped into the morass over and over again ... For the despair had turned into a morass ... The sight of my neighbour's normal little daughter..." (p. 31)

And in tune with this *acceptance* (6) she says:

> "It is only now that I realise..."
>
> "[I began] to enjoy what I could in ... life ... books ... were first ... Flowers ... came next... It all began... in a sort of wonder that such things went on as they had before, and then a realisation that what had happened to me had actually changed nothing except myself." (p. 32)

Activity (7) "I'll do it..." took shape in her case in her making provisions for her daughter's future by looking for a place in a home, and secondly, in her intensive lecture and educational work with parents, and her initiating and financing of further research. She writes:

> "Knowing what I was going to do and thinking how to do it did not heal the inescapable sorrow, but it helped me to live with it..." (pp. 35-36)

Finally, we see *solidarity* (8) – "We'll take action" – in the writing and publication of her autobiography, which stands out from many others in its truthfulness. The author thereby builds a relationship with her readers:

> "It will not be easy to tell it all truthfully, but it is of no use to tell it otherwise." (p. 9)

Thus Pearl S. Buck shows solidarity with everyone similarly affected and shares the journey with them, from the death wish to acceptance and activity in a joint, never-ending process of learning. She concludes:

"There must be acceptance and the knowledge that sorrow fully accepted brings its own gifts. For there is an alchemy in sorrow. It can be transmuted into wisdom, which, if it does not bring joy, can yet bring happiness." (p. 5)

This is how Pearl S. Buck lived through her crisis as an opportunity to learn! We perceive that we depend on one another if life, which is more than surviving, is to succeed. The interaction model for working through crisis as an open-ended process of learning can contribute to this goal.

The *results of the analyses of the biographies* – altogether more than 2,000 – can be summarised as follows:

- Biographers suffering from various kinds of crises – disruptions of life, illnesses, disabilities – describe the same developments in working through crisis.

  This means that the learning process takes the *same* course in the lives of people affected by critical life events like separation, persecution, impending death, as well as AIDS, cancer, psychological disorders and disabilities. Therefore, it becomes possible to *diagnose* the stages of the learning process and to *intervene* according to the specific situation of the person affected.

- In working through crisis, aggression has a key function as catharsis.

  This means that if the spiral phase of *aggression* is lacking in the learning process, a tendency towards n*on-acceptance* and *social isolatio*n becomes apparent in the sufferer; conversely, if the spiral phase of *aggression* is endured as part of the learning process, the tendency towards *acceptance* and *social integration* is reinforced. Therefore, the missing aggression must be aroused through crisis intervention in order to allow the learning to lead to social integration.

  (On points 1 and 2 cf. the case studies discussed in my research, Schuchardt, Erika: Biographische Erfahrung und Wissenschaftliche Theorie, Bd. 1 ((Biographical Experience and Scientific Theory. Vol. 1.)); and: Schuchardt, Erika: Weiterbildung als Krisenverarbeitung. Bd. 2. (Further Education – Working through Crisis. Vol. 2.) 5th edition, revised and expanded, 1993)

- Religious faith in its evaluative character can substitute for aggression or compensate for it.

  This means that faith as a passive attitude can lead to an "*a-pathetic solution*" of the crisis, or that Christian faith as a critical reaction can become a "*sympathetic response*" to the crisis. In both cases there is an appropriate learning process of working through crisis with a tendency towards *social integration.*

- Support is a conditional factor in the learning process of working through crisis.

  This means that where *support* is absent or inappropriate the sufferer abandons the process of working through crisis or will not embark on it in the first place; the crisis inevitably leads to *social isolation.* Conversely, appropriate support can initiate the learning process of working through crisis in crisis prevention and crisis intervention and lead to *social integration.*

The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
Jesus in the Temple - portrayed at the summit of the spiral path to knowledge
Detail from Bertinone, Italy, 15th century

3. Counselling and Faith in Life Stories

Luise Habel
Lord God, Do Away with Stairs!
Affected by Poliomyelitis

Facts: Luise Habel[32], taken ill with poliomyelitis at the age of 15 months, has been physically handicapped and in a wheelchair ever since. She experienced the threat of National Socialism both as a member of a Protestant youth organisation and through her father's loss of his job as a carpenter for political reasons, which forced her mother to grow vegetables in the family garden to earn a living. Still, the parents bought their daughter all the braces she needed, insisted on her attending high school and taking an examination for a vocational qualification, and took two orphans into the family. The psychosocial strain on her mother ended in suicide.

The background to her family's social situation made Luise Habel put the fundamental question of her life into words:

> "I thought, ... enraged and bitter, 'What can God do if his people refuse to obey him?'
>
> This has become a question that pervades my entire life. If you always depend on other people's help, in a very existential sense, then this can become a great trial. I have been thinking a lot about the powerless God who cannot help, even if he wants to." (p. 64)

Her resentment, her bitterness and aggression (3) was turned against the powerless God who seemed unable to change his 'useless ground staff': He became the focal point of her attention! Whenever she asked questions like this, complaining and bitter, the pious put her in the dock; the omniscient advocates of God put fear into her.

> "Whenever I spoke about these heretical thoughts, there was always some pious person who would prove to me that God is not powerless. I began to dread these advocates of God who seemed to know everything." (p. 65)

Left to her own devices, Luise Habel encountered a different God, different from the one the Christians, 'his people' had described to her. She

found increasingly convincing what she herself worked out; it was more in accordance with the New Testament than the 'talk about omnipotence':

> "For me, he was not the victorious God to whom everything is made subject. I saw the suffering Christ who failed in this world, who allowed himself to be nailed to the cross in his powerlessness and who cried out when he was forsaken. He was the one I felt attached to." (p. 65)

Consequently, *aggression* (3) made Luise Habel break off all relations with the church and with God: she would not pray, she would not read the Bible, she would not attend worship:

> "I decided to no longer expect anything from God, to no longer ask anything of him. I was afraid to reach breaking point when facing my expectations, when facing my disappointment at God, or perhaps my disappointment at his people. I could not risk that. And so I decided, considering the matter rationally, to accept this difficult life that was more than I could take, to come to grips with it or fail. But then I would be failing as a person, with my abilities and possibilities in life, which seemed easier to tolerate than being left in the hands of the unknown God." (p. 65)

But this rational rejection corresponded with an emotional quest. Luise Habel's probing critique as a sign of her *aggression* (3) urged her towards a critical-sympathetic response in *acceptance* (6). Luise Habel tells us how she went through these struggles in her book with the explosive title "Herrgott, schaff die Treppen ab!" (Lord God, do away with stairs!) Three experiences described in this book shall be discussed in detail here: her mother's suicide, her desire to be a community nurse by profession, her correspondence with a pastor.

Her *mother*'s suicide indicates that, under the pressure of her manifold burdens, she did not manage to work through her crisis.

In contrast to her *daughter*, Luise Habel, who was able to direct her anger and her bitterness in aggression against the people around her and against God, we learn about her mother that throughout her life, she 'never spoke about things', but always suppressed her troubles in silence; daily she fought for her family's survival; she even managed to save money for her handicapped daughter and had to face their financial ruin through the currency reform that devalued her savings in one night.

Now that everything seemed meaningless to her, she fell into a paralysing *depression* (5). But more than ever before, she and her family were left to cope on their own with this disconcerting state of affairs.

In the introduction, we explained our thesis that aggression (3) has a key function as catharsis in working through crisis. The lack of the spiral phase of aggression (3) therefore had to lead to her mother's non-acceptance of the crisis and the stagnation of the learning process in the spiral phase of depression (5).

It is evident how accurately this applies to her mother's experience and how difficult the effects were to bear for the people around her. When overtaken by fresh disasters (currency reform, loss of meaning in

life), her ever silent mother could not engage in an aggressive coping procedure. Instead, she had to direct her concentrated aggression (3) solely against herself: she committed her first suicide attempt. The failure of the attempt caused her concern for her daughter to grow immensely. Her idea to die together with her daughter, incessantly repeated before her, became the focal point of her attention, and Luise Habel described how she fought against the fascination of death with all her willpower. In the end, her mother carried out her intention, though unable to recall the incident later: she tried to strike her sleeping daughter with an axe. The failure of this new suicide attempt finally caused her mother's love to turn into hatred. At this late stage of her life, too late, the pent-up aggression (3) erupted uncontrollably in her time of illness. For hours, her mother repeated:

> "'I would have had everything I could wish for if it hadn't been for you.' She went on like this morning after morning, evening after evening. 'I would have had everything', ... I could bear it no longer. I begged and pleaded, cried out, 'Stop it!'" (p. 57)

The daughter understood and excused her:

> "I knew she didn't have much of a life, she had made more sacrifices than a human being could cope with. She had always been lonely, perhaps because she had a handicapped child." (p. 57)

But the *aggression* (3) had been released much too late, and when her psychological illness had reached this stage, and any kind of human support or professional counselling was lacking, there was no prospect of her working through her crisis to the point of *acceptance* (6). Her third suicide attempt was successful: she drowned herself. Again, Luise Habel expressed her bitterness:

> "If all those who now remembered my mother in her death had visited her in her life-time or had invited her to their home ... Perhaps she would have considered her life tolerable after all." (p. 60/61)

Again, she was confronted with the failure of God's advocates:

> "The pastor did not come to see us in the days before the funeral. But he let us know that it was not clear yet whether or not he could give mother the last blessing." (p. 61)

On the grounds that because of her mother's illness her death did not constitute suicide in the original meaning of the word, her mother was in the end given the last blessing. Luise Habel wondered whether the pastor unwittingly chose the verse she had been given at her confirmation 'by chance' for his sermon at the funeral:

> "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine." (p. 62)

Then, for the first time, she discovered the Bible verse that followed on from hers:

> "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you." (p. 62)

God's word struck her all of a sudden:

> "I had been so desperate that my mother had had to die such a lonely death. That no one had been with her. And now here there was someone who said: 'I was there. She was not abandoned. And she is not alone now. Do not be afraid.' Here, suddenly, I was introduced to a reality that was stronger than death." (p. 62)

She experienced the funeral sermon as a contrast:

> "The words the pastor spoke at her grave did not reach me. I felt numb inside, I was unable to cry." (p. 62)

Luise Habel takes us through her experience of how alive her faith in God was, and how troubled her relationships with the church, God's ground staff, were. The visit of the pastor of a Christian fellowship made her aware of this discrepancy. He came with the following message:

> "I have the feeling that you have strayed from the straight and narrow. It has been a while since I last saw you in church." (p. 63/64)

The way Luise Habel tried to describe her unusual situation of need to him first in their conversation, then in a letter, is impressive; she also mentioned that her profession and the household she ran for her father were just too much for her as a physically handicapped wheelchair user. She dared make a suggestion:

> "I referred to his Bible study group, which about fifty ladies attended weekly, and was naïve enough to say that if each of these ladies came to see me instead of their Bible study group just once, then I wouldn't have to worry about a cleaner for a whole year. But instead, I received a letter from the pastor saying that he would ask God to send me someone." (p. 64)

Again, her aggression (3) broke through against the institutional church:

> "God did not send me anyone, and that man never visited me again. At the time, I thought enraged and bitter, 'What can God do if his people refuse to obey him?' This has become a question that pervades my entire life." (p. 64)

Luise Habel presented a whole host of such examples. Particularly typical for her situation were the reactions of the people around her to her desire to become a community nurse by profession. After the war, as the daughter of Christian parents and a member of the Protestant Youth Organisation for many years, she sent an application to the Regional Youth Pastor, who brushed her objections about her "disability" aside with a confident smile and gave her the definite promise to accept her into the first seminar in Bible school when saying goodbye. As an explanation for her change of occupation from office work to work in the community, she pointed to the rift between professional and social integration:

> "Even if my professional integration was successful, my social integration leaves a lot to be desired." (p. 34)

> "Gradually, I earned the respect of the other staff members ... My colleagues learned to form an opinion of me not according to my disability, but according to my professional performance. I belonged to them. Though, certainly, only during office hours. I was alone in my free time. But because I had varied interests, I did not really notice it." (p. 45)

In the independent chapter "*Membership in a Protestant Youth Organisation*" she emphasised that she felt unreservedly accepted in the Protestant Youth group:

> "I still have the feeling that I really belonged to the group. It seemed so natural to be taken everywhere, even in the snow and ice of winter – which could be quite dangerous at times." (p. 36)

She was thunderstruck when she learned from a fellow passenger in a train, a staff member of the Protestant Youth Organisation, that she was on her way to her Bible school class, which had started a few months ago. Her inquiry at the Regional Youth Pastor's office added another incident to her range of experiences with a failing church. She received a letter saying:

> "... the disability was too much of an impediment after all. But he also said that if God wanted me to take up this profession, then he would open a door for me." (p. 47)

And again her *aggression* (3) broke out. Faith and church seemed to her a contradiction in terms:

> "I thought in my anger, 'His people slam all the doors shut. And then they leave it to God to open them again.' I was too down-to-earth and perhaps not faithful enough to reckon on a real chance. I had some experiences with my colleagues and knew that even church members would probably not react any differently. So I was not surprised at the following negative replies to my inquiries. Why should people in the church deal with things differently than people in the rest of the working world?" (p. 47)

The list of these experiences could be extended indefinitely, but they all led into Luise Habel's basic question of life: 'What can God do if his people refuse to obey him?" Again and again, her reason struggled to curse this powerless God, but her heart could not let go of him.

Her correspondence with a pastor illustrates in exemplary fashion how her aggressive struggle (3) in the area of conflict between faith and church finally reached the phase of *acceptance* (6) by way of a *critical-sympathetic response* through counselling. This pastor was different from those mentioned before. He did not meet her questions with the usual prefabricated package of answers, nor did he shower her with special offers, but he took her seriously in her affliction.

> "He did not have any prefabricated answers, he allowed for my questions and did not try to push me into a kind of faith I could not live." (p. 66)

It is through him that she learned to understand the difference between truth and truthfulness, between *objective teaching* and a subjective message that has to go through the *person of the preacher* in order to reach us as proclamation of the Gospel.

> "I learned from him that there are phrases one may not use. Phrases which are objectively true, but which – once uttered – turn into stones cast at the other person. He seemed to be a man without principles. A pastor without principles? I had to get to know him." (p. 66)

Later, she brought the lesson she had learnt to bear on the *false comforters*, who praised those in front of her "from whom one never heard a word of complaint".

> "Once, a lady wrote to me, 'How much God is bound to love you if he makes you suffer so much.' At the time, I wrote back embittered, that I would be quite happy with a little less love and a bit more health. Today I know that there are phrases one may not use; phrases that are theoretically correct, but have destructive effects in practice. How could I live with a God who expected me to achieve good results in suffering? Who would only accept me if I conformed to a certain behavioural role, and who only loved me because I was suffering?" (p. 204)

We are taken into her experience of this pastor's sympathetic support in a serious crisis situation:

> "Once I spent my holiday in the town where he lived. I had to undergo an orthopaedic examination, and the results were disastrous. Actually, I had known the truth for quite a while. But voiced again in this way, they worried me considerably. After the consultation with the doctor I went to see the pastor. I appeared calm on the surface. I told him about the results as though it was just another medical history. But I thought, 'If the pastor gives me that phrase that I have to accept the will of God, I'll go for him.'" (p. 67)

For the first time, Luise Habel found someone who tolerated her *aggression* (3). He did not try to block it, but unreservedly allowed it to erupt. More than that, he took it upon himself and suffered *together with* her:

> "The pastor sat there and did not say a word. When the silence became unbearable, I said goodbye."

The silence had disconcerted her. She sought for answers and received the following:

> "You were quite right in your perceptions. I felt so helpless, I just did not know what to say. Even as a pastor, you have to be able to admit that sometimes you do not have an answer." (p. 68)

By analogy with Ingrid and Stephan Weber-Gast's experiences, illuminating the aspect of mutuality in preaching and the necessity to make room for the darkness Luise Habel saw how she was taken out of the darkness: one of the pastors came into the darkness, stayed there, and endured it together with her. For the first time, she felt: I no longer have to bear this on my own, he is walking by my side, he suffers with me. Now we are two, the darkness is no longer an irksome solitude. I can bear it, accept it, affirm it!

> "It was a new experience for me to find that there was a Christian who did not have the answer. Who, for my sake, would not quote any of the Bible verses available to him. He could have struggled for a clear conscience. But he did not do so. For my sake. Here was a person who took something upon himself in order to spare me the burden. In this way, he became credible for me." (p. 68)

And when she realised that the more the pastor knew about the trials of her real life, the more he counted on God, she herself became able to seek God with new strength:

"This pastor had a lot of patience with me. It is thanks to him that I began to seek God again. This man did not forbid me to have my doubts, neither did he admonish me to have faith. Once he wrote, 'As long as you keep on scuffling with God like that, I am not worried about you.'" (p. 69)

Luise Habel described how her *Christian faith* allowed her *aggression* (3) to erupt and tolerated it: there was a person she could address, God; she could stand up to him, leave him, refuse to give herself to him, and in all these dealings with him she was taking him and herself seriously and was preserved from breaking off her difficult learning process in apathetic resignation, which her mother had done. Her *Christian faith* enabled her to face her *aggression* (3) as a precondition of *acceptance* (6). She could never really let go of God; like Laurel Lee and Ingrid Weber-Gast, she found: he will not let me go! And finally, through the pastor's counselling who shared in her darkness, she arrived at *acceptance* (6) in a *critical-sympathetic response*:

"But I listen closely when they speak about Jesus. About the Jesus who suffered as we do. Who was not superman, but who cried, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' He liberates me from role-constrained behaviour, from the obligation always to be brave. With him, I am allowed to cry, to question and complain." (p. 205)

She still reacted like a seismograph; she detested *patter-merchant-pastors*, who forgot that phrases did not cost them much, but could result in the sufferers cursing God, their loss of faith and confidence and their falling into loneliness.

"I am much afraid of people, not least pastors, who have the answer to everything and do not realise that they are causing another person to fall into loneliness and even despair. Bible verses, quoted untimely, usually do not help to cope with a situation. On the contrary, they often make me just the more aware of my misery. That is why I have started again to defend myself against cheap phrases, phrases that do not cost much." (p. 206)

And now she recognised her life task:

"In the last few years, I have become something like a rubbish dump for all sorts of troubles, a place where people can and may unburden themselves ... I try to accept everyone the way he or she is ... Basically, I do not try to be or do anything other than give them the feeling that there is someone who listens, who takes them seriously, who will not place herself above them but walks beside them." (p. 205)

"What we need are people – Christians – in whose presence one is allowed to cry and laugh, pray or complain, according to one's mood. People who do not love my appointed role, but me myself. Then suffering would become more bearable, God would become easier to know, and life would become more human. There would still be a surd, an uncomprehended residue, but it would make honesty possible and so tolerable." (p. 207)

The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
In his 'Starry Night' van Gogh unites his internal self and the external world: Spirals symbolize the journey of his soul, portrayed by van Gogh in the union of sun and soon as well as in the clouds' formation in the Yin Yang
The Starry Night, Vincent van Gogh, France, 1889

Ingrid Weber-Gast
Because You Did Not Flee from My Anguish.
Affected by Depression

Facts: Ingrid and Stephan Weber-Gast[33] reported on the medical history of her depression. They did so as theologians trained in pastoral psychology and chaplains in a clinic specialising in neurology and psychology. Although they were familiar with similar symptoms in their daily counselling ministry to patients and visitors to the health resort, they were unprepared for the psychological illness that afflicted one of them. In the end, they felt forced for a time to put their only daughter, who was then of pre-school age, into care.

Ingrid Weber-Gast's diary speaks so vividly and with such immediacy about the time of her *depression* that it seems addressed to the reader more as a personal letter than an objective report. The reader begins increasingly to wonder to whom the title of the book, "*Because you did not try to flee from my anguish*", actually refers.

At a superficial glance one seems to be turning the pages of a medical history, written down on the doctor's advice to contribute to the healing process. But in reality, one is confronted by the central question of the two authors, "What role does the (our) Christian faith play in depression?" (cf. chap. 3), and, "How do we take our experiences of depression into our preaching?" (cf. chap. 6). Franz-Josef Trost emphasised in his review in a German Sunday newspaper (Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt)[34]:

> "Surprisingly enough, this faith did not make a difference in the 'most difficult hours'."

And he concluded:

> "This observation sets us thinking; it compels us to be cautious with religious words of encouragement to those suffering from a psychological illness."

He entitled his article: "We've learned to be alone."

One wonders how this interpretation fits in with Rolf Zerfass' comment on the book cover:

> "This account of a young couple's suffering is simultaneously a moving testimony of their faith..."

The *couple* felt threatened in a three-fold manner: as people suffering from a psychological illness or as *partners in therapy*, as believing *Christians* and as *theologians* appointed to the task of proclaiming the Gospel. They saw the outbreak of the illness as a rent in creation, already tearing apart their union.

Ingrid Weber-Gast opened her third chapter, "*The Part Faith plays in Depression*" in her down-to-earth manner with a negative critique:

> "First of all, I have to say that in the most difficult hours my faith no longer played a role. My understanding and my will still wanted to affirm it, but for

my heart it was out of reach. My faith was no comfort, no answer to my agonising questions, no help when I did not know which way to turn. On the contrary: instead of my faith sustaining me, I also had to sustain my faith." (p. 32/33)

The chapter ends with her accusation (3) against God:

"And often enough, to this very day, that is what my prayer life is like. It is the same with prayer as with faith in general: it has lost its lustre. I try to keep at it, with faithfulness and patience, but I always have to overcome a certain inner distance. Perhaps I cannot so easily or so quickly forgive God for once having let me down, against all his promises." (p. 38)

Her struggle became very evident, "I try to..., but ..."; the communication analyst hears the aggressive "no" hidden subliminally in the "but". She herself gives us the explanation:

"I cannot forgive God for... letting me down..."

We can follow the tracks of the aggression to the sixth chapter "Sermons Shaped by the Experience of Depression".

She treated her problem in a sermon on New Year's Eve with the theme "God, give me the courage to change what I can change". She quoted a Hassidic story about Rabbi Zushya, who shortly before his death said:

"In the world yet to come I will not be asked, 'Why were you not Moses?' But I shall be asked, 'Why were you not Zushya?'" (p. 373)

She worked her personal experiences of *depression* into her message:

"I firmly believe that for each one of us God has set a personal measure that we need to fill up: a measure for the untalented, a measure for the fearful, a measure for the sorrowful, a measure for the sick. I will be asked why I did not make more of the circumstances under which I led my life. I will not be asked: Why were you sad so often? But rather: What did you make of your sadness? Did you, through your sadness, become sensitive to the difficulties other people are facing in their lives, other people are oppressed by, and did this sensitivity make you more patient and more reserved in your judgements? I will not be asked: Why were you ill so often? But rather: What did you make of your illness? How did you make use of the space the illness allowed you? You were not always obliged to work and earn your living, you had a lot of free time. What did you do with it? Did you moan and groan in vain according to the following pattern: If only things were different...! and Couldn't they be different...!; or did you at times give others joy with a little effort on your part, even if just through the time you had to listen? I would like to repeat it once more: I firmly believe that everyone can reach perfection." (p. 74/75)

It is not just the topic we find gripping, but rather it is the preacher herself. She knows what she is speaking about, because she herself is deeply moved.[35] She tells us about her being moved in her fifth chapter "*Helpful texts*":

"It may sound irrational, but this is how it was: Although I could not reach God, there were verses from the Psalms I repeated over and over again, perhaps I even prayed them, held on to them because I did not want to be without any kind of support. Especially the verse: Lord, you have been our refuge. (p. 57)

> Ardently, I used to read the verse: 'Teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.' 'Gaining wisdom' seemed to be the step towards real healing. Gaining wisdom meant gaining the upper hand, not succumbing to the darkness. To have reached dry land, to have escaped the tormenting illness. But also to have learned to live with one's own past, however painful it may have been, to have exchanged one's preference for the beautiful but deceptive appearance of things for an insight into reality. Gaining wisdom meant for me to have looked into one's own abyss without despairing. I do not want to reflect on how fully I have reached this goal, but I sense dimly that I took steps in this direction. And, even more strongly, I feel that it was right to look in this direction for my healing, and that the next steps became easier the closer I kept to it." (p. 59)

She explained her preference for psalms of lamentation:

> "They seemed to reflect particularly clearly what was going on inside me, and I sometimes thought they should be included in congregational worship." (p. 36)

The chapter "*Sermons Shaped by the Experience of Depression*" closed with an interpretation of Luke 9:18-25, "take up one's cross daily". Her message was:

> "I believe... that one is neither resigned nor furious, but rather, that one looks reality in the eye and says: Yes, this is what happened, this is what I must accept, what can I make of it? ...Taking up the cross means, however: accepting reality, not tormenting oneself further with illusions, but using all one's imagination...
>
> Not saying 'all or nothing!', but trying for 'a little' ... For that is the point at which real discipleship begins. It begins at the point where in spite of one's sadness one has a good word, an encouraging smile, a helping hand for others. One does not learn that in a few days; rather, it is a task one will not have completed before the end, no matter how long life lasts. But it is a task one has to tackle every day, like daily prayer. Indeed, it could almost be given a place alongside our daily prayer. Perhaps many of us may say: my best prayer, Lord, is the cross that I take up daily. Amen." (pp. 100/101)

She continued with a brief reflection on the ability to show one's pain. Her message:

> "It would be well ... to make time and space amongst us for those who want to or even have to show their pain, in order to cope with it. For we are people who drown in the hidden tears we never cried." (p. 101)

Ingrid Weber-Gast compared her experiences in working through crisis to a rainbow – God's bridge to mankind. Her bridge to God stretched from her first experiences of faith, through her accusing *aggression* (3) against God, "I still cannot forgive you, you have let me down", to her confession, "My best prayer, Lord, is the cross I take up daily". And this is why she encouraged others to "be able to show their pain".

She could not have described the central part her faith played in her *depression* (5) or verified our thesis more impressively: *Christian faith* can compensate for aggression (3)! I. Weber-Gast did not need to direct her aggression at random against her partner, against the people around

her, against fate or even herself. As the power of her Christian faith set her free, she could vent her aggression directly on God. It is him she calls to account for having once let her down, against all his promises. And she who is captive to *depression* and anxiety, does so without fear and in an astonishingly courageous manner:

> "Strangely enough, I did not suffer from any fear of sinning, at least I was spared this... When I felt far away from God, I suffered, but I never felt that this distance or my defiance or my desperation could be sinful... I felt like God's overloaded beast of burden – did he not at least have to bear the consequences of the breakdown?" (p. 37)

She could be unafraid because, like it or not, she could not let go of her faith:

> "Instead of my faith sustaining me, I also had to sustain my faith. And yet it was a help: In rare but truly comforting moments it meant a lot to me that others were praying for the sick, for me." (p. 33)
>
> "Apart from the lowest point of my depression, I did preach once in a while. I was able to do it ...
>
> and the responses I met with afterwards told me that I had reached the hearts of the people." (p. 35)

In her sermon, she spoke about the experience of not being able to leave God:

> "Sometimes I actually think that this moment in life comes for everyone, the moment all enthusiasm and certainty collapses and we become people who cannot let go of God because we once heard of him and now can no longer forget him. We have to stand on God's threshold enduring the silence, until he comes." (p. 84)

From her preaching, the reader learns how Ingrid Weber-Gast discovered that Christian faith could allow her to grow from *aggression* (3) as catharsis to *acceptance* (6), here as a "*critical-sympathetic response*". Her husband and partner therapist Stephan Weber-Gast comments on this as well, he does not shy away from speaking openly about the temptation of suicide, and like his wife he faced the challenging question about the part his Christian faith played in the *depression* (5):

> "In a sense, I was handed over to my wife's depression ... We did not repress any of our thoughts at the time, not even the question of what kept my wife from committing suicide ... There were times when I myself was overwhelmed by the feeling: Too bad we cannot, we may not, escape together in this way ... Admitting that challenged me to reflect on what my faith meant to me during this time. It did not bring me immediate relief. I could see that the person by my side, whom I love more than anything, was dreadfully afflicted. My prayers became very emotional – the longer they were, the more vehement the undertone of accusation, of reproach, of a demand that God justify himself. I do not know whether it was a coincidence that several times my wife felt noticeably better the morning after I had prayed particularly furiously the night before." (p. 30)

He saw his faith as helpful only 'indirectly', in that he could 'wrestle' and 'contend' with God, who allowed himself to be 'accused' without threatening revenge.

> "So somehow my faith did help me, my faith and the example of many in the age-old Judaeo-Christian tradition; that our God is a God with whom we are allowed to wrestle, who allows himself to be accused without threatening to take revenge, who is greater than our heart. Contending with God may keep some life in us, while dull fatalism would have only produced silent resignation." (p. 31)

Thus, Stephan Weber-Gast as someone indirectly affected by crisis also verifies our thesis: Christian faith can release us into *aggression* (3), allow it, help us express it and work through it towards *acceptance* (6); he also chose the *critical-sympathetic response*.

Neither partner seeks a transfiguration of their suffering. Both question their faith and finally realise, for themselves as for other theologians: suffering deepens the intensity of my life; and because I am torn apart by the rent in creation, the proclamation of the Gospel can become 'two sided'. Therefore, they suggest:

- The proclamation of the Gospel should take into account the listeners' depression and offer more words that reach down into the darkness of the illness. (p. 34)
- Every pastor should see this difficult life close up, not only as an officially appointed helper, but also as a friend. (p. 34)
- More psalms of lamentation should be introduced into worship so that they become familiar and in emergencies are then at the disposal of those who need their help. (p. 36)
- More doubters should be brought from the margin into the centre of congregational life, because they bring vitality into the congregation. (p. 83)
- More frankness should be practised in dealing with God..., in speaking and writing to God..., leaving all comforting half-truths behind... not turning the heart into a den of thieves, and not speaking about 'an unfathomable will' where there is nothing but pain and emptiness. (p. 85)

There is no contradiction when Ingrid Weber-Gast allows that God cannot accompany the melancholy on their journey and human support is all they can receive, because in her encounter with disciples of Jesus, such human support acquires for her the character of a sign.

In her sermons, therefore, she proclaims the presence of God in the midst of darkness, since her brothers and sisters have shown God to her. For Ingrid Weber-Gast, human support becomes a sign of encounter with God, since these people embody towards her the discipleship of Christ.

> "People who are ill in other ways may try to take their faith with them into the illness as a companion on the way, but the melancholy are robbed of this companion from the very beginning... Because even God is no longer a

> companion in their journey, one should not leave them alone for a single moment, since human companionship is the only thing they can receive. And yet precisely this is so difficult to provide. (pp. 36/37)
>
> "But I firmly believe that people who seek a place alongside someone who cannot go on and with unwavering patience try to help carry the burden, even though they often feel like running away, are living out in practice something of what Christian discipleship means... But those who are burdened with a life in darkness will find the Lord there too, if their brethren show Him to them." (pp. 80/81)

We will now have to return to the question posed at the beginning. To whom does the title "*Because you did not try to flee from my anguish*" refer? As we apply our thesis that Christian faith can compensate for *aggression* (3) as catharsis in working through crisis and leading to *acceptance* (6), we find three possible interpretations:

Because You, my life partner, did not try to flee from my anguish: You supported and accepted me!

Because You, the congregation, did not try to flee from my melancholy: You prayed for me and showed HIM to me!

Because You, God, did not flee from my lamentation: You allowed me to wrestle with You, but You never let me go!

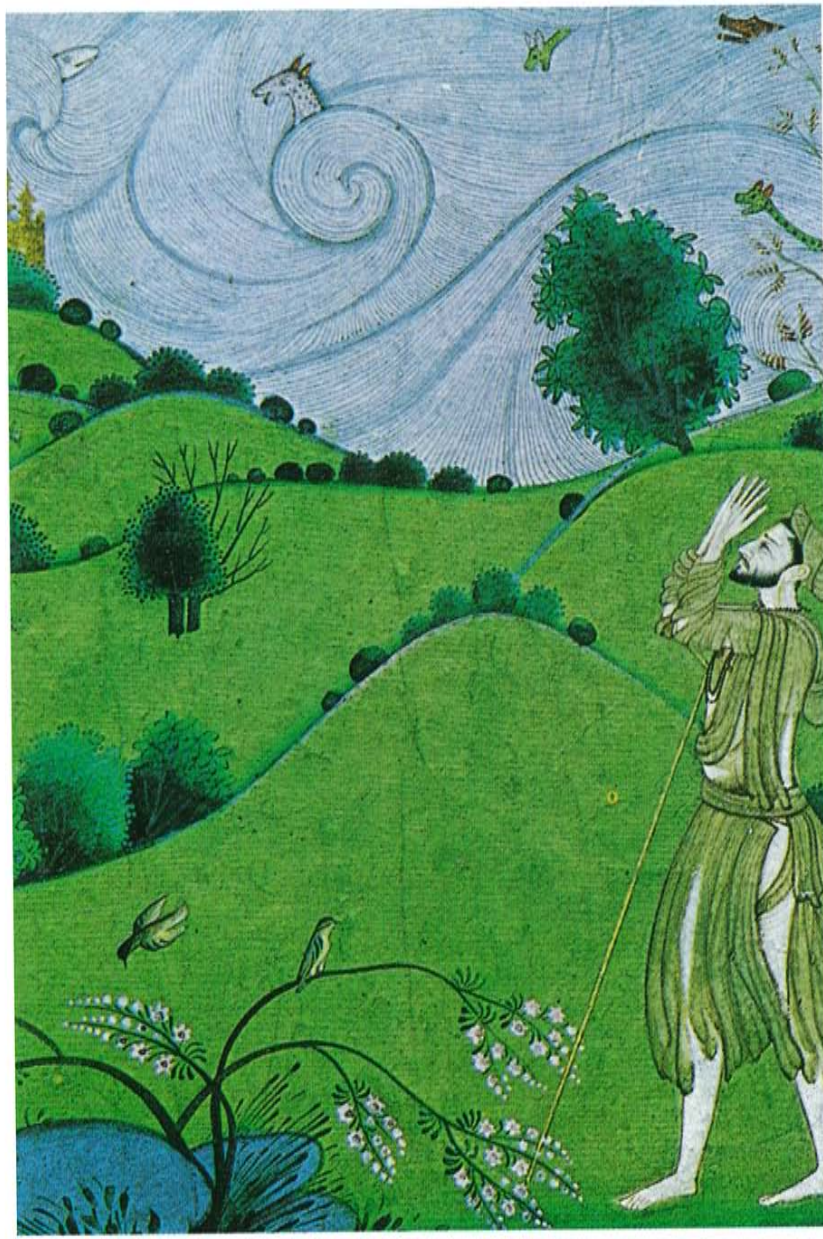
> "Those who want to follow Jesus must know how to carry their life's burden if they are to be able to follow. This is the point at which real discipleship begins... Perhaps many of us may say: My best prayer, Lord, is the cross that I take up daily. Amen." (pp. 100/101)

Jacques Lusseyran
And There Was Light: Life Begins Today.
Affected by Loss of Sight and Persecution

Facts: Jacques Lusseyran[36] went blind. His sensory handicap was not genetic but acquired. Jacques, the son of physicists, had an accident at the age of seven that led to the complete loss of his eyesight.

Jacques' parents, who belonged to the "petite bourgeoisie" in Paris, fought for a place in a regular school for their blind son. This laid the foundations for his life as a university professor, father of a family and a writer in America and Paris after surviving Buchenwald.

Jacques Lusseyran's life story is a document of faith. If faith means saying yes to life, to the limits of finite existence, working within them and remaining open to the promised future, then Jacques Lusseyran embodies this unlimited affirmation of life. He clearly lives in the *final* stage of *acceptance* (6) of working through crisis: "*I have only just realised...*"



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
The pilgrim Sudama - accompanied by spiral phenomena in nature - on the path of enlightenment to Krishna's golden city; Punjab, India, 18th century

The titles of his two autobiographies testify to his unconditional acceptance of a life with blindness.

"And There Was Light" (in German, *The Light I Found Again*), his first autobiography (A I) and *"Life Begins Today"*, his second autobiography (A II).

In the "*epilogue*" of the first autobiography, he says:

"Here my story ends, as it must... His dearest wish was to show, if only in part, what these years held of life, light and joy by the grace of God... Joy does not come from outside, for whatever happens to us it is within... Light does not come to us from without. Light is in us, even if we have no eyes." (A I, p. 244)

The second allows him at the end to confess:

"The inner life means to be convinced that 'seeing' means 'contemplating', 'knowing' means 'understanding' and 'possessing' means 'giving oneself away'. Our whole life is given to us before we live it. But it takes a whole life – perhaps even more – to make us aware of this gift. Our whole life is given to us in every second. Life begins today..." (A II, p. 132)

The analysis of Lusseyran's biography will illustrate in an exemplary fashion the *reality of acceptance*. Here are five results of my examination, which confirm our working hypothesis of working through crisis by learning:

1. His handicap did not disable him, since his psycho-social situation was extremely fortunate. He overcame his blindness though the opportunities that were given to him in social rehabilitation.
2. The *acceptance* (6) of a disability presupposes and builds on previous experiences of *acceptance*:
   - for the *child* Jacques, acceptance by his parents, in which his self-acceptance was embedded;
   - for the Lusseyran *parents*, acceptance by God, in which their self-acceptance as parents of a blind child was enclosed;
   - for the *adult* Lusseyran, acceptance by God, which safeguarded his self-acceptance against challenge.
3. For the Christian Lusseyran *acceptance* (6) was not silent submission, bowing to fate in a "naïve-apathetic reaction", but an active and creative *acceptance* (6), e.g. in his exodus from his blindness; he has been referred to as:

   "The man who did not lose his sight!" = *"And There Was Light "*; after his exodus from death in the Buchenwald concentration camp: *"The man who did not die!"* = *"Life Begins Today"*.
4. *Non-acceptance of the reality of his life* made Lusseyran blind: when he was "beside himself" with fear, rage, bitterness; when he experienced darkness, lack of relationship, disorientation, depression; when he suffered from loss of confidence in total unrelatedness, from his relapse into the *transitional* stage of working through crisis:

   " What the loss of my eyes had not accomplished was brought about by fear. It made me blind."

5. Lusseyran's Christian faith compensated for his *aggression* (3) and led him to the *reality of acceptance* (6).

These fundamental observations on the *reality of acceptance* will now be developed in detail.

Jacques described the situation in his parental home before and after his accident as exceptionally good:

> "When I think of my childhood I still feel the sense of warmth above me, behind and around me, that marvellous sense of living not yet on one's own, but leaning body and soul on others who accept the charge. My parents carried me along and that, I am sure, is the reason why through all my childhood I never touched ground... I passed between dangers and fears as light passes through a mirror. That was the joy of my childhood, the magic armour which once put on, protects for a lifetime." (A I, pp. 1f.)

Faith and God are not for him separate topics or stand-alone themes: they are his whole life. He counts on God. God to him is self-evident (which means literally that God makes himself evident). God becomes the acme of his unconditionally affirmed life:

> "My parents were heaven. I didn't say this to myself so precisely, and they never said it to me, but it was obvious. I knew very early, I am quite sure of it, that through them another Being concerned himself with me and even addressed himself to me. This other I did not even call God. My parents spoke to me about God, but only later. I had no name for him. He was just there, and it was better so. Behind my parents there was someone, and my father and mother were simply the people responsible for passing along the gift. My religion began like this, which I think explains why I have never known doubt. This confession may be something of a surprise, but I set store by it because it will make so many other things clear, my recklessness for instance." (A I, p. 2)

The author illustrates his faith marvellously with the image of a relay race from trust to trust.

> " I was always running; the whole of my childhood was spent running. Only I was not running to catch hold of something. That is a notion for grownups and not the notion of a child. I was running to meet everything that was visible, and everything that I could not yet see. I travelled from assurance to assurance, as though I were running a race in relays."
> (A I, p. 2)

Lusseyran faces the first threat of misfortune at the age of seven, when he is blinded in a school accident (suffering caused by human hands). Neither his parents nor he himself see this disaster as the end of the world. His parents avert the psycho-social threat by allowing him to be "normal" like his brother. The child Jacques accepts the physical threat by accepting himself as a blind person. As an adult Christian, he describes this part of his childhood under the significant heading of "*Revelation of Light*":

> "The next morning they operated and with success. I had become completely and permanently blind. Every day since then I have thanked heaven for making me blind while I was still a child not quite eight years old. I bless my lot for

practical reasons first of all. The habits of a boy of eight are not yet formed, either in body or in mind. His body is infinitely supple, capable of making just the movement the situation calls for and no other; ready to settle with life as it is, ready to say yes to it. And the greatest physical miracles can follow from this acceptance... These simple things I know, and I know that since the day I went blind I have never been unhappy. " (A I, pp. 8f.)

A variation in the second biography speaks of his "love of blindness":

"I know very well what a chain of proofs of grace has enabled me to love the blindness in me." (A II, p. 114)

Lusseyran himself critically anticipates the provocative challenge of his total acceptance of suffering, thus revealing the transforming power of his unconditional *acceptance* of suffering in an even brighter light. For him, the suffering caused by human hands has lost its sting of fatefulness, it no longer confronts him with the question "Why me?", but opens up to him a different, inner kind of sight, "the light he found again", through which he finds a new dimension of perception and life:

"My subject – in so far as I have one – is life. The life of the heart, of the mind, of the human reaction to the heart of the world and my own interest." (A II, p. 69)

Very different appears Lusseyran's description of extreme situations of fear, insecurity, anger and bitterness, situations in which his trust left him, he lost his light again, and he could not accept his blindness, but suffered:

"Still, there were times when the light faded, almost to the point of disappearing. It happened every time I was afraid. If, instead of letting myself be carried along by confidence and throwing myself into things, I hesitated, calculated, thought about the wall, the half-open door, the key in the lock; if I said to myself that all these things were hostile and about to strike or scratch, then without exception I hit or wounded myself... What the loss of my eyes had not accomplished was brought about by fear. It made me blind." (A I, p. 12)

Non-acceptance of his disability, his remaining in the *transitional stage* of *aggression* (3), *negotiation* (4) or *depression* (5), becomes an intolerable ordeal in his encounters with a blind boy:

"For a blind child there is a threat greater than all the wounds and bumps, the scratches and most of the blows, and that is the danger of isolation. When I was fifteen I spent long afternoons with a blind boy my own age, one who went blind, I should add, in circumstances very like my own. Today I have few memories as painful. This boy terrified me. He was the living image of everything that might have happened to me if I had not been fortunate, more fortunate than he. For he was really blind. He had seen nothing since his accident. His faculties were normal, he could have seen as well as I. But they had kept him from doing so. To protect him, as they put it, they had cut him off from everything, and made fun of all his attempts to explain what he felt. In grief and revenge, he had thrown himself into a brutal solitude. Even his body lay prostrate in the depths of an armchair. To my horror I saw that he did not like me." (A I, p. 21)

In this young *neighbour* the extreme threat of suffering appears in its three dimensions: physical, psychological and social destruction. Both boys suffer from physical blindness, but Lusseyran is not affected by the elementary psychological and social threats to his life; and he masters his physical suffering with his faith in a "relay race from trust to trust". It remains impossible for Jacques also to refuse completely to suffer; precisely through the basic *acceptance* (6) of his disability he actively embraces life, i.e. he enters into and establishes relationships, which necessarily includes the risk of being hurt. Jacques, too, suffers crises at turning points of his life – just like anyone who is not disabled – but unlike his young neighbour, he is able to learn from suffering instead of becoming bitter. He unveils his experiences of suffering with great frankness. To him, the blind man, it seems a consequence of his blindness that he might remain excluded from the 'wonders' of partnership. He realises that being human means being lonely:

> "I wondered whether Françoise would interest me. Was that possible? I was not as happy as I had been. No doubt about it, I had worries... I was afraid of myself. Frankly, I was frightened, and that was my trouble... I made it clear to him (Jean, a friend) that Françoise was only a pretext. Because of her I had remembered that I was blind... I would never be able to see the girls' hair, their eyes or their figures... It frightened me to know that I should always be kept away from these marvels... No doubt about it, the danger must be real if pity was the treatment I deserved! Without realizing it, I had just faced one of the toughest obstacles a blind person ever has to meet, and from then on I had to go from one fall to another for two years, until I regained my common sense." (A I, pp. 86f.)

As an answer to such questions, Jacques speaks in his first book about the *reality of his acceptance*:

> "The (inner) voice said I had fallen into a trap, had forgotten the true world: the world within, which is the source of all the others. I must remember that this world, instead of disappearing, would grow with the years, but only on one condition: that I believed in it steadfastly." (A I, p. 88)
>
> "The only way to be completely cured of blindness, and I mean socially, is never to treat it as a difference, a reason for separation, an infirmity... The cure is to immerse oneself again and without delay in a life that is as real and difficult as the lives of others." (A I, p. 24)

Lusseyran responds even more precisely in the second autobiography, where he defines non-acceptance of the crisis as the only ailment, and his answer, comparable to Paul's words (2 Cor. 4:8ff) about the paradox of the Christian faith, is permeated by the paradox of "suffering in freedom from suffering":

> "There is no ailment. I realised that through my blindness. God – or nature or life, if you prefer – never takes anything away from us. And if he appears to be taking something from us, then he is only robbing us of formalities and habits. We need to know that. The only ailment I know is not blindness, deafness or paralysis – though they may be difficult to bear – but resenting the blindness, deafness or paralysis. I am not praising sacrifices but realism,

> common sense, which means praising love and loving what is real. In my blindness I call it 'loving the light', for the light is there. It is there in the very same way as 'life' in its wholeness is there in the moment when our life seems to have nothing left to offer." (A II, p. 113)

One could add with Paul: "... dying, and see – we are alive ..." (2 Cor. 6:9).

A final situation of extreme suffering brought on in the Buchenwald concentration camp confirms once more that he truly finds acceptance only by faith. Nineteen-year-old grammar-school student Jacques – leader of the "Défense de France" resistance group – is carried off, interrogated, and tortured; in the concentration camp, he survives hunger, cold, and seemingly hopeless low points of sickness and then, as before, takes on responsibilities for his fellow prisoners.

> "I set myself to fighting panic, the panic of my fellows and my own, for they were inseparable. I was going to sort out the war news... Doubt and agony were taking root. We had to make war on the disease... How were we to hold on to the remnants of reason in the swirling madness of deportation?" (A I, pp. 228f, 231)

Jacques not only obtains information on the military situation for his block. He also collects news items, and interprets and translates them. What comes first for him, however, is the one thing that is needful, the one thing that can change their situation of need:

> "I could try to show other people how to go about holding on to life. I could turn toward them the flow of light and joy which had grown so abundant in me. From that time on they stopped stealing my bread or my soup. It never happened again. Often my comrades would wake me up in the night and take me to comfort someone, sometimes a long way off in another block. Almost everyone forgot I was a student. I became "the blind Frenchman." For many, I was just "the man who didn't die." Hundreds of people confided in me. The men were determined to talk to me. They spoke to me in French, in Russian, in German, in Polish. I did the best I could to understand them all. That is how I lived, how I survived. The rest I cannot describe." (A I, p. 222)

Impressive, and reminiscent of Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*, is how Lusseyran (as described in the second biography) works through his learning process in Buchenwald, the camp of suffering. This is where his *friend*, the *blacksmith* Jérémie, comes in, the only one in block 57 who lived without fear and had the following simple explanation for it:

> "'For those who can see, this is quite ordinary,' he said... The Nazis had given us a terrible microscope: the camp.

Lusseyran's internal dialogue with Jérémie reminds one of Dostoyevsky's Alyosha rebelling against the world's suffering; for both, their lamentation played a significant role as a necessary phase in learning *acceptance* (analogous to our hypothesis: aggression – spiral phase 3 – has a cathartic function in working through crisis):

> "At first, I did not understand him (Jérémie). I even felt something close to indignation. What? Buchenwald similar to ordinary life? Impossible. All these hideous, frightened people, this raucous threat of death... all this was

supposed to be ordinary! I remember not wanting to admit it. It should be worse or if not, more beautiful. Until Jérémie made me see... For me, it was not a revelation, not a dazzling discovery of the truth. I do not even think that words were exchanged. But one day it became clear, I could feel it in my flesh, that Jérémie, the blacksmith, had lent me his eyes for a long time... Jérémie taught me with his eyes that Buchenwald was in every one of us, hashed and re-hashed, constantly cherished and horribly loved. And that, consequently, we could do away with it, if we wished to strongly enough... 'How ordinary,' Jérémie sometimes said. He had always seen people in fear, in a fear that could not be conquered because it had no object. He had seen that secretly they had one wish above all: to do evil to themselves. It was always the same; and here it was the same performance. Only here all the conditions had finally been met. The war, Nazism, the political and national madness had created a masterpiece of disease and perfect misery: the concentration camp."

(A II, pp. 24, 25)

The power of acceptance (6) transforms. Lusseyran describes it as the rediscovery of joy:

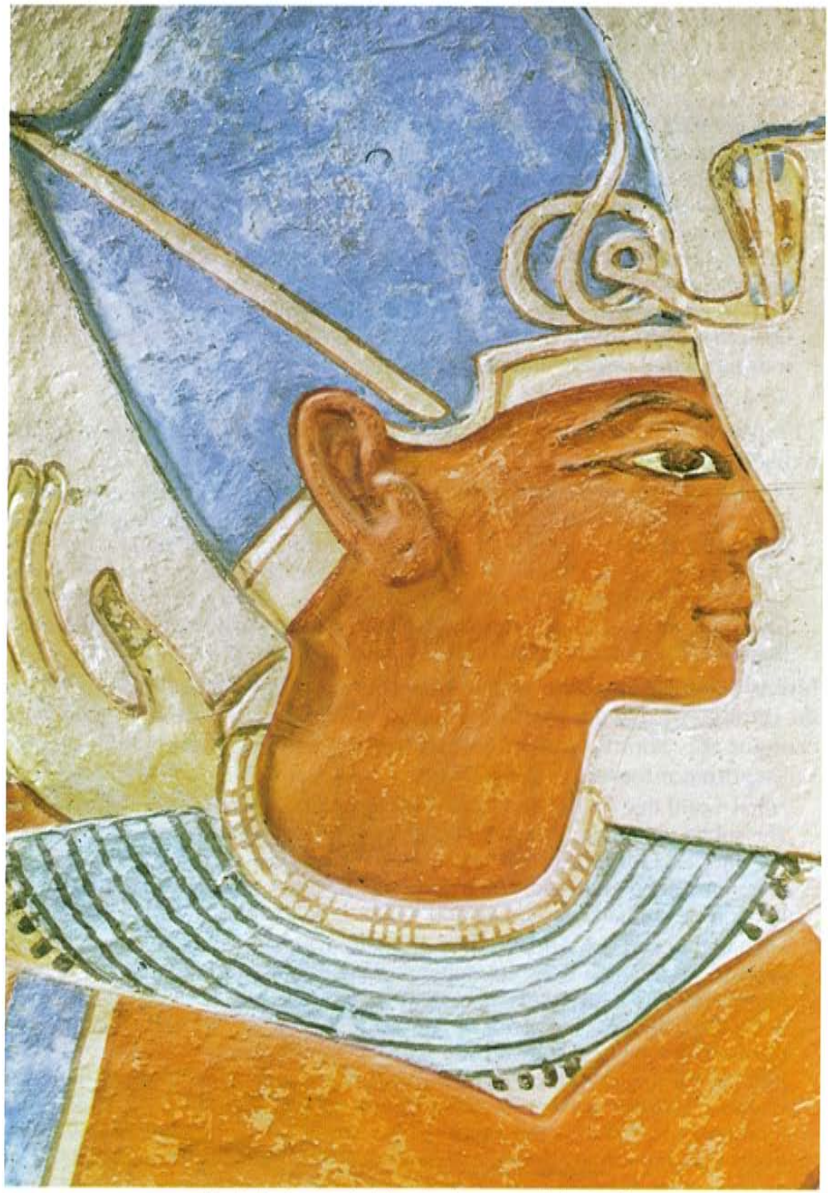
"In the middle of block 57 he (Jérémie) found joy. Imagine this gift Jérémie gave us! ... What joy? ... It was the joy of being alive... of feeling the life of the others, some others at least, pulsating against ours in the dark of the night ... It was forgiveness, there, all of a sudden, a few steps away from hell. It was again the possibility of everything, great fortune... The joy of discovering that joy exists, that it is in us – exactly like life – without conditions and therefore that no condition, not even the worst, could kill it." (A II, pp. 25, 26)

Jérémie helped one who was to be a university professor in later life to an important discovery, namely, that it was not his bright mind that brought this about – since Jérémie did not know the world of science. Lusseyran confesses:

"I have said that he (Jérémie) saw. I have spoken of him as of a living prayer. The subtle will claim that the faith of Jérémie was without nuance. So what? For him, and for us through him, the world was saved in every second. The blessing had no end. And, when it ceased, it was because we had not wanted it, because we had ceased, we and not it, to be joyful...

He had touched in his depths the supernatural or, if the word bothers you, the essence, that which does not depend on any circumstance, which can exist in all times and in every place, in pain as well as in pleasure. He had encountered the source of life. And, of course, he had at once been cleansed and purified. If I have employed the word "supernatural", it is because what Jérémie did seems to me to be precisely a religious act: the discovery that God is there, equally present in every human being, entirely present in every moment, and that one can return to him. This is the Good News that Jérémie in his very humble manner made us hear. " (A II, pp. 27, 28)

This 'Good News' is the 'glad tidings', the Gospel, that we find here in the testimony of the witness Jacques Lusseyran.



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
The Spiral serpent – as the defeated fire-spitting Uraeus. The third eye in the Chepreson of the Egyptian Pharaohs as an expression of flowing energy, inspiration – to initiate such streaming is the true task of the healing and sanctification in fullness.
Egypt 2900-2300 B.C.

Ruth Müller-Garnn
You Hold Me by My Right Hand.

Silvia and Albert Görres
Living with a Handicapped Child.
Affected by Their Children's Brain Damage

Facts: A smallpox vaccination when he was ten months old made Markus Müller-Garnn[37] "in medical terms ... (an) idiot"; shortly afterwards, his father became a complete invalid, his parents (a Protestant-Catholic mixed marriage) then produced three daughters who were not handicapped, and ten years later – after the Second Vatican Council, in 1970 – they had a Catholic wedding; together, they laid the foundations for a Christian family life, so that the then fifteen-year-old Markus found security in his parental home.

The birth of two mentally handicapped children – their elder daughter Regina and their middle son Patrick – alongside two healthy children give the practising psychotherapists and doctors, Silvia and Albert Görres, the existential role of parents alongside their professional role; they live and think through this experience as sufferers, experts and Christians.

Both couples, Müller-Garnn and Görres, seek, as Christians, answers to the question: "Our child is mentally handicapped! – How can God allow this to happen?" Both find answers, though not yet solutions, and with these interpretations they learn to live different lives. The Müller-Garnn couple find the answer in a *naïve-apathetic solution*, Silvia and Albert Görres in a *critical-sympathetic attitude*. Both couples show what Christian faith can do, irrespective of one's theology. They learn to accept their life with a disabled child; in accordance with our hypothesis they verify in their biographies that their Christian faith can compensate for *aggression* (3) as catharsis towards *acceptance* (6) in working through crisis.

Ruth Müller-Garnn gives us an insight into the *naïve-apathetic solution*. Her strong commitment to her religion is the basis of a childlike acceptance and trust, accepting all difficulties – e.g. her son's acquired mental handicap, poverty, social isolation – as burdens specially assigned to her by God's will:

> "From the very beginning, I was able to meet an essential prerequisite of a positive attitude towards my very ill child: throughout my life so far, my religious commitment has always sufficed in the end to see a divine purpose in all strokes of fate." (pp. 117/118)

The strength of her unwavering trust in God, which she herself describes as 'childlike or naïve', conditions her unreserved acceptance of her totally disabled child Markus. In her full awareness of herself as God's child,

the age-old question 'Why me?', as an expression of helpless *aggression* against a certain fate becomes irrelevant, since she has always entrusted herself and her cross to God and knows herself to be upheld by him:

> "I take these events from HIS hand as intended for me. For this reason, the question 'Why did it have to happen to my child?' never occurred to me. This is for me – as a 'believing Christian' I am in many ways quite odd – a particular form of trust in God. I call this unwavering trust childlike, sceptics may call it ... naïve. Either way, this unconditional trust often borders on presumption." (p. 118)

The fundamental trust of lived acceptance also benefits the family, transforms the situation and imparts meaning:

> "Embedded in his family Markus has a meaning; he changes us and those around him..." (p. 49)
>
> "Perhaps our love for these creatures transforms us so joyfully because it is an uncalculating love that must always begin without expecting a response. Perhaps love in the presence of these children simply becomes concrete. I am speaking of love in the sense of being ready to help, to respect the other, to help him preserve his dignity, and not of an overwhelming feeling of sympathy ... Perhaps it is also their unconditional trust, their utter dependence on us that touches us deeply in our hearts." (p. 123)

Her partner's transformation involves his growing in faith and expresses itself in his pride in son Markus:

> "... Georg, too, had been able to accept Markus from the very beginning ... even though he did not, as I did, trust God as much at the time. (p. 118)
>
> ... In the course of time, Georg began to feel proud of Markus along with his love for him. Today, he is – it seems to me – in a way just as proud of Markus as he is of his three pretty and intelligent daughters." (p. 119)

The change in the reactions of the *sisters* is reflected during their school days, when Sybille and Annette came home upset at a disparaging remark of a class-mate:

> "'Your Markus isn't really a human being, is he, he's half animal.' ... Sybille was filled with indignation: 'Mum, how can she say something like that! She doesn't even know Markus ... She doesn't know what we have him for.' I thought about this. ... And Sybille (7 years old) said with a naturalness that gave me much joy and almost put me to shame, 'Why, to love him, of course!'" (p. 112)

Her own conversion as the *mother* of a totally disabled child she captures in the paradox of Christian existence: To bear burdens and, equally, to be free of them:

> "In the years after Markus' illness began, I have surely cried more often and more desperately than mothers of healthy children normally do, and I have certainly bellowed intemperately like a bull, because I lost control... The truth is, we feel that Markus enriches our lives and that he is a burden. We love our 'sick' boy and would yet give anything if we could have him as a healthy child... We know how much our whole family is indebted to him and the experience of living with him, and yet, we would be grateful not to have had

> this experience. This sounds like a paradox. But every sickness is an opportunity to mature, and wherever there is misfortune, there are cheering signs of compassion to be seen." (pp. 116/117)

She gives space in her book to the burdens; one whole chapter discusses the problem that "suddenly one is isolated". (p. 101)

She draws a vivid picture of how her relationships with the people around her are troubled, but she also demonstrates that in a childlike, trusting relationship with God everything can be unconditionally permitted and also shared. For example, her revulsion from Markus, physical contact with whom often meant being bitten or spat at – for the Christian Müller-Garnn a symbol for Jesus' agony on the cross (p. 102) – or the reproach from the people around her, who call her hard-hearted for locking the poor chap up – for themselves, however, her neighbours claim too soft a heart to be able to bear the boy and his fits (p. 104). Finally, she describes her isolation from society, displayed for example in her firm's relief when she gives her notice, because the employee with the difficult fate has been getting on people's nerves for a long time (p. 105).

We hear of her bursting into crying fits, in the course of which "heaven" sent her Sister Sofia, who for short moments broke her domestic chains; and then she admits the risk of chattering during parents' evenings or telephone conversations in her yearning for human contact. A much greater risk, however, is to escape into a kind of arrogance, the arrogance of the 'sorely afflicted, in which one wears a difficult fate like a halo'. (p. 106)

Ruth Müller-Garnn shares with us that faith does not exclude doubts or quarrels, but allows us to turn confidently to God, whose presence imparts *acceptance* (6), teaching us to bear suffering – even undeserved suffering. Her murderous doubts prompted by a serious fit of Markus' threatened her profoundly:

> "Why, oh why must Markus suffer so? He has never in his life had enough understanding to do wrong. Can God truly be merciful, if he allows such suffering? It is one thing to accept unconditionally a child who is so seriously mentally disabled, with all the difficulties and sacrifices, but another to watch it suffer so terribly. This was more than I could bear, and I began to quarrel with God." (p. 74)

But the devout Catholic identifies with Mary: "How on earth could Mary bear to stand silently beneath the cross? ... How dreadfully she must have suffered!" And she began to work out the meaning of Paul's words about the sufferings of this present time that are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us (Rom. 8: 18).

> "And yet, in my darkest despair in those days, I began to form a mental picture of what eternal happiness means, perhaps because it is only in the depths of suffering that one can envisage the counterpart, the depths of the promised joy and happiness." (p. 74)

This certainty of faith that a *naïve-apathetic solution* grants is proclaimed by a verse in Psalm 73; it was Markus' confirmation verse (p. 99), and

was used later as the title of the biography: "Nevertheless I am continually with you; you hold my right hand (Psalm 73:23)."

For the couple Silvia and Albert Görres their experience as parents touched by crisis was radically different from their role as *consultants*, as doctors and psychotherapists. Silvia Görres suffered her disabled children as a life-long "thorn in the flesh" and, still deeply affected, she distanced herself in her reflection by writing in the third person:

> "For every mother and every father a disabled child is a constant 'thorn in the flesh', even if it lives in a home or in an institution far away. The way they are vitally affected will never, not even by the death of the child, come to an end. This child is their fate, from which they cannot exempt themselves for one minute of their lives." (p. 8)

Silvia Görres dedicates her book to her two children Regina and Patrick "out of the long effort to understand and come to terms with a seemingly incomprehensible fate, in order to provide other parents with comprehensible, usable help". Again, she distanced herself from her fate by entitling the book "Life with a handicapped child", instead of speaking personally of 'our two handicapped children'. She takes an expert position on the situation, the role of the parents, the handicapped child, the sisters, the spouse, practical ways of dealing with the child, and the problems of family or home life, and examines her own experiences in the concluding chapter "Highlights from everyday life". Inevitably she comes up against the central question of the *acceptance* or *non-acceptance* of the handicapped child, the latter often connected with a death wish that she puts down to the lack of support from those around her and especially from the church.

> "The strain and the perpetual demands the disabled child makes can lead to this, that its parents – in particular its mother as the person most affected – no longer see a way out and seek death for themselves and for the child, as they believe they can bear this life-long burden no longer, and perhaps because they have received too little help. The unconscious expectation of the parents is ... to get help ... from the church and from God." (p. 78/79)

The practical aspects of such church support – though here mostly requested in vain – are sketched out by Silvia Görres in chapter nine, "The handicapped child and the Christian congregation" (p. 129 ff.). She produces a catalogue of possible forms of assistance, the heart of which she does not see in offering financial help, but in the reduction of prejudices, in compassion. She sees such support in appropriate conduct, for example, sparing her the usual course of running the gauntlet and other opportunities to practise humility in Sunday services. She refers to the gathering up of pressing worries in intercessory prayer, in which the congregation could identify with unmerited suffering of the parents of handicapped children and would no longer dismiss personal affliction as an accident or misfortune for which they have no responsibility: then, the intercessory prayer would have a vicarious meaning for the community of the faithful, the church; especially for those parents who, through

no merit of their own, have only healthy children. Lastly, she calls for sisterly *solidarity* in the church, which is the only way the stabbing pain can lose its sting, and the possible expressions of which – visiting ministry, counselling, practical assistance, Sunday service ministry – may be as diverse as the members of the congregation themselves.

In the epilogue (p. 185ff.), the *father* concerned, Albert Görres, a Christian *doctor* and *psychotherapist*, poses the central question, namely "Our partner – the disabled person?". He cannot accept a naïve-apathetic solution. He struggles in a *critical-sympathetic response* to understand the meaning of such suffering – in the form of a mental handicap, an almost inconceivable catastrophe, worse in many cases than the death of a family member, that drives many parents to anguished death wishes and death fantasies against their disabled child. As a *Christian* and the *father* of two mentally handicapped children, Albert Görres confesses:

> "If we are honest, we cannot fail to notice that a natural and inescapable element of our relations with disabled people is rejection, fear, even hatred. A natural element ... Christians are in no way exempt from the temptation to feel and to think: go away, or else I (!) will suffer, and go away for good, so that my (!) life will be easier." (p. 137)

The risk of this public lament helps Görres. Great is his courage in confessing openly as a practising psychotherapist and doctor that he feels "... an element ... (of) rejection, ... fear ... hatred" for his own disabled children, and admitting frankly as a responsible Christian that he is tempted by a death wish. "Go away ..., go away for good". This releases him into *aggression* (spiral phase 3), with its manifold expressions, and which, according to the results of our analysis of biographies, is as catharsis an essential precondition for *acceptance* (6) and *solidarity* (8) in working through crisis. Görres reminds us of Job, who protested against his undeserved suffering, the meaning of which God did not disclose him. In his *critical-sympathetic response*, lamenting in identification with their suffering, he positions himself *alongside* the affected parents in his practice and alongside the great number of the nameless, thereby releasing them from their suppressed aggression, their involuntary barrier against life, their breaking off their learning in working through crisis.

For the Christian Albert Görres, however, what turns the balance is that in his *lamentation/aggression* (3) he does not have to turn aimlessly against the people around him, thereby establishing a vicious circle, but turns immediately to God in an internal dialogue. We see how much more deeply this critical dialogue drove him to think about his faith in the three hundred pages of his book "*Kennt die Psychologie den Menschen? Fragen zwischen Psychotherapie, Anthropologie und Christentum*" (Does Psychology know the Human Being? Questions between Psychotherapy, Anthropology and Christianity)39, in which he claims that the more central and the more important something is for one's existence, the less one can know about it. At the same time, he confesses, "I need to consider these matters because I have not yet found a way ..." (p. 9) and asserts that

we are forced to ask whether the shrill-sounding cognitive dissonance of the contradictions "does not leave open a way, not only to bear God's burden and to praise him, but to find God in all things, in the good as well as in the bad." (p. 13)

He presents the meaning that he himself discovered in the chapters "Reasons for Faith", "The Sense and Non-sense of Sickness", "The Courage of Confidence" and "Disappointment with God: On Tilman Moser's book 'God-poisoning'".

In both publications he derives his stance in favour of partnership with disabled people from his definition of faith; for him, faith means "the recognition of a person's rights" (1979, p. 90). He opposes Martin Luther, who described mentally deficient children as '*massa carnis*' and suggested that it was best to drown them because they were not able to know and love God and to live in freedom, which led one to doubt that God wanted them to live (1973, p. 138). This is the source of his emphatic demand for living in partnership with the mentally handicapped, a partnership that does not call for pious feelings of pity, but for an effort of thought. In 1973 Albert Görres described his position as a *philosophical insight,* claiming that every human being, however severely disabled, was a person and therefore a legal subject, on which no one was allowed to lay a hand, and yet who at the same time could not represent himself or defend his rights (p. 138). In 1979 he develops a *theological axiom*, claiming that the recognition of a person's rights includes the recognition of God's law. In this insight Görres finds the answer to the fundamentally insoluble question of the "sense and non-sense of sickness", namely that God had also to be granted the right to be trusted in advance, which demanded from us the "effort of courage" (p. 163). This would promote the unconditional *acceptance* of one's "predestined existence" and following his teacher Sigmund Freud, mean letting go of the need to "make oneself a substitute God for a time" (p. 167). Görres set out these thoughts with reference to the book of Job:

> "The courage of trust that God asks of us here seems so important to him that he does not make it any easier for us intellectually. Revelation teaches us many things, but it does not give us an answer to the question of the meaning of evil that would satisfy our desire to know. It simply tells us that this cannot all be nonsense, but it will not disclose to us the sense ... In the trial Job is allowed to conduct against Yahweh, Job confronts Yahweh directly with God's shame. Yahweh is not above a speech for the defence; however, his argument is not an explanation of evil. Instead, he explains himself. My wisdom and power have been shown so clearly to your spirit and reason that I can reasonably expect trust from you even where the details of the meaning of my decrees remain hidden. You shall follow me not only in the light of my presence, but also in the darkness of my concealment – which is not my absence." (1979, p. 164)

Herein Görres finds an answer that should help complaining parents in his psychotherapeutic practice:

> "... even if they (the parents) will not admit it, a psychiatrist or psychologist so often hears the complaint: Doctor, I can no longer love this child who is so immensely demanding, who is even aggressive; this child behaves badly, it hits me, it abuses me, I can no longer love this wicked child! Such people feel great relief when they are asked: Can you try to grant this child its rights, to acknowledge the rights of this child? Relieved, many people say: Yes, I can do that, and I want to do it with my whole heart. They feel comforted and cope more easily if they are told: If that is your true desire, then you are loving your child as best you can." (1973, p. 140)

He answers his questions by identifying with Job:

> "But I let myself say the words that satisfied Job: God can bear the responsibility for my suffering. I truly know enough about him to leave this worry to him, since I am neither able nor called to solve this problem. I would find it easier to trust if it (my problem) were solved, but then, not much trust would remain. For it is only in this one point that trust is asked of me as a burden, as a real burden. I believe that God is allowed to demand trust of me as a burden... I am not a judge to sentence him (God) to non-existence because of evil ... (I) have a vital interest in victory; victory in the trial decides between existence or non-existence ... To leave the standpoint of faith would be to lose one's identity. Faith is the only access to reality, to one's hidden inwardness..." (1979, p. 97-103)

From this *critical-sympathetic attitude of faith* Albert Görres acquires a changed perspective: A mental handicap is no longer seen as a "technical breakdown of life" that a doctor is supposed to mend. It becomes a "necessary, salutary reality on our journey through life", which we may be able to relieve, but not to heal.

> "The healthy, strong, powerful, or rich need the poor, the weak, the sick, those in need of help or protection, because in partnership with the latter, and in no case without this partnership, the former learn the one thing they strictly need to learn, namely that the way to their salvation and the salvation of humankind is a way that goes downwards." (1973, p. 144)

In 1979 he consolidates this thought:

> "Our sick neighbour is an outstanding opportunity amongst those presented to us to learn to love in a selfless and almost superhuman maturity. This is one of the reasons why we put them out of the house, but in so doing we lose ourselves ... we flee, but at the price of not finding ourselves." (1979, p. 169)

Görres captures our world in the image of Solzhenitsyn's cancer ward, which brings to light how the suffering and death of the incurably sick and of the disabled can discredit every this-worldly hope and every meaning of life. The disabled human being impresses upon us that the world always wears the face of the cancer ward.

> "The disabled are not some individuals amongst us that we can shunt off to a ghetto. We all are mentally handicapped children, dependent on protecting hands to help us find the way." (1973, p. 15)

Albert Görres summarises: we so-called able and healthy people would be different if illness and disability did not exist. Thus, Görres can resist

the temptation to cry "Go away" and can take the opportunity to ask, "Stay with me!"

"Stay with me, so we might all become who we are supposed to be." (1973, p. 148)

Laurel Lee
Walking through the Fire, You Shall Not Be Burned.
Affected by Cancer, Desertion and Certainty of Death

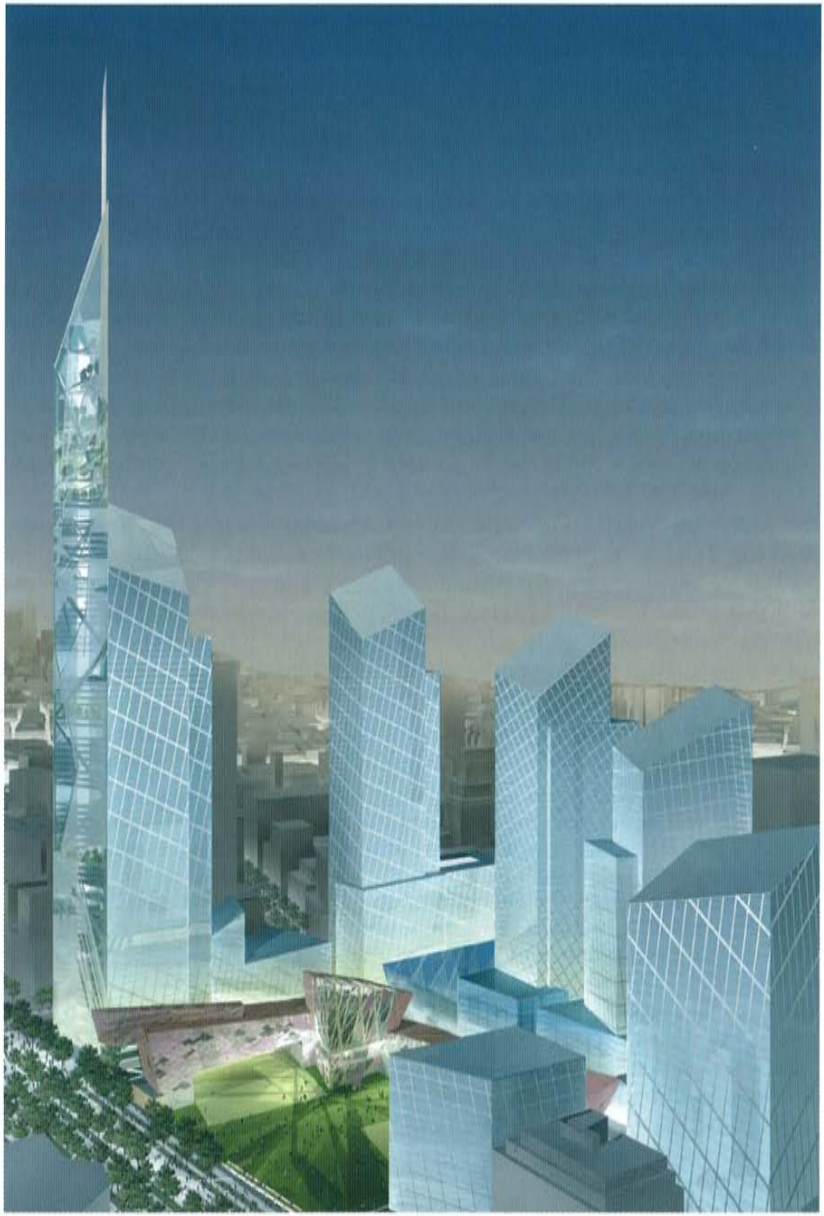
Facts: Laurel Lee[40], incurably ill with cancer, in the 4th and final stage of Hodgkin's disease, and the mother of three children who, against medical advice, carries her third child to full term while undergoing radiotherapy, goes almost simultaneously through the anticipation of her own death, the birth of her third child, her husband's petition for divorce, isolating poverty, and her emergence as a best-selling author.

The analysis in her biography closes with the challenge posed by the certainty of her death by cancer. Since cancer today is the cause of death of every fourth person, this specific life disorder may be considered an additional category of disability alongside the four main categories: physical disabilities, psychological disorders, sensual impairments and mental handicaps. A chronic life disorder also puts those affected into a crisis they cannot escape and inescapably demands of them that they learn to live with it. In her diary, the answer Laurel Lee sets out to find can be classified as a '*critical-sympathetic response*'.

The story of Laurel Lee's suffering could be taken from the Bible. It would teach us once more that miracle stories do not tell so much of concrete healing – Laurel Lee also remains incurably ill with cancer, and the hour of her death comes in sight – but more of the attempt to change one's perspective. Laurel Lee suffered sickness, misery, poverty, desertion and loneliness, and yet she always felt close to God: "I have discovered wonderful things in death. It was a journey into my inner life; the more the outer person wasted away, the more the inner one was renewed day by day."

Laurel Lee was happy to be alive; but she did not want to live at any price: "I was in a place where it no longer mattered whether you were alive or dead. I caught glimpses of heaven, and what I saw was enchanting. And if it were not for the thought of my children I would not have wanted to leave this window on heaven."

This attitude stems from her Christian faith; it is how she applied her faith to what she called her 'misfortune'. Laurel Lee's way of 'being



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
Complementary spiral rising towards the sky - World Trade Center Monument Sept 11th, 2001. A spiral of 1776 feet of steps to 'independence', to freedom,
Daniel Libeskind, New York 2003

whole', the 'indestructible health' we can sense in every line, is captivating. During her trip to Germany, her German editor writes :[41]

> "Laurel Lee ... incurably sick [is] – as we knew after the days we spent with her – indestructibly healthy, incorrigibly positive – her courage to live is captivating and blurs the distinction between healthy and sick." (p. 4)

Hear what she says herself:

> "There is something I should like my doctors to know. If I told them they might forget it later on. So I am writing it down so that they will remember. I wanted to give a gift to them and to my family." (p. 110)

She uses striking images to put into words what is unspeakable. When she was informed after her spleen operation that she had already reached the third and penultimate stage of Hodgkin's disease, her *aggression* erupted:

> "I have three little children, not even old enough for school. That is so searing a thought, so like an AT WAR headline that I said it out loud." (p. 79)
>
> "I was mad at every encouraging word and that I had believed them. We all stood two inches tall; I was set up for a fall. It was winter, and they took my only coat." (p. 78)

Inwardly she cries, but because she hates to draw people into her despair, wishing them to 'remain free', she puts up her defence mechanism, puts on her emotional armour, puts down her visor and asks: What effects will this event have on my treatment? When she protests at what is for her the confusing repetition of constant radiotherapy and liver and spleen tests, "But I no longer have a spleen!", she is left alone with a brief "Oh yes, that's right!"

She clothes the following events in the image of a lift: she is the lift boy, the one to press the buttons to go up or down as she wants.

> "I was alone. What could I do with my mind? It was like I was in an elevator and my will could push the up or down button. I sang a portion from a song that a minor prophet sang thousands of years ago: 'Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will exult in the God of my salvation. The Lord, my God, is my strength' (Habakkuk 3:17f.)."
>
> "The song could be turned up and sung out loud, but I could not turn it off. It was like the Holy Ghost Radio Station. My agony turned into a great joy that was beyond understanding: and joy is one with peace. I was in a very high place, and I wanted to look around." (pp. 79f.)
>
> "I wanted the doctors to come back so I could comfort them. But instead Clara came, and she knows how to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice." (p. 81)

Against all reason, Laurel Lee's faith had moved the mountains of her fear of death. She was free again, free to go her own way! The *New York Times* commented, "What Laurel Lee did was a reaction to what was happening to her: she countered death with patience, cheerfulness, a personal philosophy of life and faith in Jesus."

Her entry into hospital felt like arriving on a different planet, and she suffered something like culture shock. She was terrified, for example, by the decision to start radiotherapy immediately instead of first ascertaining the gestational age of her baby by ultrasound scan as planned, because of a malfunction in the ultrasound equipment. But she tells us how she was reminded as if in a vision of the biblical story of Naaman, from which she gained calmness and confidence:

> "I was terrified. I felt I was being pushed in a little cattle car to Auschwitz, or some other extermination camp. My fears all came upon me when I saw the corridor. I have never had an understanding of machines, small or great. Patients were treated behind lead-lined doors that read: 'Danger! Keep Out! High Radiation Area.' Red lights were turned on while technicians turned knobs, watching the cancer victims on TV screens."
>
> "I was taken into an examination room. I prayed with utter fervour. Then I had a vision in which my mind could see a story: 'Naaman was a Syrian who had leprosy. He sought a prophet of God who told him to dip seven times in the Jordan river, and he would be whole. Naaman balked at the word; but he obeyed and was well.' There was much more than this, but it was clear to me that I had a course to follow, and in my submission to radiation, I would be restored." (pp. 22f.)

Then, while she went cautiously through the preparation procedures, which she compared to the torture scenes in a science fiction novel, she was informed that the radiotherapy was postponed until a diagnosis was made through the ultrasound scan. She happily declined the offer of transport by a wheelchair and 'went my way rejoicing' (p. 23).

Then came the verdict: 'Immediate radiation therapy is necessary' (p. 34):

> "I was not ignorant of the danger of radiation to the foetus ... Tears just welled in my eyes." (p. 35)

A staff member again doubted that therapy was possible in view of the forthcoming delivery and wanted to leave the decision to her, the expectant mother:

> "I was in real stress. All men were liars. If I had had any strength, I would have run away for the afternoon just to look at one solid thing, like a tree." (p. 35)

But she was sent for again and the radiotherapy began without delay. Again, she found that she was carried through the situation in her resistance and that God himself was affected by the situation, that he supported her.

> "The betatron machine was chosen, because it emitted the least scatter. I was rolled under its girth. Earphones were applied because the machine roared as it worked. They put small rice bags on my neck, and a lead apron over my abdomen. I could feel the baby moving within me and my mind was held constant in God.
>
> The day of the second treatment, peace of mind rolled slowly back up and filled me. I spent the hours of that returning with my water colours, painting a little picture. I recalled the lines from Isaiah: 'When thou walkest through

the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flames be kindled upon thee'." (pp. 35f.)

The struggle between 'resistance and surrender' continued. She illustrated it with distressing images.

"These lions stayed in my room. At times they were very big, and I would tremble. Sometimes they were small, but they were always present, with teeth." (p. 99)

"Besides the concern of the cancer-causing agents, I did not want the top of my head to look like my knee. A disease and its treatment can be a series of humiliations, a chisel for humanity. My room had been an ice-skating rink. As I sat and wrote, I glided through the hours, leaped over barrels, and was exuberant. Now there were holes I had to manoeuvre around. My feet could get wet and cold, and I would shiver on the bed." (p. 100)

These long stays in hospital aroused homesickness and death wishes:

"I had never had this disorder before... When Dr Mainer made his rounds in the morning, I told him in solemn tones, 'I've lost my will to live,' pause, 'in the hospital." (p. 43)

And yet she also encountered God's presence in hospital: she experienced it when meeting her doctors. For one of the doctors, Michael Mainer, she was always a human being first and not just another 'case'.

"This was based on a feeling, not words. It was rare for our conversation to go beyond what was medically relevant. He kept disclosures of his inner self on a strict budget." (p. 44)

And yet he, the healthy one, was infected by Laurel Lee's indestructible inner health. He said, "I once was a lot happier. I want to get back there again." (p. 45) His question to Laurel Lee: "He asked me about how I had become a Christian."

Mary-Elisabeth's birth became for her the promise of the biblical message:

"I felt I could run the length and breadth of the world." (p. 50)

"Saturday and Sunday Mary Elisabeth was mine for a brief season, with a circle just around us, and all the cares to come had to recede." (p. 51)

And when the neonatal pediatrician Stu Levy informed her of the results of Mary-Elisabeth's examination, she was reminded of the book of Daniel.

"... he said the words from the book of Daniel, without knowing it: '... she appears more vigorous than the rest'."

Then he, too, unexpectedly asked her the question: "Just what are you into?" (pp. 54f.)

Her quest for a *critical-sympathetic response* or, in Bonhoeffer's terms, her journey between 'resistance and surrender' continued, interrupted only by moving repeatedly between hospital and home.

"The path had such steep rocks. Within myself I was so exhausted that life lost all its colours, its past, and its future. I was pressed down by each day." (p. 62)

Among people who did not suffer from cancer she felt like a leper, running the gauntlet as all sufferers do:

> "'Did you see those red marks on them? It's for the radiation machines.' It's like they were passing lepers and everyone whispered, 'Unclean! Unclean!'" (p. 63)

Her worst experiences were encounters with mothers of children with cancer, for whose suffering she would have liked to cry out along with her own:

> "They were always perfectly tender with their injured ones, who needed no tether: they didn't move. I kept feeling a cosmic apology that mine had to emphasize the contrast of health... The other mothers were at the other end of my tunnel. Their child was leaving them; I was leaving my children.
>
> What are words
> That say good-bye
> I'm just going
> I will not die
> I think it best
> To shout it out:
> See you later alligator
> In a while, crocodile." (p. 64)

Along with this 'anticipatory grieving" in her depression (5) at the lost future of these children, as at her own, went 'reactive grieving' over what she had already lost through the illness, and the concrete experience of being abandoned by her husband:

> "When I was back home I found that he had taken a portion of my clothes and deposited them in a grocery-store lot Goodwill box. I shouted, 'What do you think you are doing – getting rid of your dead wife's estate?' 'I thought about that', he answered." (pp. 85f.)

This happened on March 13. Two months later, on May 27, she wrote:

> "Home is said to be the one place you can go and they have to take you in... I walked into someone else's house at my old-shoe address." (p. 104)

It was no longer her home:

> "Thoughts flew around in my head. I understood that to him I was dead. We talked that night. 'We live in two different kingdoms,' he said." (p. 107)

He coined an expressive image to illustrate the point:

> "'Have you ever seen two dogs and one has been hit by a car?' he said. 'The other just walks around it and howls, not knowing what to do." (p. 96)

In her diary, under the heading of 'Monday, May 30', she added 'Memorial Day' and then wrote about the final phase of the desertion:

> "Friends opened houses to me. Richard started to file for divorce... I was in the wilderness of my life. I was a Gretel without a Hansel lost in the woods. There was a wicked witch who would eat me if I would listen. In my thoughts were my wars fought. 'Weeping may endure for the night, but joy cometh in the morning' (Psalms 30:5)." (pp. 108f.)

This 'and yet' against all reason made her rent the upstairs of an old house, bring the children home, finish her journal, give it to her doctor

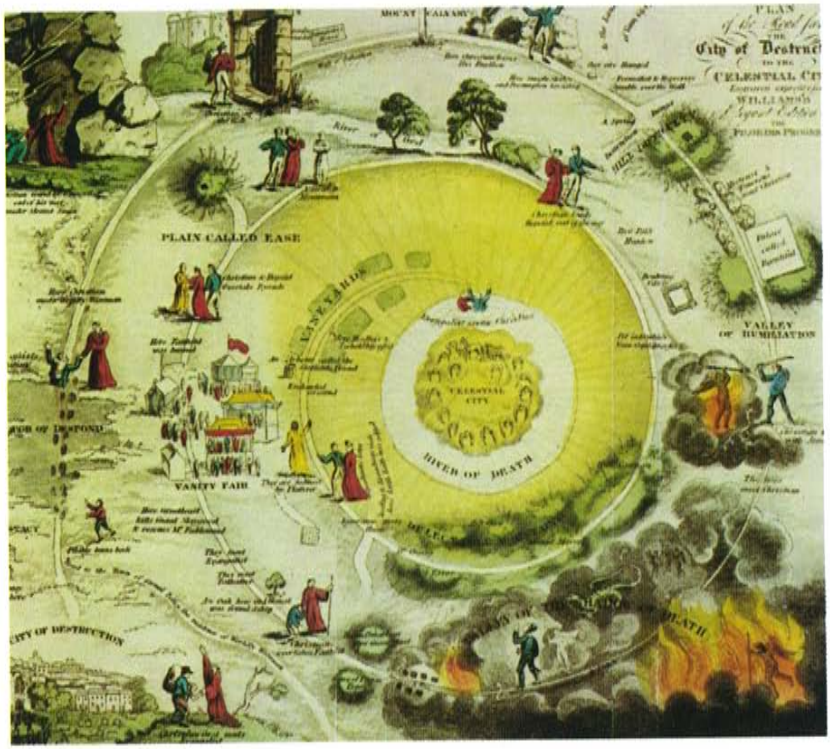
Michael Mainer to read – from where it went round to the other doctors' pigeon-holes – until it reached the personal adviser of the American Minister of Health. Laurel Lee's message is not a glorification or transfiguration of suffering as a way of testing or of God's punishment in the form of a *naïve-apathetic solution*. In an interview with her editor in a German Sunday newspaper she explained:

> "Yes, I have been wondering why I had to bear this misery. And I have not been able to find any positive element in this suffering."[42]

Laurel Lee's message is her testimony. With God, her creator, she struggled inwardly, she wrestled, she screamed, she lamented, she cried. But God, her redeemer, fulfilled his promise to her: "I will be with you ... Walking through the fire, you shall not be burned." And in a critical-sympathetic response Laurel Lee learned to accept her cancer:

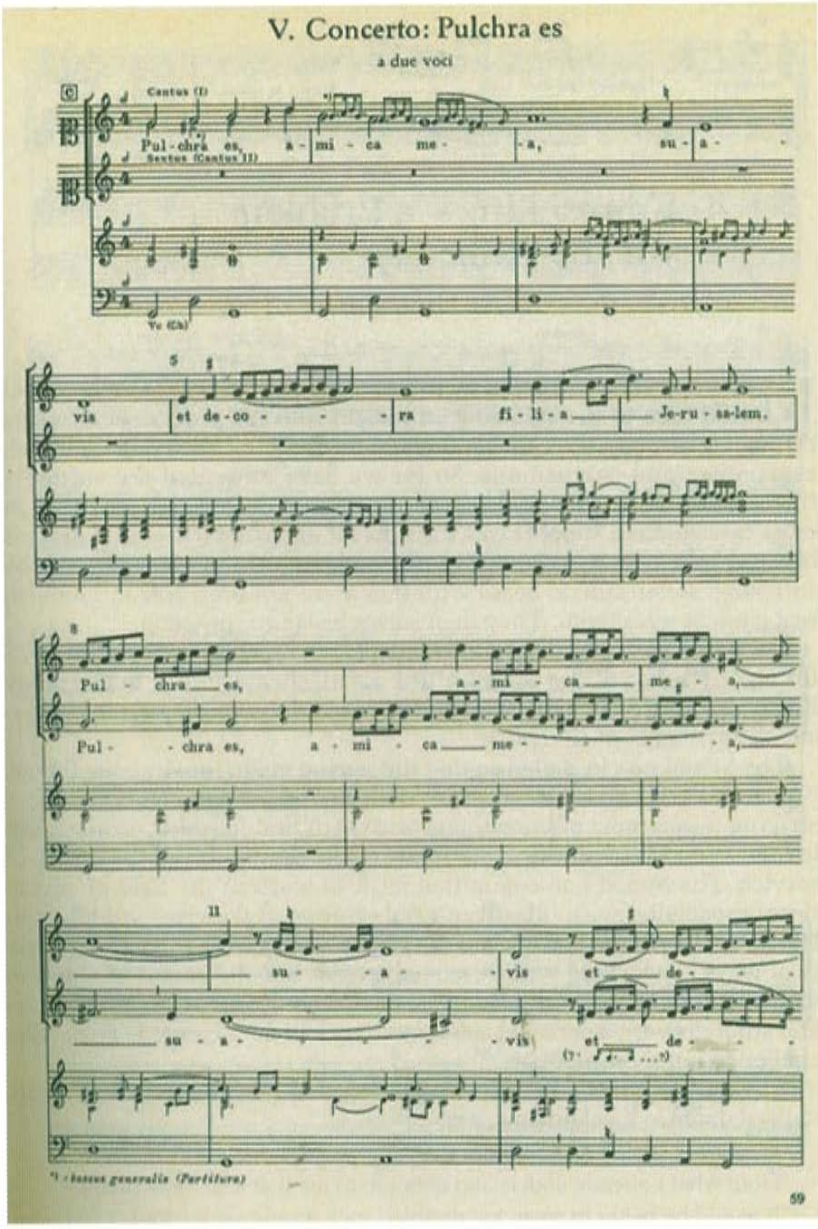
> "There is something I should like my doctors to know. I have discovered wonderful things in death. It was a journey into my inner life; the more the outer person wasted away, the more the inner one was renewed day by day."

Laurel Lee, a female Job, went through hell, but she stepped out of it; she was pulled out of it by this indescribable, contagious faith, which against all reason and every medical prognosis can move mountains: as a witness Laurel Lee lives and will live in her diary.



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
Pilgrim's Way to Celestial Jerusalem,
Illustration for The Pilgrim's Progress; John Bunyan, England, 19th century

‚The Loving-Pair' – Accompanying Each Other ...
Music can teach us ho to accompany someone:
Taking over the second part and thereby supporting the melody
highlighting it, bringing it to life.
Ernst Barlach: 'The Loving Pair', Hamburg 1922



... comparable to the accompaniment in Music

4. Counselling – a Problem for the Affected

My aim in this study was to give the wide circle of those who could offer care to the suffering an insight into the process of working through crisis, and thus enable them to fulfil more effectively their task as partners and companions. So far we have presented the sufferers themselves, with their experiences, needs and desires. We saw that in most cases human support was insufficient and even irksome. This was because as a rule caregivers did not understand the mentality of the suffering; worse still, to begin with they were not even able to establish real contact with them. They themselves became a problem.

I was stirred by insights I gained during *several stays in Bethel*: in 1978 for a conference of the Synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany EKD[43], and since 1979 for *project-oriented seminars for students* in university departments of education.

The Synod met in Bethel so that the setting might illustrate its theme, "What are Life and Education for?" During the proceedings there was a striking programme of encounters with staff and disabled people. This led the Synod beyond the usual limits of the discussion of the duties of service. The Synod had committed itself to work in the field of education, especially with disadvantaged groups. Likewise, students at Hanover University had chosen the project seminar in order to see practical ways of working with disabled people. But the concrete offers to visit or rather to meet with Bethel residents confronted Synod members and students with a personal challenge they had not expected. They were challenged in their identity.

At first, the members of the Synod reacted with more or less rationalised defence mechanisms, e.g.:

"The time is simply too short for that."

"From what I already understand about it, to me that looks like prying."

"It would be better to spare the disabled such a sight-seeing tour."

"I confess, I do not honestly know how to behave in such a situation, will you come with us?"

"I would gladly go with you, but I have never seen anything like this before; what would I have to do?"

The students responded with aggressive criticism; they sneered first at the ghetto situation, "*How could they set up a whole town full of disabled people?*", then at the exploitation of the Bethel residents, "*How can they accept their own salary if the people who work there get 3 pfennigs for 10 binders, and never have more than 35,00 deutschmarks pocket money?*" Finally, during the welcome of visitors in the Dankort, they reacted with a silent protest.

On both occasions there were offers of help. Among the Synod members the visits were constantly promoted in personal conversations – since all the Bethel residents had been expecting 'their' Synod members for weeks. When the proceedings closed at meal times or before or after committee meetings, those who were interested were often personally accompanied during their first visit to one of Bethel's houses. It was astonishing to see how, spontaneously and with unconcealed joy, the disabled succeeded time and again in approaching the Synod members, who were not disabled, and in freeing the guests of their embarrassment by not feeling inhibited themselves, and sometimes even infecting them with their joy, so that they suddenly did something together – building, painting, playing, listening to one another, enjoying one another's presence. Personal contact bypassed fear and allowed the first connections to be made. Jörg Zink[44] described this process vividly:

> "It is a fact: Fear arises in us who are healthy. Just like 'them', we could lose our health, our composure, our security and power, our freedom and in the end, our self-respect. And a primeval fear stirs within us, coming from deep down. We close our eyes, our ears and finally our mouths and walk on. All we can do is to expel and repress our unpleasant thoughts. But thereby a whole mountain of inhumanity is built up between the healthy and the disabled."

The students had much more time at their disposal. Characteristic of their project-oriented studies was the interdependence of real life experience and theoretical reflection on what had happened. Thus, the project seminar, on the model of Clinical Pastoral Training (CPT), dovetailed practice and theory. Each study day contained three tasks. First, in the morning, cooperation between students and disabled adults in the various fields of work in the Bethel houses. Then, during lunch time, theoretical reflection on their interaction with the Bethel residents, based on the written reports of their conversations, to which they tried to relate their specific questions about their own behaviour. These reports then served as the raw material of the theoretical seminars in the afternoons, during which the participants sought together for theoretical explanation of their actions, so as to gain insights into possible alternatives. The most important *conclusions* the students arrived at were:

- It is not the disabled, who build bridges for understanding, who are disabled; we, the 'healthy', are disabled in our relationships; we shy away from dividing barriers, we break the bridges or do not find them in the first place;

- It is not the disabled who are exploited by their work in the workshops, for there they experience the meaning of their work and of their working together; we who are not disabled are victims of our own idea that performance and profit could help us discover the meaning of our lives; our actions are often bereft of meaning, because we bow to the coercion of economic goals;
- It is not only the disabled who need to be integrated into the human community; the able-bodied and efficient also rely on it; we, who seem not to be disabled, need be liberated from our false objectives and one-sided standards; we need to be corrected by the disabled, so as to find new possibilities for living.

Although there are no reports of the Synod members' self-evaluation, we may infer from their behaviour and their reactions that most of them were insufficiently prepared internally and therefore insecure. In both cases, there was the same *experience*:

- The disabled are not our problem, but we who are not disabled become a problem for *them*!

Jürgen Moltmann[45] reflected on this question from a theological viewpoint:

> "Our defence reactions put the disabled into the position of lepers. They are isolated, ignored or bedevilled by pity. The disabled are not our problem. We are their problem."

So the Synod members as well as the students realised – in line with the experiences presented in the Federal Government's Commission of Enquiry on Psychiatry – that social integration is much less a question of information as of interaction, i.e. of the ability to come into contact with others and to act together. As people who are not disabled learn through experience that they are a problem for the disabled, they can change their attitude and comportment. They gradually become able to overcome problems in their relationships. But this will not happen through information, but primarily by doing things together. From this it follows for all congregational ministry, for every personal encounter with the disabled:

- Interaction has priority over information.
- Experience must precede the knowledge we strive for.

On the basis of their experience, the students described this as follows:

> "This project seminar gave me many new experiences. (It had) a key function for my attitude towards my fellow men and women, whether 'disabled' or not, towards myself and towards my faith. This week I have learned, although not in the way I expected, to what extent it is precisely the ability to communicate that enables us to live together, to integrate the 'disabled' and those who are not. I would like to begin with an incident in Bethel that gave us students a concrete experience of the integration of the 'disabled': my friend Julia and I were working in Great Bethel and Nebo, two houses close to one another, during the last few days of the week. We went for a walk together that was

special because two Bethel residents accompanied us, each one a patient in the house we were working in. My patient is called Maria and is 36 years old ... In the café people looked at us curiously, but they soon turned away; no one got up and left. We helped Maria and Ursula take off their coats and let them choose a piece of cake. While we were waiting for our order, we made ourselves comfortable at our table. Ursula and Maria sat opposite Julia and me. We wondered if we had not made a mistake there, but the two of them surprised us: they stroked one another's arm, praised their clothes with gestures and words, Maria asked Ursula sympathetically, 'Why are you not talking? Are you sad? ... It doesn't matter if you don't want to talk' ... This outing showed me how much we can learn from the disabled, e.g. to delight in seemingly small things and to respect what we take for granted: a different perspective on the world, an alternative to our achievement-oriented life."[46]

The students vividly described the problems of their own disability, living in dysfunctional relationships or being unable to establish relationships:

"In this semester it became more and more clear to me that the real problem in my dealings with disabled people lies with me ... I have the same difficulties in making contact with people who are not disabled, but with the disabled I cannot hide them or gloss over them."[47]

"As we discovered in our group, the feelings of insecurity came from us mostly; we projected them onto the disabled."[48]

"In conclusion, I would like to say that the experience of my own (communicative) disability was important for me, as well as seeing possible ways of dealing with it, namely speaking about the difficulties, barriers, inhibitions and fears themselves..."[49]

A report on the seminar dealt with this topic:

"The mornings were devoted to practice, and in the afternoons reflection was on the agenda. The reports of the conversations made it increasingly clear that we were dealing with the same difficulties we had with people who are not disabled. How could we create a group experience, a sense of community, so that everyone felt they belonged together ...? ... there was a situation in a conversation when I felt so shocked by a patient's isolation that I could no longer keep my own feelings back from the group and finally spoke about them ... then, we could begin to confront my real problem ... Through this discussion we laid the foundation for one of my best experiences in a group: how by opening up about one's own feelings one encounters openness in others ... Others can cope more easily with what I say if the interpersonal relationship is clear. In this way, we can truly live together, for as long as I do not mention my feelings, whatever I say seems like a wall."[50]

This ability of the disabled to establish relationships, discovered by Synod members and students alike, was Pastor von Bodelschwingh's[51] strongest weapon in his fight with Hitler's envoy Dr Karl Brandt, when the latter was sent to negotiate the then propagated zero point formula (Nullpunkt-Formel) with Bethel. How do we know that someone has reached the zero point? he asked. Dr Brandt is said to have answered:

"As soon as it is no longer possible to establish human companionship with the sick person."

Whereupon Pastor von Bodelschwingh is said to have replied:

> "Professor, the ability to establish companionship is determined by *two sides*: it depends on my own ability to enter into companionship with the other person. I have not met anyone who was not able to establish companionship."

His nephew, Pastor Fritz von Bodelschwingh, reported this discussion that had been handed down only by word of mouth. He added an account of "his own case" and concluded that it was "a harsh lesson for my life …".

> "As a candidate 'in a blue apron' I was transferred to Neuebenezer and entered ward 7 at 6 a.m. for the first time in my life. Brother Hollan folded back the covers on the first bed near the door and said, 'You can start by bathing our Fritz!' What I saw almost sent me bolting out the door: a completely demented young man, 20 years of age, nothing but skin and bones and bedsores, with knees constantly pulled up to his armpits in convulsions, where they had been wrapped in cotton wool to protect them from further chafing. He could not speak a word, he had to be fed and his excrement had to be cleaned up – he was lying in a bed of peat, invented particularly for people who were ill and could not keep themselves clean. In short, for the first time in my life I saw human existence at zero. When this appalling bundle was laid naked in my arms so I could give it a bath in the bathroom, I almost threw it on the floor. When a quarter of an hour later this creature lay under the covers, nappies changed and freshly bandaged, I thought, I won't stay another day! But then this horrible bundle stirred and stretched one arm up in the air. Startled, I looked round at Brother Hollan: so far (he) had been watching my dealing with the ward's most ill resident in silence … But now he had to help: even today I still hear his tone of voice, in which sympathy with me was mingled with astonishment at such lack of understanding in an academically trained theologian, 'Mister Candidate, have you still not noticed, Fritz wants to say thank you!' But I had not thought of Fritz as a human being. I wondered how much this disabled person must have suffered in sensing that I did not regard him as a human being, but as some disgusting object. Yet, he did not pay me back for it, but tried to alleviate my distress at this first encounter with the ruin of a human being by thanking me. He, sick and stupid, was capable of establishing a relationship. I, the healthy one, was not, but had to develop this capacity through him. We quickly became good friends."[52]

The ability of the disabled to establish relationships was vividly portrayed in the *students'* reports:

> "At first I was driven by the attitude that I must give them something, together with the fear that I could make a mistake or not meet some of the staff's expectations, but then, through the critical review of the experience in our student group, I gained an insight rooted in life and not just theory: the men in Arafna House had something to give to me too …"[53]

> "We have even seen that the 'disabled' tried to build us a bridge, because we ourselves were handicapped in dealing with the disabilities of the others, with which those affected coped in the most natural manner. Many patients are way ahead of us in this respect, and we can only learn from them to accept their being different just as naturally, and learn to cope with our own weaknesses, so that in this way they become strengths.[54]

In this connection I would like to point out another danger for the 'healthy', namely the much discussed helper syndrome[55], the "incapacity to express one's feelings and needs that has become part of one's personality structure, combined with a seemingly omnipotent, unchallengeable façade, in the field of the social services". This also surfaced in the Bethel seminar. A *physically disabled* student, suffering from spastic paralysis, examined her problems in relationships or difficulties in establishing contact with Bethel residents by analysing the reports of her conversations and recognised the parallels to her difficulties in making contact with people who are not disabled:

> "I need the disabled to forget that I am disabled myself, because they show me that they need me. It is the same with people who are not disabled. It is easy enough to work together in a group, I can always share something from my practical experience (my previous job as a nursery school teacher that I had qualified for at night school).They also like to approach me with their problems. But what if I have nothing to contribute, if I do not play my part? Then there is nothing, nothing but utter emptiness ..." [56]

Later, she recaptured the observation of this emptiness in a personal conversation:

> "It occurred to me that when I am alone, I often watch the kind of TV programme for hours that makes me cry my heart out; there is no role for me to play then, I am only me: the disabled A.B., wishing for somebody she could be close to and sometimes also for herself to be wholly human; after crying I usually feel better; but I can only do it on my own, the others do not know that this is me as well." [57]

At the close of the seminar, she added in her group:

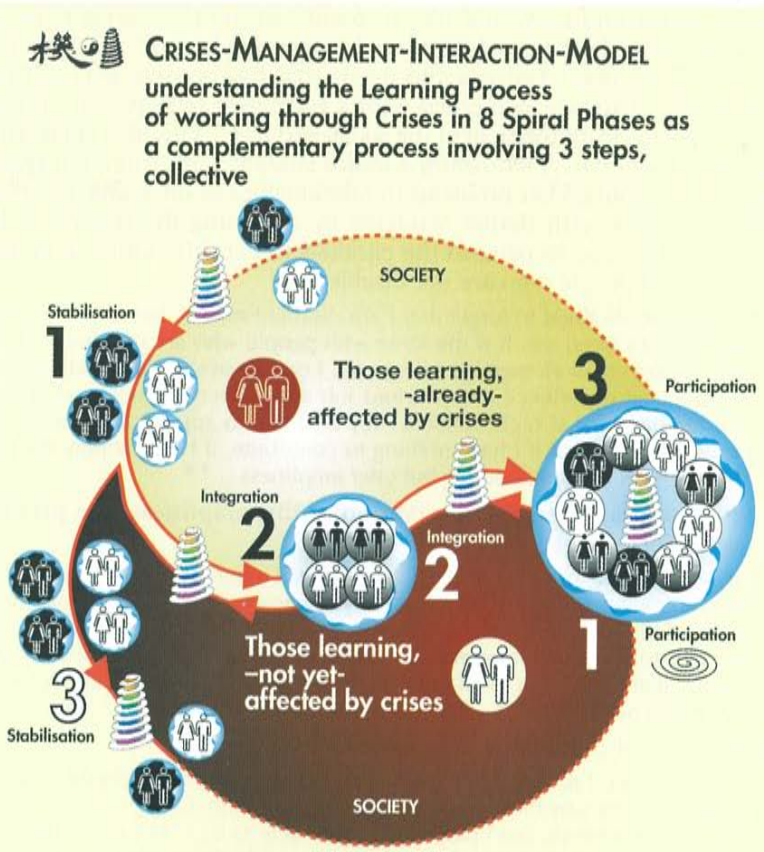
> "Only now do I realise that I, a disabled person, 'deal with' disabled people in precisely the way that I do not wish to be dealt with. Often, I am not myself, A.B. with her needs; but I play a role, 'A.B. acts as if ...' But now I have also learnt how to change this. I can draw alongside them with my problems, instead of offering my help, seemingly with no problems of my own, 'from above' so to speak." [58]

In this, we can agree with Schmidbauer:

> "It seems to me that estimable human qualities would not lose their value if the way they were achieved were examined." [59]

However, we must question his discussion of the conflicts of the caring professions in his analysis of the Christian religion and social ethics. Schmidbauer asserts that 'the historical connection between Christianity and industrial culture (seems) irrefutable', and he points to the essential elements of the helper syndrome:

> "The first (point) is the concept of humankind's original sin ... The second point: Christianity clearly ranks altruistic values ahead of egotistical values. 'Love your neighbour as yourself!'" "Therefore, the obligation to love our neighbours remains. It enters into a curious correlation with the doctrine of original sin, of the original badness found inherent in oneself and others. Love of one's neighbour is, in a way, achieved through self-hatred." [60]



The Complementary Structure as the Basic Precondition
of the cosmic and therefore also human existence
as depicted in the Chinese Yin Yang:

- Balance ➡ Living a balanced life ➡ Shalom
- Imbalance ➡ Sickness
- Separation ➡ Death

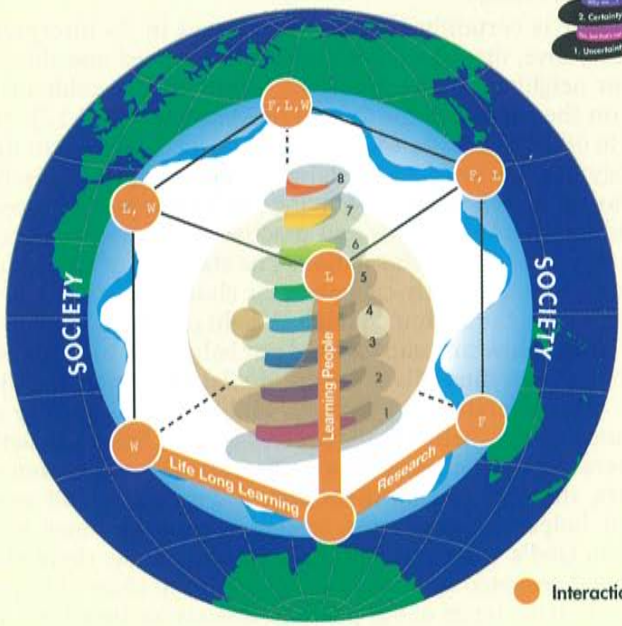
text collection Huainanzi, 2nd century B.C.

WARUM GERADE ICH? V&R, Göttingen ¹²2005, ausgezeichnet mit dem Literatur-Preis
WHY ME? WCC Geneva 2005, Awarded the Price of Literature

KRISEN-MANAGEMENT UND INTEGRATION DIE 8.2003
Band 1: Biographische Erfahrung und wissenschaftliche Theorie
Band 2: Weiterbildung als Krisenverarbeitung
DVD • mit Jahrhundert-Bibliographien • mit AV Best Practice International

CRISES-MANAGEMENT-INTERACTION-MODEL

understanding the Learning Process
of working through Crises in 8 Spiral Ph. as
a complementary process involving 3 steps,
collective



Crises – also a hidden treasure

The person –already- affected by crises
is a challenge to the society
and complementary:
The society of the –not yet- affected people
is a challenge for the –already- affected person
in analogy to the complementary structure in the symbol Yin Yang.

Erika Schuchardt

WARUM GERADE ICH? V&R, Göttingen ^{12}2005, ausgezeichnet mit dem Literatur-Preis
WHY ME? WCC Geneva 2005, Awarded the Price of Literature

KRISEN-MANAGEMENT UND INTEGRATION DIE 8.2003
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In the course of his presentation, Schmidbauer arrives at a rather rash conclusion:

> "One may even assume that our society's social services would no longer function if there were not people who, through the mechanisms of the helper syndrome, are willing to wear themselves out to the point where they harm themselves. Values like selflessness and self-sacrifice are still propagated by Christian ethics. The 'as yourself' behind the 'love your neighbour' is often not heard clearly enough."[61]

Schmidbauer is certainly right in saying that in its interpretation of neighbourly love, theology has all too often focussed one-sidedly on the "love your neighbour" only. However, he ignores the golden rule of the Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 7:12): "In everything do to others what you would have them do to you ..." In the history of theology this has consistently gained in importance precisely in periods of transition, when changed living conditions made it necessary to transcend fossilised traditions and practise new patterns of behaviour, as e.g. in the time of the Reformation. The standard of the golden rule is often not proclaimed clearly enough in the church today. But these words in the Sermon on the Mount do not lose sight of the connection between our own need of love and support and our behaviour towards our neighbour. Schmidbauer thus fails to see the crucial dimension of a Christian's freedom. We understand by this the ability of believers to make an autonomous choice, defining themselves against Schmidbauer's "helpless helpers" with their syndrome of "social care as a defence against their fears, their inner emptiness, their own desires and needs",[62] as "liberated helpers", people for whom helping becomes a practical response to God's work in them. Because they know themselves to be affirmed and accepted by God, they are moved to share this experience with others. In the terms of our previous discussion, based on the biographies, this is the 'critical-sympathetic' response of the Christian. Moreover, we may argue that everyone always faces two possibilities: the possibility of freedom and the possibility of being trapped by compulsions and one's own experiences. In Bethel, the students found the joy of 'liberated helpers' as well as the misery of 'helpless helpers'.

In the light of our experiences, we firmly believe that in our communities we could find a large number of helpers who are capable of freedom. But we know too little of the crises sufferers undergo; we do not know how greatly we add to their burdens by our everyday behaviour and we are little aware that through our support we could reduce their sufferings in times of crisis. The rehabilitation measures that are offered today are confined to treatment times, social services are tied to consulting times.

In our enquiry, our concern is life together in a neighbourhood, in the working world, in a church congregation. As a result of overvaluing performance and material possessions, our life together is marked by a lack of compassion and an inability, rarely recognised, to establish

relationships. This inability shows itself to a greater degree when dealing with suffering people and in their isolation hits them especially hard. In the spiral phases of the process of working through crisis, we could see that only those who are ready to engage in a learning process can be caregivers. The lack of such willingness is the central problem. The question arises how the 'social disability of the non-disabled' was brought about. During the 17th Kirchentag in Berlin in 1977, Tobias Brocher[63] put forward the thesis "*The Sickness of the Healthy – The Health of the Sick*". He gives his thesis a social interpretation:

> "The apparently healthy have produced a sickness with disastrous effects on our society by putting up false ideals of health and achievement one seems no longer able to attain. The apparently sick who refuse to accept such high standards of achievement can still not convince the greater part of the people who are used to the traditional conditions that it is quality not quantity that counts."

Brocher describes the sickness of the "healthy" as despondency, concealment, embarrassment, doubts, feelings of inferiority or crowing defiance and overcompensation through megalomania. In contrast, he calls for openness, honesty and freedom from fear, and the ability to speak about oneself quite freely so that others can not only be sympathetic and identify with the speaker, but are able to learn from this willingness to give and to reveal one's heart. This, however, is where the sick and disabled can play a decisive role, as a demand, as a challenge, as a corrective, reminding us of our mutual dependence.

Fischer[64] and others look for human interpretations; in a revealing reversal, Fischer speaks of the terrible notion of the dead weight (Ballastexistenz) of the non-disabled, who in their health are a burden to those around them:

> "... people who thoughtlessly take for granted their own right to health and strength, who are only content when they seem so healthy that they need neither God nor people and who, on the other hand, are usually so worried about losing their strength, their property and their time that out of fear and caution, they excuse themselves wherever they can from caring for the troubled and the needy... These are the real dead weight, who indolently excuse themselves from their public and private responsibilities, from a spirit of sacrifice and from bearing their share of the burdens and the suffering. They and not the disabled are the real burden on society. They paralyse by the appearance of their strength and health."

This thesis leads us to the brink of the explanation we require of the inability to relate; however, we need to think more precisely about the connection between the ability to foster and cultivate human relationships and the ability to suffer and endure already addressed in the previous chapter. Moltmann[65] describes the West Germany as an apartheid society, privileging the healthy and productive over against the suffering and the weak:

> "Instead of an open, vulnerable society, there arises a closed, impregnable society with apathetic structures. Lively, open, vulnerable life is being cast in concrete. This is modern death – called apathy: life without suffering – life without passion ..."

He contrasts our fear of nuclear death or of death by ecological disaster with the much more likely prospect of death caused by "our own apathy". Horst Eberhard Richter[66] analyses the psychological origins of these problems, which he sees in the fundamental anxiety of the well-adjusted who live in conformity with norms to exclude and dissociate themselves from the deviants who do not conform to the standards. Richter grounds the dependence of society on the suffering on the stabilising function of the alternative world of the marginalised group. In explanation, he pointed to the following psychological mechanism:

> "... that one interests oneself in illnesses and abnormalities in order to stand out by contrast as healthy and whole. One can more easily keep at bay the anxiety about one's threatened integrity and the inescapability of death, if one can recurrently, albeit in measured doses, distract oneself with the thought that there are people on the other side who are marked by affliction and terminal disease."

In analogy to the false ideals of health and achievement Brocher describes as the sickness of the healthy, Richter claims that we, in our psyche, split off the image of ourselves we most fear. This may include sicknesses, disabilities, sexual desires that are taboo, etc. Whatever people perceive outside themselves they do not have to register inside themselves. In its function for society as a whole, splitting off and the projections connected with it bear the marks of a 'reproduction of age-old attempts to cope with fear with the help of a dualistic model: if you are weak, sick and old, then I can be strong, healthy and young'.

Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker[67] offers a philosophical explanation of the mechanisms of coping with fear and the stabilising efforts of non-sufferers vis-à-vis the suffering as a socially determined psychological repression. He counters the common charge that society is hostile to the suffering by posing the question of a "relative legitimacy", of society's right to repress the memory of the suffering. He opens his argument thus:

> "You cannot help people if you do not love them. You cannot improve society if you do not do justice to it; otherwise you will change it without improving it and repeat the same mistakes you wanted to stand up against. Legitimacy of repression means that people need repression."

By defining the elementary purpose of repression as the mental procedure of screening the consciousness against unwelcome contents, and by identifying the consciousness and language of the self (the "I") as a mental achievement, Weizsäcker acknowledges simultaneously the necessity of psychological mechanisms to decide which mental contents contribute to the construction of a person's identity and which do not.

> "Therefore, the repression of the same contents may be legitimate at first and then, a little later, precisely because we have matured, become the most dangerous form of a lie, a lie against one's own conscience."[68]

Dorothee Sölle describes this lie against one's own conscience as the living death of people who survive only by producing, whose death and hell is their unrelatedness, which is the "biblical death 'by bread alone'"[69]:

> "The death which really is a threat to us, which envelopes us in the midst of life, is death by unrelatedness ... This is the hell which engulfs us in the midst of our lives, in the midst of the production process."[70]

In a memorandum regarding the isolation of the disabled, a World Council of Churches consultation in 1978 proclaimed:

> "Wherever the disabled are missing, a community is disabled. The unity of all people, regardless of their disability, is a sign of how the world can be saved from inhumanity. The presence of the disabled keeps us aware of the fact that every human being is a frail, endangered, deficient being created and blessed by God ... We strongly emphasise that the unity of disabled and non-disabled presents a challenge."[71]

As the *result* of our reflections we have found on the one hand that sufferers are obviously dependent on those who are not yet suffering, a fact they cannot brush aside. On the other hand those who are not yet affected depend on the suffering in an invisible way, a fact the healthy can repress throughout their lives by evading the learning process of working through crisis. However, this is done at the price of their not finding their own identity and therefore also weakens or atrophies their receptivity to experiences.

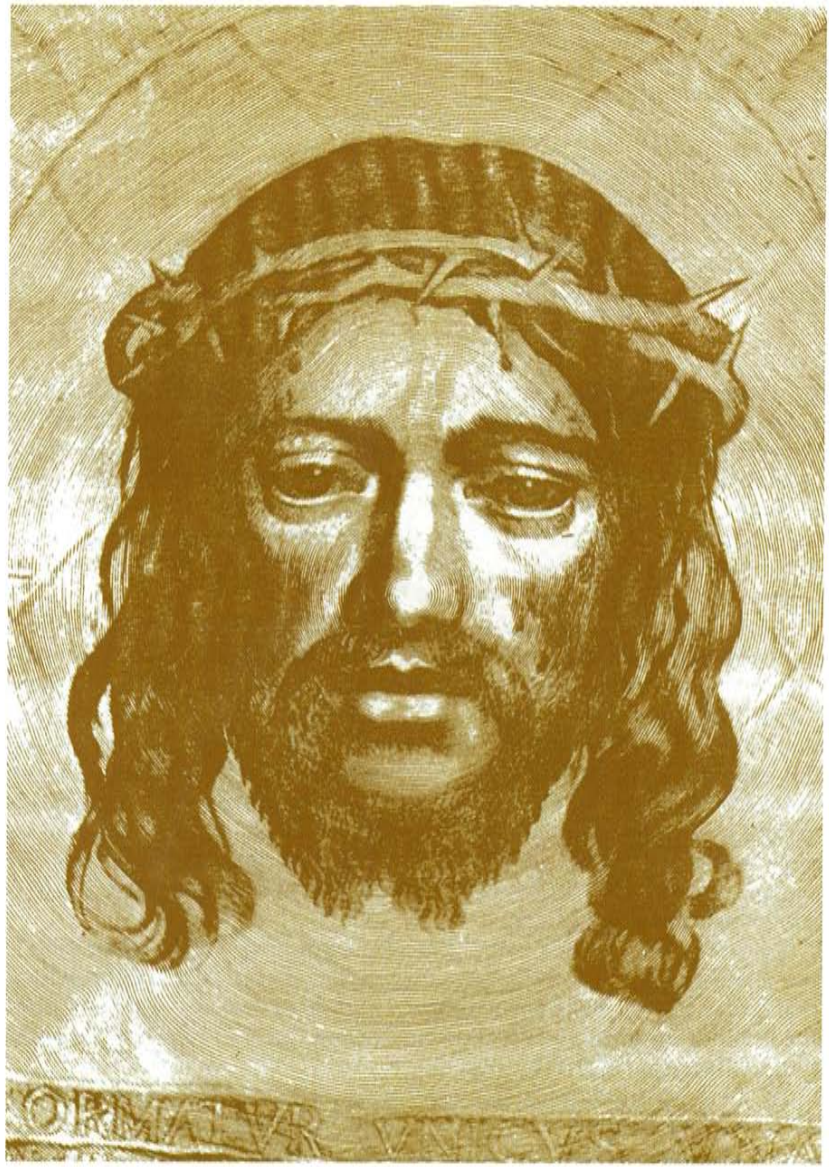
To counteract this 'death' by unrelatedness, we need to discuss the result of an analysis of biographies recounted by people who were affected by crises:

- People in crisis are not a problem for us, but *we*, the 'not-yet-suffering', become a problem for *them*.
- The congregation/society needs those affected by suffering, just as the suffering need the congregation/society.

This double thesis leads us to think through the task of human caring again. Those in whose lives the suffering have so far appeared only on the margin should ask themselves whom they have failed to see until now, and which experiences they have triggered in those in crisis by their behaviour. By ignoring the chronic suffering of people in crisis and denying them their compassionate support, they simultaneously threw away opportunities to free themselves from the constraints of false values and to discover and exercise their own atrophied abilities. In our crises we need partners – the others who realise forms of being human we have repressed, who accept limits and are able to wait, who persevere in hopelessness and thereby develop their gifts, who make human fellowship possible.

But those who work professionally with people in crisis – social workers, social education workers, occupational therapists, teachers, psychologists, doctors, deacons and counsellors – will also find reason to revise their behaviour in the comments of the suffering in their biographies. The method of "helping people to help themselves" in operation in the caring professions today does not convey the insight that in the care of the suffering – rightly understood – the roles of teacher and student are interchangeable. Experts can also receive 'help to help themselves' from the people they care for, provided they are not blind to their own weaknesses. What we lack to a large extent is the crucial dimension of human caring: the ability to establish relationships.

Inevitably, we must now ask the question already present in all the chapters of this book: the question of the meaning of suffering in human life as a question to theology.



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul

Mellan winds the ongoing thread of the spiral to the geometrical centre of the picture up to the nose – our most archaic sense-organ – for us the centre of the face:
Each breath evokes '*in-spiration*' and thereby the present, past and future
<see Hebr. = '*ruach*' ='*breath*'+'*spirit*'; Lat. '*spir-are*'+'*spiri-tus*'='*re-spire*' + '*spir-it*'>
The Sudrium of St Veronica, Claude Mellan, France, 1649

5. Theological Aspects of Suffering and Endurance[72]

Successful care in crisis situations requires that the caregivers themselves have worked through their own crises and have recognised the typical phases (spiral phases) in the process, lived through them consciously and thereby developed the ability to suffer and endure in a new way. That this is especially important when *counselling* the suffering is obvious. If Church workers realised and practised this, sufferers and caregivers themselves would gain a lot. This is the only way to improve the quality of our common life.

Some of the examples presented show that in human caring theological questions arise again and again. It is not the role of this study to settle theological questions, but some theological reflection is needed, to show the possibility of developments that can bring the afflicted greater spiritual help and relief. It must be clear that we can only raise questions and not present answers. Given the main purpose of the analysis, I do not intend to encroach on the discussions of theological experts, though this cannot be avoided completely. Some statements show their true colours only when we realise to whose advantage or disadvantage they are spoken. We will also find out in this way how ambiguous what is generally called 'theology' can be.

So in this last chapter – in a way, as a digression – the author, who is not a theologian, will try to present current theological approaches. It will be my goal to make both sufferers and those who are not yet suffering familiar with the interpretations theology offers to the age-old question "Why suffering? Why crises?".

In view of these target groups I have refrained from a systematic presentation. Instead, I have tried, in keeping with their interests, to select examples of theologians who have spoken on suffering: from a *Catholic viewpoint*, Hans Küng "Gott und das Leid" (God and Suffering), 1967, and Gisbert Greshake "Der Preis der Liebe" (The Price of Love), 1978, and from a *Protestant perspective*, Dorothee Sölle "Suffering", 1973, and Klaus Müller "Vom Sinn des Leidens" (On the Meaning of Suffering), 1974 – the latter is a physicist but sees the dialogue with theology as his life's work.

Theological propositions are concerned with 'suffering as such', whereas working through crisis asks the existential question about endurance; this is the only question that also shares in the suffering of others. In considering the following theological interpretations, it is well to keep this pressing question in the foreground of our attention.

Hans Küng
God and Suffering

Among the great theologians of the century, Küng is one of the first to make human suffering the starting-point of far-reaching systematic consideration. In a large-scale investigation he sketches out in five steps his suggested answer to the question "suffering, why and what for?". [73]

Küng's *first step* is what readers generally expect of a theologian: a critical discussion of the traditional teaching of the "*justification of God*" (p. 7). He starts with Leibniz, who as is generally known not only coined the phrase but also to developed the classical outline of a theodicy (1710) into a comprehensive cosmodicy. (Already at the time Voltaire's "Candide" ridiculed the "best of all possible worlds".) Leibniz discussed the metaphysical, physical and moral problem of evil.

He disputed that a world without suffering was a better world. Küng finds the explanation in Leibniz's "unshakeable trust in the good God" that supported him and led him to justify "not only God as the absolutely perfect and good God, but simultaneously the world as the best of all possible worlds God could have created". Kant's work "Concerning the Possibility of a Theodicy and the Failure of All Previous Philosophical Attempts in the Field" (1791) was already sharply critical. Küng adds for good measure: even if theodicy were thinkable, would its sharp logic make sufficient existential sense to convince a suffering person? Can it "give someone whose heart is broken by suffering the comfort and strength needed to endure? Or can it only offer a clever cerebral line of argument that is about as helpful to the sufferer as a lecture on hygiene and the chemistry of foodstuffs to the hungry and thirsty?"

In his *second step*, he uses an example from Dostoyevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamozov* to show how unmerited suffering can lead to "rebellion" (Volume 5, Chapter IV) and terrible accusations against God and the church.

In his *third step*, Küng expounds the question of "*faith*" in the face of unmerited suffering, through this unique document of world literature, the book of Job. Küng's *thesis*: "With trusting faith, one cannot 'explain' suffering, but – and this is what matters – one can 'pull through' it." The way Küng presents Job's friends in their discussion of theodicy is impressive, as their logic based on justice and their theoretical arguments for

the meaning of suffering appear to Job to be fresh attacks, pushing him further into his "dangerous self-defence" and indignation. God deems Job worthy of an answer. But for Küng the essential point is that God does not answer by giving Job some 'theory' but intervenes through his 'revelation': "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind..." (38:1-5).

According to Küng, God does not reveal himself "as a partner with equal rights who can be held accountable, but as the creator whose inscrutable glory is pure wisdom and kindness". Faced directly with his living God, Job's rebellion subsides: "See, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth." (40:1-5). For this God's sake, Job can accept the world with all its mysteries and all its evils and suffering. And he can recognise that he had attempted by his self-justification to put God in the wrong, so that he, the human being, would be proved right.

With this reading, Küng follows an interpretation of the character Job that even in the Old Testament history of this story is not undisputed. Assuming that the Job poem (as opposed to the popular folk tale in which it is embedded) ends in chapter 40:1-5 or the corresponding chapter 42:6, Job's falling silent can be construed as human resignation in the face of a tyrannical God. One cannot contend with such a powerful one, who boasts about his created monsters. The human being breaks off communication. Does this break in communication make God a sufferer? Did Dorothee Sölle have this in mind when she said, "Job is stronger than God"? In my view, the epilogue added later, where God gives Job twice as much as he had before, reinforces the tyrannical character of this God. God has won his bet with Satan; Job is paid the winnings in cash. Are human suffering and human life worth so little to God, that superabundant compensation allows what has gone before to fall into oblivion?[74]

Our desire to be in the right, to be right and to be proved right is, according to Küng, more than a mistake: it is sin. Job is not spared self-accusation. He is not tormented by individual sins and transgressions he did not commit, but he has to become clear about his perverse attitude. "What is the 'solution' to the problem of suffering?" Küng answers briefly, "The uncertain and yet liberating risk of faith". For we recognise ourselves in the person of Job, because behind him, as the suffering servant of God who bore his own suffering, appears the "figure of the other suffering Servant of God who bore the suffering of the world and definitively conquered suffering, sin and death". In Jesus Christ is fulfilled what has been announced in the Old Testament.

Three decades ago, in a little book almost forgotten today, "Hiob der Existentialist" (Job the Existentialist), Heidelberg: 1952, Hans Ehrenberg spoke about "our time being right for Job" and evoked the book of Job in five striking dialogues.[75]

When he lets Job ask, "Why does God, the real God" (which means: not 'the omnipotent' or 'the absolute') "forsake his own son? Why does he command Abraham, the father of the promise, to sacrifice the son of the promise, his only son? God is the accused when his son breathes his last: it is finished! Nobody accuses a demonstrable God. But the real God is willing to bear our sins; he has

borne them!" or said, "If God had not tolerated the accusation against himself, Job would have become an atheist and a nihilist", one becomes painfully aware how rare new ideas seem to be in recent interpretations of Job, and how often they are written at the price of our ignorance. Ever since Hans Ehrenberg, who was conscientious in making older exegetes known, albeit in a critical fashion only after 1945, much of what was later said about Job is repetition. Is there something to keep quiet about here, because Ehrenberg played off our bare existence by faith against a "theological erudition" that dresses up human life and suffering? Hans Ehrenberg, who in 1925 had already broken with the philosophical idealism of the university and then moved on to pastor a parish, met with little response in official theology in general. Before 1945, he was a political outcast, and out of this experience he embarked on a new 'theological existence' in West Germany.[76]

In his *fourth step*, Küng presents the following thesis on the "*justification of humankind*": "This is true theodicy: God's justification through God himself in the justification of a humankind estranged from God!" This reminds us strongly of Karl Barth (Church Dogmatics IV,1 § 61, particularly the excellent section on pp. 559-568). Surely, Küng claims no originality when he goes on to say that in justification, the "false theodicy of a self-aware and self-reliant humankind gives way to the anthropodicy of the gracious God himself, who out of pure grace freely justifies a powerless and sinful humanity, and thereby also justifies himself as the just and gracious God". Therefore, "I can revolt against the God who stands in solitary splendour *above* all suffering in undisturbed bliss or apathetic transcendence. Against the God who revealed his own compassion in Christ's suffering, I cannot". Drawing a parallel to Job's story, Küng shows that at the point where the Job narrative ends, the Gospel of Christ begins. While Job is only shown the 'inscrutability' of the gracious God, in whom he is to trust in faith, we are shown in *Jesus Christ* and his cross, beyond the 'inscrutability of the gracious God', the grace of the 'inscrutable *God*'. And "this grace revealed in Christ, which transforms suffering into life, makes possible a faith with understanding, even if this faith with understanding will always remain faith!".

In his *fifth* and last *step*, Küng outlines the idea of "*freedom in suffering*": "God's love does not preserve from all suffering, but it does preserve in all suffering." With that, suffering and death have lost their sting, because a new future opens up for the believer who lives with Christ, sharing in his suffering and death: "Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ... Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." (Phil. 3:7, 14). Thus, the Christian essentially stands between the 'already now' and the 'not yet'; in the dialectics of 'suffering and freedom from suffering', both belong simultaneously to a Christian existence. However, Küng decidedly rejects an interpretation of a Christian's sharing in Christ's suffering that invites suffering, for suffering and pain are an attack on the life

of human beings. Following Jesus in his suffering does not mean "imitating Christ's suffering, does not mean emulating the cross of Christ; Christ's suffering is, so to speak, not so much the ideal as part of the structure of Christian existence". For the believer, the end time of new life has already begun in the present with the crucified and living Christ. Therefore, the believer can make the paradoxical statement already now, in the present state of dying away: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me ..." (Gal. 2:20). This leads Küng to the idea of the transformation of suffering: "Certainly, suffering remains bad. But it is no longer absolutely bad, a state to be abolished by the denial of one's will to live, as in Buddhism. Only separation from God and his love is absolutely bad".

Küng's statement that Christ's suffering is not so much the ideal but part of the structure, the pattern, of Christian existence can be understood in the light of Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics IV,2,676/194 p. 598-613 (The Dignity of the Cross): here, the cross of Christ and the cross Christians bear are explicitly identified as in *indirect* relation (see especially pp. 599ff and 601ff); see also the interpretation of Gal 2:20. Turning from the suffering of the disabled to the 'suffering of Christ' is difficult. Only faith can accomplish this.[77]

The gap between reflection and experience can be filled up by a 'witness' who in his solidarity – Küng even says, God is both distant *and* close to us – expresses the unthinkable and takes that which is not experienced upon himself. The one who supports the sufferer is the loving witness! How else – except from the suffering themselves – could a bridge be built between the accursed fate of the individual and the execution of God by us all?

The semantic difficulty that most theologians use the expression 'suffering' for disability as well as for 'Christ's suffering from God' may be at first a logical annoyance; ultimately, it expresses that when really encountered in faith, even evil (and therefore also *my* own sickness) can neither be 'explained' nor 'made meaningless'. At this level, I am constantly forced to argue with God – which is another reason why society needs the disabled: they compel us to inquire after God's justice. And here we must all answer in the same way: HE suffers immeasurably from us, most of all from the healthy. And this, precisely, is the point at which the disabled are witnesses! More than a 'healthy' person who has never known trials ever could be.

To the *final question*: Is there meaning in suffering? Küng answered, "An infinite amount of suffering is senseless 'in itself'. God offers us meaning in Christ's death and new life. An offer that wants to be taken up in a trusting manner against all non-sense." God is also in the darkness. Suffering is not a sign of God's absence, it can, conversely, if understood as a cross, be a way to God. Küng summarised, "What was maintained by Leibniz and vaguely perceived by Dostoyevsky, was confirmed by Job and lived out by Paul through Christ: even suffering is embraced by 'God', is 'taken up' by him. Even suffering can be a place in which we encounter God in all our godforsakenness! Christians know no way past suffering, but they know a way *through* it!"

Does not Küng also speak much too 'nicely' of suffering in the name of Jesus or at least try to justify it? May we so quickly take the sting out of faith in a 'hidden God'? The sufferer learns the bitter lesson of how little God the creator sets out to do against misery. How can one in all seriousness offer encouragement? H. Häring said in A.J. Buch/H. Fries (ed.), Die Frage nach Gott als Frage nach dem Menschen (The Question of God as a Question of Humankind) (1981, p. 83), "God is not on the side of violence. He is on the side of love. He is faithful to the sufferer." "In his battle against suffering, God has no power, but he does have the last word."

Dorothee Sölle
Suffering

These reflections on suffering build on the biblical message of God as the 'lover of life'. Dorothee Sölle[78] testifies that Jesus of Nazareth lived out this unlimited affirmation by affirming and drawing to himself the despised and outcast, those who had been rejected or forced to reject themselves. She concludes that suffering – physical and mental, individual and collective – is a permanent challenge, facing us with the task of eliminating it. However, this necessary and often one-sidedly emphasized aspect should not blind us to another equally important task: to learn from suffering (cf. Th Wb NT 5: 905, Michaelis, W.).

Sölle follows the theological tradition in assuming that this idea can already be found among the ancient Greeks. She refers (p. 124, ann.3) to Aeschylus, Agamemnon, verse 176 ff: Zeus commanded on pain of suffering (death) to walk the path of thought! However, this translation was disproved by Neitzel, H. (Gymnasium 87, 1980, p. 283-293).

But there is no need to cite specific authors: "You learn from your mistakes" is a common saying in many cultures. One may take it up without associating with it a particular theological standpoint. This aphorism has in common with most proverbs that it is only partially true. "Dig a pit for another", and you will not inevitably "fall in yourself".

In the Christian tradition, suffering and learning are consistently linked by the exhortation to take up 'one's' (not just any) cross. In suffering and in working through it to develop endurance, one taps into the deeper dimensions of life. It is essential to see life as a whole as meaningful and participate actively in making it happy. A steadfast desire for happiness will, according to Sölle, 'seal in' and 'melt down' suffering.

Before presenting this basic assumption, Sölle asks two questions: "What is the origin of suffering, and how can one eliminate its causes?"

This modern question, critical of society and asking for 'external' causes, can only make sense where the traditional question, referring to the individual and asking for 'internal' causes, is not repressed: "What is the meaning of suffering, and under what conditions can it make us more human?" (p. 5)

Dorothee Sölle first sharply criticizes "*Christian masochism*" for transfiguring suffering that could be eliminated; i.e. interpreting suffering as punishment and testing, as a means of purification and discipline that helps to overcome our pride and demonstrate our powerlessness and dependence, the ultimate purpose of which it is to lead us back to God "who appears great after he has made us small" (p. 19). For D. Sölle, the difficulty lies not so much in the existential interpretation of the meaning people give their pain, but rather "in the later theological systematising, which has no respect for a suffering as yet undefined and uncategorised and reveals itself as the scarcely tolerable craving of the theologians to explain and speak where silence would be more appropriate" (p. 19-20). As a kind of ultimate consequence of the masochist approach, she sketches out the counterpart of a sadistic God. The logic of this understanding of suffering is not easily refuted: "(1) God is the omnipotent ruler of the world, who imposes all suffering. (2) God does not act without reason, but he acts justly. (3) All suffering is punishment for sin." (p. 24). Every attempt to consider suffering as caused directly or indirectly by God runs the risk of thinking of God as a sadist. The permanent justification of the modern objections against this God is the suffering of the innocent, and Sölle adds that measured against the scale of human suffering, everyone is 'innocent' (p. 25).

D. Sölle's chapter "A Critique of Christian Masochism" (p. 9-32), begins with a 'documentation of suffering' and becomes an effective settling of accounts first with Christian sermons and tracts (see also Daiber, K. F., "Leiden als Thema der Predigt" (Suffering as a Topic in Sermons), Munich: 1978), and secondly with the contemporary Theology of the Cross. In this context, Sölle also reproaches Moltmann's "The Crucified God", 1979, for supporting the thesis of the sadistic God (p. 26-27). Her criticism of Moltmann has recently been modified by R. Strunk.

He claims that D. Sölle works with the image of an authoritarian father, and that in many points she coincides with her opponent, at least in the basic intention of taking God into suffering instead of ascribing condescending compassion to him. Occasionally, she imputes to Moltmann positions he never held. Strunk voiced his criticism in a review of M. Welker's article on Jürgen Moltmann's book 'The Crucified God', Munich: 1979, in: Evangelische Theologie 41, 1981, p. 90ff.[79]

I do not want to burden the readers with these controversies, but they should be aware of how vigorously, even belligerently, the connection between God and suffering is debated among Protestant theologians in Germany.

Furthermore, Sölle levels against the contemporary world the probably more accurate reproach of a "*post-Christian apathy*" (p. 33). Her thesis: "To wish for freedom from pain is to wish for death". She understands apathy, literally not-suffering, and in turn 'the inability to suffer', as a social condition in which the striving to avoid suffering is so dominant that avoiding relationships and contact in general becomes the goal. Consequently, the 'pathe' of life, the pathos of life in general, is restrained

along with the experiences of suffering, while the strength and intensity of its joys atrophy (p. 36).

Whoever has never suffered for love has never known love evoked by love. Love and suffering, these two can never be divorced – as the minnesinger Hartmann von Aue said. Sölle quotes Küng: "Fear of violating the principle of apathy was stronger than fear of mutilating the image of Christ in the gospels" (p. 43).[80]

Certainly, the problem of apathy must be taken seriously. Jüngel and Ebeling have also taken up this question in their debate with the God is Dead Theology, which itself developed in the dispute over theodicy.[81] The God who does not suffer, the counterpart of a personality that does not feel, is dethroned: apathy there as well as here.

According to Sölle, the fact that members of our society accept pain as fate blatantly contradicts a Christian understanding of suffering, which rejects the notion of a fate that leaves people powerless. "The transformation of the pain in which people move from passivity and flight into 'acceptance' could signify for the suffering such a 'strength', found in pain" (p. 44).

However, such a theological idea can only penetrate into the truth if it takes on a political form. The worst form of the inability to suffer shows itself not in the private desire not to suffer, but in political apathy, which demonstrated by the example of Vietnam, among others, "that Auschwitz is not yet over", precisely because Vietnam was not an issue (p. 45-46).

In connection with this criticism, Sölle described the connection between "*suffering and language*" (p. 61): the way out of the isolation of suffering leads via communicating in lamentation to the solidarity of change. "Active behaviour replaces merely reactive behaviour, mastering powerlessness ... leads also to structural change" (p.72-73). She explicitly includes suffering in hopeless situations, which is tolerated as long as the pain can still be articulated, provided that those affected share their lives – and that means their suffering also – in the fellowship of a group. The meaning of liturgy discloses itself in a new way: in its set phrases people can discover their fears, their pain and their happiness, and not abandon themselves to apathy (p. 74). Prayer turns out to be this integrated action "by which people transcend the silent God of an apathetically endured reality and go over to the speaking God of a reality experienced with feeling in pain and happiness. It was this God to whom Jesus spoke in Gethsemane" (p. 78). For our contemporaries, the dignity of Jesus is revealed in his mortal agony. Precisely because every threat to one's own life touches on one's relationship with God, threatens one's basic trust, Jesus' experience in Gethsemane points us beyond destruction. It is the experience of consent: 'Your will be done'. "The cup of suffering becomes the cup of strengthening" (p. 86).

After reflecting in detail on how suffering may be made bearable, Sölle concludes about "*the truth of acceptance*": "The strength of this position

is its relation to reality, even to wretched conditions. Every acceptance of suffering is an acceptance of that which exists. The denial of every form of suffering can result in a flight from reality in which contact with reality becomes ever thinner, ever more fragmentary. It is impossible to remove oneself totally from suffering unless one removes oneself from life itself, no longer enters into relationships, makes oneself invulnerable" (p. 88).

Death is the total unrelatedness of a person[82] (Jüngel, *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery*, 1975). So the old questions of theodicy no longer arise, whether God intends to punish the suffering, whether he has forgotten them, whether he loves them despite or precisely because of their suffering. We are no longer concerned with a child's question, "Do you love me?" Adults ask, "How can people put their love of God into practice?" (p. 95). And this is the point at which D. Sölle's *basic assumption* recurs, "The God who is the lover of life does not desire the suffering of people, not even as a pedagogical device, but instead their happiness" (p. 108). Thus, in a Christian understanding the acceptance of suffering is part of the great affirmation of life and not, as may sometimes appear, the only decisive factor beside which the affirmation of life pales into insignificance.

Sölle again uses the example of Job to show that the "acceptance of suffering" is not bowing to what we cannot change because it is stronger than we are. Acceptance means an overcoming that subdues and strengthens us simultaneously. "*Exodus from suffering*" is the greatest theme of the Bible. Sölle claims that "Job is stronger than God" (p. 112), because he trusted in the God who led his people out of their suffering in Egypt; but the God that Job encountered was just another pharaoh. Job is stronger than God, because he expects his answer not from the one who "causes suffering", but solely from the one who suffers (p. 119).

In "*Suffering and Learning*", she suggests that the story of the resurrection has representative significance. "A person's resurrection is no personal privilege for himself alone – even if he is called Jesus of Nazareth. It contains within itself hope for all, for everything... There is one who said, 'I will die, but I shall live!', one who said, 'I and the Father are one', and with that, he gave hope for those suffering in silence and hopelessness." Sölle explains that no heaven can compensate for something like Auschwitz. But the God who is not a superior kind of pharaoh has justified himself in his compassion, by sharing in death on the cross, and she emphasises that God has no other hands than ours (p. 149-150). One cannot compare suffering by asking how many victims there are or how they were killed. "The only thing that can be compared is the attitude of people towards the suffering laid upon them, what they learn, and how they change."

A Christian interpretation of Auschwitz finds its justification only in incorporating, interpreting and clarifying the story of Auschwitz (p. 146-147). But God needs human beings, needs us, to work on perfecting his

creation; hence God suffers with humankind, so that redemption does not come to us from outside or from above; it takes place in an internal process in and with us.

In the last chapter, "*The Religion of the Slaves*", we hear of people who suffered consciously, "people we know who in suffering have become better and not more bitter, those who have willingly taken suffering upon themselves for the sake of others" (p. 151). Sölle uses the life of the French Jewess Simone Weil to give an account of compassionate solidarity. For Simone Weil, her 'why-question', her quest for the meaning of suffering, was a terrifying experience that flooded her soul. "During this absence [of God], there is nothing to love" (p. 155).

As a *pattern of thought for the Christian faith*, the "paradox" is indispensable, as it takes up and contradicts what can be seen in nature and history. "I see the injustice, the destruction, the senseless suffering – I believe the justice, the coming liberation, the love that occurs in the night of the cross" (p. 158). Two elements are constitutive for this process, the cross and the resurrection.

In his discussion of the dogmatism of philosophers and theologians in the *Treatise on Critical Reason*, (Princeton: 1985), Hans Albert denounced the term "paradox" as an attempt at immunisation (p. 114, n.27). However, as far as the correlation of the cross and resurrection is concerned (though D. Sölle is not always exact in using the expression), a theologian can scarcely do without it; one takes the risk that the term is unthinkable and thereby admits one is unscientific at this point.

According to Sölle, Christians are people who have already passed through death by the power of the cross of Christ and his resurrection. In the "I can't go on!", death by unrelatedness, all that remains is the choice between the absurd 'cross' of meaninglessness and the cross of Christ, between a death we accept 'apathetically' as a natural event and a death we suffer as 'passion'. Resurrection is the ability of the soul not to stop believing in God in the darkest night, which in turn means affirming life in its entirety.

The paradox that God loves us, even if this is not at all visible, makes the future subjectively possible, according to Sölle. Without this paradox, the future would be of interest only to the survivors. "The Christian God is no little Chinese god of fortune" (p. 166). Jesus identifies with the suffering. In order to conquer death, he became mortal as we all are. To get involved with the *way of Jesus* means also to hold fast to the paradox. That this paradox as a category also applies in the strict sense to the individual, Sölle shows through the *example of counselling*. Though "one can suffer *for* another person, one cannot *accept* pain for another. One can help by grieving *with* those affected, but one cannot carry out the *task* of 'serving God's pain with one's own pain' with them. One cannot make suffering productive for another. This remains the responsibility of the grown-up individual." (pp. 166-167).

A. M. K. Müller
On the Meaning of Suffering.
Toppling the Dogma of the Actor

Müller's *basic assumption*[83] is this: suffering is a productive force. As a precondition, he demands that we renounce the false premise of our worldview that changes can only come through action, whereas suffering is only passive. For as a consequence of this false premise we believe we must give everything to the task of eliminating suffering through action, so as to make it disappear in reinterpretation, bring it to justice by the condemnation of the perpetrators, and alleviate it through the suffering of the guilty. The goal of all action is then the 'acceptability' and objectification of suffering, with the desired end of making suffering manageable.

Müller presents his *alternative* in opposition: suffering needs to be released from the incorrect polarisation of active and passive, the dogma of the actor needs to be toppled and in its stead, one needs to acknowledge the process undergone by the non-actor, which means that "the meaning of suffering is revealed only when the priority is given not to action and manageability, but to interaction, which always implies unmanageability" (p. 311, cf. Sölle, op. cit., p. 11). Interaction, as a mixture of structural and personal interplay, can become productive for a vital way of perception if "solidarity" is put into practice not only as the learning goal of a group (cf. H. E. Richter), but also in the living relationships of the smallest unit, namely an individual, in meditation on God and oneself (p. 312). Müller examines the meaning of suffering at the threshold of the crisis of survival in three stages: from the biography of the individual to the collectively perceived radical changes in science and the crisis of humanity in general.

The *first stage*, suffering in individual biographies, is explained with examples from the fields of jurisdiction and medicine. The way suffering is treated by a judge or a doctor stems from a certain pattern of thought: the "sufferers" (the injured parties or the sick) experience the "unacceptable internal trial", the "actors" (judge or doctor) experience the "acceptable external process" (cf. Sölle, p. 11 and p. 146 ff.). Müller's *thesis* is the unacceptability of human suffering: only in the sufferers themselves can suffering bear fruit; according to Jesus' testimony in the Sermon on the Mount, only in suffering itself can the sufferer hope for healing through new insights. This is also the reason for the yearning for an internal coming to terms, which in turn is inextricably linked with the question of the meaning of suffering (p. 313). By emphasising this internal process, Müller sets in the centre of his considerations the same basic thought as D. Sölle. Such internal healing, e.g. in the relationship between doctor and patient, always presents a challenge. It demands quite a bit from the former "actor", challenging the doctor in attendance

to relinquish his "acceptable" doctor's role and thereby to enter into an "unacceptable" state of being affected by suffering himself. If the doctor accepts what the symptoms of the patient impose on him, the patient experiences the acceptance that can become a precondition of his acceptance of himself and his unacceptable suffering (pp. 314/315).

Jesus' suffering was unique because he perceived the process of suffering in a different manner, namely consistently as an "internal relatedness" (p. 316). According to Jesus' testimony, suffering becomes a productive transforming power wherever it does not create new suffering by reaction, but wherever transformation takes place in those affected themselves, because their suffering remains unacceptable. Suffering, and this is part of its meaning, discloses to us the insight that "only they who bear suffering as suffering and do not take it as a conceptual reinterpretation and are shaken in the process enter into the dimension of perception in which the meaninglessness of suffering suddenly turns into a future granted afresh. And the immediacy of this experience can no longer be challenged conceptually" (p. 317). In this sense, the Soviet physicist Sakharov confessed, after he had been unable to avert a routine nuclear test explosion that claimed lives, "The feeling of powerlessness and horror that seized me that day has left its mark on my memory for the rest of my life, and it changed a lot in me on my way to my present worldview" (p. 317).

In the *second stage* of his reflections on the meaning of suffering at the threshold of the crisis of survival, Müller turns to the radical changes of collective perception in science. Here, too, suffering appears in the form of a crisis-ridden process (p. 318). With reference to Kuhn, who demonstrated with case studies that we have to distinguish between the longer periods of "normal science" and the shorter upheavals of "scientific revolution", he cites C. F. v. Weizsäcker: "A scientific revolution is usually preceded by a crisis of the prevailing paradigm. But the prevailing paradigm is never toppled merely by experiences that seem to falsify it ... A paradigm is toppled by a new paradigm" (p. 319). Müller intends to demonstrate that the central experience here also is crisis: "In the crisis that precedes the establishment of a new paradigm, the supposedly certain 'exterior' is drawn into the 'interior' of great uncertainty and there transformed in unforeseen ways. This mixing of the interior and exterior in the crisis of science is often experienced by the researcher involved as a phase of life marked by ardent, yet real powerlessness; but at the same time, such a phase is the 'precondition for all profoundly creative processes'" (p. 319).

According to Müller, the consequence of the discovery of the meaning of suffering is that we become conscious of the opportunities that lie in such times of radical change, for all their inherent dangers (p. 320). The meaning of suffering, concealed in normal epochs, can be revealed by the crisis. A crisis can reveal "that one flees from the inescapability of the coming epoch [tries to escape it, author's note], and realises the

tendency of wanting to be someone by setting one's current perception in concrete, thus striving to deny the essential temporality of that which is". This, according to Müller, is also the motive for theory formation. "Theory captures time, so to speak, 'preserves' it and by this act of freezing bends it permanently to our will." (p. 321). In contrast, Müller discovers that our being affected by the fullness of time always includes already a non-being (an absence) of the abstract – even of thinking in general. "This is why suffering leads us to an abyss, which makes a concrete way of thinking on the other side possible, thereby also a new way of thinking on a different, unexpected level of perception" (p. 321). Such productivity must be preceded by the crucifixion of the former way of thinking in a crisis experienced by all involved.

Finally, in the *third stage*, the idea of suffering in a total crisis is examined. According to Müller, we are faced for the first time with a total crisis of survival for humankind: "The future possibility of an objective perception of social and natural conditions in which plateaus appeared as progress is called in question " (p. 322). In this, he discovers another possible meaning of suffering. "Could it be the meaning of suffering to release us in a long historic process from our tendency to focus on our objectified relations to the outside world?" (p. 323) An alternative is promised to those who are 'free' at heart from a will to power. The Sermon on the Mount calls these the 'meek'. Their potential for a possible future with humane conditions and relations lies in their "way of perceiving their affliction". The meaning of suffering therefore coincides with the power of the open time, but only at the cost of "leaving the last plateau of a knowledge free from suffering" (p. 324).

Gisbert Greshake
The Price of Love.
Reflections on Suffering

One who loves has to suffer; Greshake's[84] *main thesis* shows clearly through the title; only one who loves can understand suffering. Never mind how fluent or stringent theological reflection may be, the author says in his preface, it can prove its worth only in the practice of faith, hope and love.

In four sections, Greshake discusses *two questions*. The first is theological and abstract, "Suffering and the Question of God: An Out-dated Problem?" (chap. I); he answers it under the heading "Creation and Suffering" (II). The second question is existential and concrete: "Too High a Price?" (III), and its answer is found in "Overcoming Suffering" (IV).

In his treatment of "Suffering and the Question of God", Greshake affirms, "No doubt, the basic question of humanity: 'Suffering – why?'

always revives the old question of theodicy". However, as Greshake puts it, following Küng and Zahrnt[85], it is not much valued today. The rediscovery of the book of Job in recent decades has savagely discredited all attempts to explain the existence of suffering in the world. According to Greshake, Dorothee Sölle condemned the conventional discussion of theodicy most radically, this being a theological response to the atrocities of the Nazi regime, which Greshake found lacking for instance in the sociologist Peter L. Berger's work (p. 13).

A simple for and against 'theodicy' as such is not much use: if one interprets the question 'What has God to do with suffering and evil?' in a broader sense, I believe it fits Sölle's position as well as that of her opponents. However, if it is taken to mean, 'Is God the cause of suffering?', then it will surely meet with theological opposition, if only because it starts out 'philosophically' from causalities instead of God's own words (Karl Barth). Taken by itself, a yes or no to 'theodicy' cannot be decisive, as long as it is unclear which theology determines the context.

If not theodicy, then what? What *alternatives* does theology offer today? The exclusively christological solution has now become dominant, which believes all suffering to be embedded in the suffering of God, in the life and death of Jesus, in which God put 'suffering under the promise of an inconceivable glory'. But is this not just another almost cynical empty promise? (p. 24 ff.). In his own approach, Greshake tries in a new way to bind together the different conventional strands of thought and at the same time to bring them into line with the basic attitude of people today, "We may not accept suffering, rather, we must fight suffering" (p. 26).

Arguably, Greshake could not write a sentence like "Any attempt to look upon suffering as caused directly or indirectly by God stands in danger of regarding him as sadistic" (Sölle, op. cit., p. 26). Consistently, he defends his position against D. Sölle's attacks on theism (p. 13); indeed he rejects a "negative attitude towards theodicy" in general (p. 14-19). Although he agrees with Küng (p. 16f.) on several points, Greshake questions others (p. 20), particularly Küng's suggestion to separate reflection from experience. He is certainly right to say that one may not strictly separate 'thinking' from 'experience'; one should not tear off 'experience' abruptly from the intellect. Theological reflection, which is also an integral part of faith, can disclose plausibilities; as a theory, it can create a framework for practical solutions (p. 22).

Admittedly, Greshake's sketch of "Creation and Suffering" itself still shows – or shows again – traces of an attempt at theodicy with traditional elements. Sölle's verdict against the three axioms of "God's omnipotence", "God's justice", and "all suffering is punishment for sin" (op. cit., pp. 24-25) could well apply to him too. In essence, he distinguished between *two kinds of suffering*: first, the suffering we humans inflict on ourselves, I inflict on myself or others, or others inflict on me; secondly, the suffering that comes to us from the given structures of reality or, in theological terms, from creation (p. 24). Behind this may be a simplification of the three kinds of evil (metaphysical, physical, moral)

Leibniz once spoke about; here, apparently, it is a matter of a relatively unpretentious division of suffering into its subjective and objective loci.

For suffering of the *first* kind, *suffering caused by human hands*, humankind itself is responsible. It springs from sin – our own sins, the sins of our fellow human beings and the sins of all humankind (p. 39). One cannot demand from God as the omnipotent creator of the freedom of human beings that he avert suffering at the same time. This would mean interpreting the idea of divine omnipotence as unlimited ability rather than understanding it in relation to a will, where what God wills has been stated clearly enough. Greshake's critique refers here to scholastic and later dogmatics that demanded all sorts of possibilities from the concept of omnipotence, for example that God should be able to create a triangular circle, wooden iron or suchlike (p. 28). In reality, however, and in line with older theology, God's omnipotence is limited by being free from contradiction. Because of this, it makes no sense to say God in his omnipotence could create freedom for his creatures and avert suffering at the same time. Greshake's thesis is: "If God wants freedom for his creatures, then the possibility of suffering is necessarily given along with this" (p. 29). He asks, might it not be that only an excess of suffering allows us, through the pains in our body and soul, to grasp what sin is, to see its face, and to recognise how much we entangle ourselves and others in sin and guilt? (p. 38).

There is much here to remind us of Karl Barth. His instructive discussion in *Church Dogmatics II*, 1, p. 524-538, might help us understand the theology of God's omnipotence. In particular, his examination of the question of freedom from contradiction as a limit to God's omnipotence (ibid. p. 534f.) in Scholasticism and the older Protestant dogmatists. "God cannot do everything without distinction. He can only do what is possible for Him and therefore genuinely possible. This does not imply any limitation of His omnipotence. Rather, it defines his omnipotence as His and therefore true omnipotence. It is omnipotence, the true omnipotence over all and in all, in the very fact that He cannot do 'everything', that the possibility of the impossible, the power of impotence, is alien to Him and excluded from His essence and His activity... We have, indeed, to keep an inflexible grip on the truth that God is omnipotent in the fact that He and He alone and finally (because He is who He is) controls and decides what is possible and impossible for Himself and therefore at all. Whatever confirms Him is possible for Himself and therefore generally, and in the created world" (p. 535).

While the responsibility for the first kind of suffering lies with human beings, as the flip side of our natural existence, the *second* kind, '*structural suffering*', cannot be derived from human freedom and sin, since we already find it in the conditions of the world. Therefore, it must already be in creation itself. The older theology attributed this 'physical suffering' to 'moral suffering', to sin, so that all 'objective' suffering appeared to be punishment for sin (p. 39f.). Of course, this conception led to an objectification of sin that we can hardly tolerate today; but for Greshake, the difficulties lie precisely in handling 'structural' suffering

theologically. For him, a 'purely eschatological answer' could only qualify as a 'superficial philosophical consideration'; instead, he inquires after the 'inner meaning' of a world that generates structural suffering (p. 39f.). Greshake takes up a thought mentioned by Teilhard: suffering is a necessary 'by-product' of evolution. From time immemorial, there has always been a price to pay for freedom in extrahuman development. Tests, strokes of luck, but also work and effort push ahead, life itself goes on in 'trial and error', and often enough, many failed attempts precede a single success. The initial stages of matter show a lack of structure or a disturbed physical order. Another price is pain in sensitive flesh; and higher yet, rank malice or the agony of the mind, which examines itself and makes decisions. "At every stage of evolution, at all times and in all places, in us and around us, evil forms and reforms itself, implacable and ever new." (p. 45).

Thus, Greshake maintains, "Let us put it in concrete terms: That something like cancer exists is a necessary consequence of the fact that evolution takes place as the preliminary draft of freedom, not determined, not necessary, not fixed, but playfully, by exploring various possibilities, in the accidental." He proved the conclusiveness of his argument thus, "If God intended human freedom as a precondition of love between him and his creature, and if human beings are essentially integrated in a world appropriate for them, then the negative counterpart of freedom is given simultaneously with it: therefore, structural suffering necessarily exists" (p. 46).

Thus, God intends the freedom of humankind as a precondition for love, and since human beings are integrated in a proportionate world, freedom necessarily has its negative counterpart in structural suffering (p. 46).

Therefore, suffering cannot be played off against the good creator. Rather, it is the price of freedom, the price of love. Love without suffering cannot exist, it is a contradiction in terms. A God who intended to accomplish this by the power of his omnipotence, thus preventing suffering, would thwart love.

Perhaps there are still too many echoes here of previous attempts to justify God. It is understandable that Greshake forcefully proclaims, "No, God absolutely does not want suffering" (p. 51). So is the price too high? Like his theological predecessors, Greshake mentions the classic example of Job, as well as Dostoyevsky's Alyosha, and like D. Sölle, he also numbers Simone Weil with the rebels. Evidently, Greshake suspects that behind the more recent solutions is the assumption of a God who is not involved enough in the world or a concept of God for which the creator is at risk whenever he gets mixed up with the lower orders (p. 52f.). It is part of a sinful world that suffering rooted in sin will bring up new suffering; however, suffering accepted of one's free will, suffering endured in solidarity with a sufferer, can transform sin and our entanglement in sin from the inside. This suffering then turns into suffering for love, suffering in God's service. In our voluntary compassion (Heb 2:18), according to Greshake, we find a way prepared for us out of

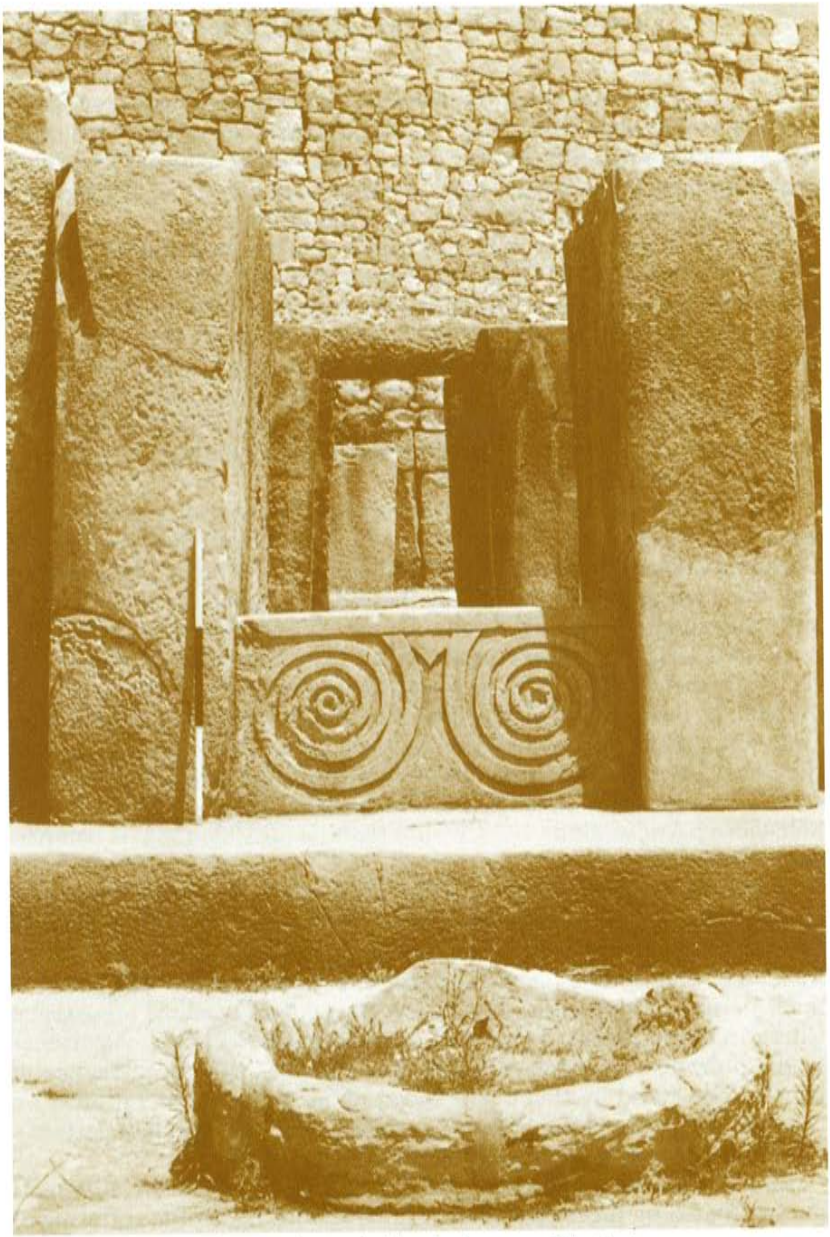
suffering. "The resurrection, the Father's response to the Son's cross, is the beginning of the abolition of all suffering." This is how God paid a price too high for the sake of love, so extensively that all human suffering may rest in God's love and find in his compassion strength for the battle against suffering, for perseverance in suffering and for imparting meaning (p. 57).

Finally, on "overcoming suffering": The phrase "suffering is definitely transcended" is not to be understood only in an eschatological sense, as referring exclusively to the end (as the final point); it also means that perfection is already at work and comes to light in partial fulfilments. There are small steps that love as compassion can take already.

Greshake lists the following *steps* in conclusion:

- The elimination of suffering "by personal commitment, through social reforms, and not least by compassion" (p. 61).
- Resistance in the suffering one cannot surmount, guarding oneself against destructive aggression as well as against the isolation that leads to resignation. Then suffering can be transformed productively (cf. Müller); he also refers to Paul's words in 2 Cor 4:8 and 2 Cor 6:9.
- Unavoidable suffering takes on a positive quality in a life story wherever it is endured in love of God and in solidarity with the suffering of others. "People who have never suffered pain, have never lived..." (Kübler-Ross); "What will become of a society in which certain forms of suffering are avoided gratuitously" (Sölle, p. 38.)
- Answer to prayer, very hidden and visible only to those whose eyes have been sharpened precisely in faithful prayer for the presence and the work of God, can become a miracle that breaks through all our expectations, all things that are easily comprehensible (p. 69f.).

So Greshake's *final thesis* is this: "God permits evil and suffering, because their possibility is the necessary counterpart of creaturely freedom and personal love. But God himself enters into this world of suffering, so that in and through humans he may transform suffering by love and transcend it, now in fragments and finally in perfection." (p. 70f.).[86]



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
Spiral relief at the threshold of the Holy of Holies,
Megalith Temple, Al-Tarxien, Malta, 2400-2300 B.C.

Considerations and Questions for Theology

When going through these theological discussions of suffering, some Christians will have difficulties with the apparent rejection of the traditional teaching on suffering (or on ways of dealing with it). Indeed, it seems from some theological opinions as though they must, for the time being, do without many familiar theological affirmations.

More on this can be read in *inter alia* E. Gerstenberg and W. Schrage, *Leiden* (Suffering), (1977). In the chapter "The Will of God", they claim that although in the New Testament the idea is not particularly prominent, everything is centred on God's "sovereign will". However, if the responsibility falls to him, then he turns out to be a "sadist", a "henchman", or suchlike (Sölle). Gerstenberg/Schrage try to avoid this consequence. We are left with the insight that according to God's will, suffering actually should not exist and not every instance of suffering corresponds to his will (p. 204-207).[87]

Finally, they conclude that the New Testament, seen as a whole, never made *suffering* in itself a central theme (p. 210). In recent expositions of Christian dogmatics, one does not find much in the index under suffering. We must all accept personally that God is powerless in the face of suffering largely caused by human hands, as God acknowledged in the cross of Christ. He suffers unspeakably from humankind! But is this really correct? "What is it to a God if he suffers?", many may well exclaim; he nevertheless always does it as the one who is superior in principle. *His* suffering does not quite convince them. The greater his power, the easier his suffering should be on him! But if he suffered exclusively from you and me, if he suffered interminably from people and their behaviour? And nothing else? Would faith be possible then as compassion with God?

Suffering would now have a different meaning: despair at the loss of all relationships, isolation as absolute hopelessness. Yet God reveals in Christ that he encounters human beings at the point where they are at the end of their tether. So even despair experiences faith! "My power is made perfect in weakness"; this is how Paul experienced the presence of Christ in his suffering (2 Cor. 2:9). In their faith, the lonely experience God's presence, strangely enough, and also through the presence of people who stand by them. The biographies testify to this protection through the interlocking of God's presence and – though less perfect – human support as a decisive experience in the crisis.

As a lay person without the theological knowledge of the authors, I am fascinated by these profound, extensive outlines on the suffering of human beings that reflect our own experiences of suffering or compassion, and yet I find something lacking. I look in vain for references to *this missing experience of an interlocking of protection and support* that is mentioned by the life stories.

Several *questions* occur to me:

- Can we devise a 'theology of suffering' without including these two dimensions of relationship as a decisive experience?
- Has God's gift to humankind, our *ability to establish relationships*, been taken sufficiently into account in academic theology?
- Has academic theology reflected on what ambivalent forces in human beings are constantly at work to bury this ability?

These dimensions of our human life are threatened not only by the current tendency, from which Christians also are not free, to overrate material values, work and achievement, but also by the creative power of the intellect, from which all science has emerged:

- Is it not the task of theology as a partner of the other sciences to reintroduce into the discussion the missing dimension of the ability to establish relationships, without fearing a loss of scientific character?

In *education*, we are beginning to recognize this lack of proximity to life due to our exaggeration of the scientific aspect, but we are struggling to deal with it. In the circumstances of suffering and compassion, this *ability to establish relationships*, largely lost not only in our sciences but also in our ways of living together, seems to grow and to become stronger. We recognise in people in crisis, like those we have met in the biographies, an intensity in their living with others that the 'healthy' and 'capable' rarely achieve (often, because their deficiencies have not yet become clear to them).

In the search for change in our threatened world, *supporting the suffering* in every way and weathering the crises together is an *obvious path* that can open up the new future, in the sense described in Matthew 25: 34-40. It is not so much momentous acts, as our helping hands, reaching out in awareness of the common needs of the sufferer and of the caregiver, that bring about these transformations.

Contemporary studies of Luther's theology (Gerta Scharffenorth[88]) have rediscovered the Reformation insight into the significance of human relationships and the ability to relate.

Today the question forces itself upon us: does the loneliness of suffering people, with their experiences of being forsaken, have a history that also goes back to losses in theology – to overlooking and burying the fundamental significance of our ability to relate for our human nature?

That we never in our lives stop learning, that the 'spiral' of experiences, the battle against attacks from the outside and the self-destructive forces inside never ends, not even when we have succeeded in accepting our own fate – those are the insights of the suffering, the authors of the biographies. We are constantly tempted to deny them.

As a lay person, I ask myself how these insights may be brought into the theological discussion of suffering.

The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
The spiral curves of the Scala eliciodale give access to the Vatican museums and libraries, Rome 1932

Summary and Conclusion

This study has tried to focus on faith and pastoral care from a different perspective, namely the viewpoint of those directly affected by suffering, by surveying the empirical data and reflecting theoretically.

Therefore, in its first chapter, it summarises the tendencies found in more than 2,000 biographies, which may be presented as the *three central and fundamental experiences* of the suffering:

- *First experience*: Sufferers see themselves mostly as objects, pushed down into passivity; rarely as subjects with a relationship with God who are taken seriously in pastoral care.
- *Second experience*: Sufferers hear preaching as a "consoling" transfiguration of their crisis, but rarely as comfort and help in critically clarifying their suffering.
- *Third experience*: Spiritual counsellors appear more often in their official roles than as personally affected fellow-sufferers and partners.

From there, the study develops the *first thesis*:

- *Despite* their negative experiences of the church and pastoral care, sufferers and those who support them hold on tight to their own positive experiences with their faith.

The second chapter works out a dimension of human *care* that is almost lost, namely, as a much needed *offer of help in working through crisis*. In this context, I present the ideal-typical 'learning process of working through crisis' as a working hypothesis developed from eight spiral phases. In particular, the results of the analysis of the over 1,000 biographies to hand were emphasised, according to which only a third of those affected by suffering – since they were supported – reached the goal of the acceptance of their suffering (sixth spiral phase) and finally their social integration (eighth spiral phase – *solidarity*); however, two thirds of them – thrown back on their own resources – broke off their learning process in the initial or transitional stage and were condemned to social isolation.

By reflecting on the question of the significance of faith and human support in working through crisis, we arrived at the *second thesis*:

- *Christian faith* can *absorb* an *aggression* (third spiral phase) recognised as *catharsis* in the learning process through *accusation* and *lamentation before* God.

This means on the one hand that *Christian faith* enables those affected to accept their crisis, their suffering, 'obediently' – in an affirmative and unquestioning manner – as inflicted by God; this is the '*naïve-apathetic response*' of the believing sufferer. On the other hand, it means that *Christian faith* enables sufferers to release their *aggression* (third spiral phase) against their suffering, their crisis, at first allowing the suffering some space in order finally to learn to bear it in dialogue together with God, thus becoming able to affirm and accept (sixth spiral phase) their suffering; this is the '*critical-sympathetic response*' of the suffering Christian.

It holds true for *both* responses that Christian faith can absorb aggression in working through crisis. Suffering believers do not find themselves left to their own devices. They have someone to turn to, someone to speak to, someone who will listen; they are upheld by their relationship with God – even and especially in their aggressive accusation (third spiral phase) as well as in their bargaining with God (fourth spiral phase) and finally in the darkness of their depression (fifth spiral phase) – as people accepted by God.

The third chapter illustrates the *significance of faith and human support* in selected autobiographies. It considers *various kinds of suffering* – acquired poliomyelitis (physical disability), acquired depression (psychological disorder), acquired blindness (sensory handicap) and political persecution, acquired and congenital brain damage (mental handicap) as well as cancer (chronic illness) and desertion – and *different attitudes of faith* – the naïve-apathetic as well as the critical-sympathetic response – and finally divides the support given by those in an official capacity alongside the compassionate who were personally involved into *adequate, inappropriate* or *entirely lacking.*

The *conclusion* confirms once again the results of my research, first published in 1980 as "Biographische Erfahrung und wissenschaftliche Theorie" (*Biographical experience and scientific theory*), "Soziale Integration", Band I (*Social Integration, Volume I*) and "Weiterbildung als Krisenverarbeitung" (*Further Education – Working Through Crisis*), "Soziale Integration", Band II (*Social Integration, Volume 2*) (cf. in the latter p. 235 and p. 431ff. – 5th edition, revised and expanded, Bad Heilbrunn: 1993 with bibliography).

- Our *first basic assumption*, that irrespective of the cause of the crisis, everyone who is directly or indirectly affected has to go through the spiral phases of the learning process of working through crisis in order to achieve their social integration, is testified to unanimously by all the biographies. In this study, examples of those *indirectly* affected are Pearl S. Buck, and Silvia and Albert Görres and Ruth Müller-Garnn as parents of mentally handicapped children; those *directly* affected

are represented by Laurel Lee (suffering from cancer and desertion), Luise Habel (physically disabled), Ingrid Weber-Gast (emotionally handicapped), and Jacques Lusseyran (suffering from a sensory handicap and political persecution).

- Our *second basic assumption*, that *Christian faith is a force* that makes possible *aggression* (third spiral phase) as catharsis and enables the acceptance (sixth spiral phase) of the crisis, is also validated almost unanimously by all authors. We find two different *attitudes* of faith: Ruth Müller-Garnn lives out the *naïve-apathetic response* of faith as unconditional, obedient acceptance of the suffering God inflicted upon her. This response could even resolve nascent doubts – in the believer's identification with and affirmation of the passion.

  Like Job in the Old Testament, the majority of the biographers fight through the *critical-sympathetic response*; though they wrestle with varying degrees of intensity; Luise Habel, Ingrid and Stephan Weber-Gast, Jacques Lusseyran, Silvia and Albert Görres and Laurel Lee may be regarded as typical.

- Our *third basic assumption*, that *aggression as catharsis has a key function* in working through crisis is once more confirmed by Luise Habel's *mother*. She ends up inevitably not accepting her life with a handicapped child, because she does not pass through the *catharsis* in her aggression. She breaks off the learning process in the *transitional* stage and finally commits *suicide*, since she turns against herself the aggression she had not worked off (cf. our results: two thirds of the more than 2,000 biographers attempt suicide, all of them without exception express death-wishes).

- Our *fourth basic assumption* holds that a *lack of or inappropriate* human or spiritual care leads to a *breaking off* of the *learning process* in the transitional stage and thereby to non-acceptance in *social isolation*, while on the contrary, *available and adequate support* brings about acceptance in the final stage of social integration. This insight runs like a red thread through all the biographies. For example, Luise Habel describes hurtful as well as helpful pastoral care – Ingrid and Stephan Weber-Gast go through partner therapy – Jacques Lusseyran describes the support of his parents and later of Jérémie, the blacksmith in the Buchenwald concentration camp, as his 'reality of acceptance', grown out of experiences of affliction, which in turn allow him to become a helpful caregiver and counsellor of many of his fellow human beings – Laurel Lee, in her desertion, bears witness to the power of her Christian faith – while Ruth Müller-Garnn and Silvia and Albert Görres suffer the lack of any spiritual and human care.

All biographers confirm the mainly *supportive experiences* of sufferers *with their faith*, although help from pastors was often missing or failed them completely.

However, it must be said that material taken from biographical documents often resists systematic categorisation, and moreover that the object of enquiry, namely faith and pastoral care, to a large extent refuses to be tied down in definitions or to place itself at our disposal: Christian existence remains a risk and a mystery!

Observing the *deficiencies* in pastoral care prompted us in a fourth chapter to inquire about the caregivers themselves. We began inductively, with the case histories of the encounters between sufferers and those not yet suffering (residents of Bethel met church representatives, synod members, students). The central problem of the latter lay in their faulty relationship with the sufferers. They appeared to lack the ability to relate.

This led us to the *third thesis*:

- People in crisis are not a problem for us, but *we*, the 'not-yet-suffering', are a problem for *them*.

Different positions in the *scientific disciplines* were then consulted *deductively* – inter alia Schmidbauer's helper syndrome, Brocher's thesis of the sickness of the healthy, Fischer's reversal of the meaning of the term 'dead weight' (Ballastexistenz) so that it refers now to the non-sufferers, Horst-Eberhard Richter's defence mechanisms against fear, Moltmann's apartheid society of the capable and finally C.F. von Weizsäcker's theory of the relative legitimacy of society's repression mechanisms – and examined according to the different interpretations of human behaviour that we could see in them: social and human interpretations, and interpretations in terms of debt.

The results led us to the *fourth thesis*:

- The congregation or society needs those affected by suffering, just as sufferers need the congregation or society.

In the fifth and last chapter, the study presented in an excursus some Catholic and Protestant *theological approaches*, in order to ascertain what *sense* they make of the origin and meaning of suffering.

The theologians agree in describing our 'remaining on the way with trust in God' as the lifelong process in which every day faith must be embraced and risked anew; however, they differ in the interpretations with which they indicate the realities of Christian existence. In all these presentations of our 'being on the way' we missed the *interlocking of God's protection* with *human support*, i.e. they do not take into consideration the ability to establish relationships as a gift from God: Hans Küng speaks of 'anthropodicy' as the true theodicy, in which God's justification by God himself is decided in the justification of the human being who is far from God. Through this justification, human beings can, if they accept this offer of meaning, come out of the 'unconditional suffering' of their distance and separation from God and enter into 'conditional suffering' in being close to God in relationship. A statement that nevertheless strongly abstracts from life.

Dorothee Sölle enters a plea for the traditional Christian challenge to connect suffering and learning. She sees this as the process in which suffering is put into words, a process that leads from silence to words (crying, accusation) and finally to action. This moves her to reject radically both Christian masochism and post-Christian apathy and to appeal to the compassionate as those who engage actively and creatively in the process.

A. M. K. Müller discovers suffering as a productive force. He advocates the toppling of the dogma of the actor, the overthrow of 'acceptable' suffering through external processes instead of the necessary 'unacceptable' internal processes, where suffering is accepted as a crisis and sufferers are transformed. This means that in the abyss of suffering, their thinking can acquire an awareness of the next world that leads to new thinking on different levels of perception. However, this is the point at which Müller discovers theoretically a chance of survival in the face of the crisis of humanity.

Gisbert Greshake justifies suffering as the price of freedom and the price of love, from which both kinds of suffering, the 'suffering caused by human hands' and 'structural suffering' can be explained as by-products of the evolution of humankind; however, this means in the end that suffering originates and is rooted in human sin.

As a *result*, we can insist that the '*why and whence*' of suffering must remain *unanswered*, because suffering is beyond causality or any attempt by us to control it. Yet, we learned that the '*what for and whither*' in suffering can disclose *interpretations of meaning* in the sufferers' encounter with God, usually against the background of experiences shared with those caring for them, and provided there is a readiness for lifelong learning.

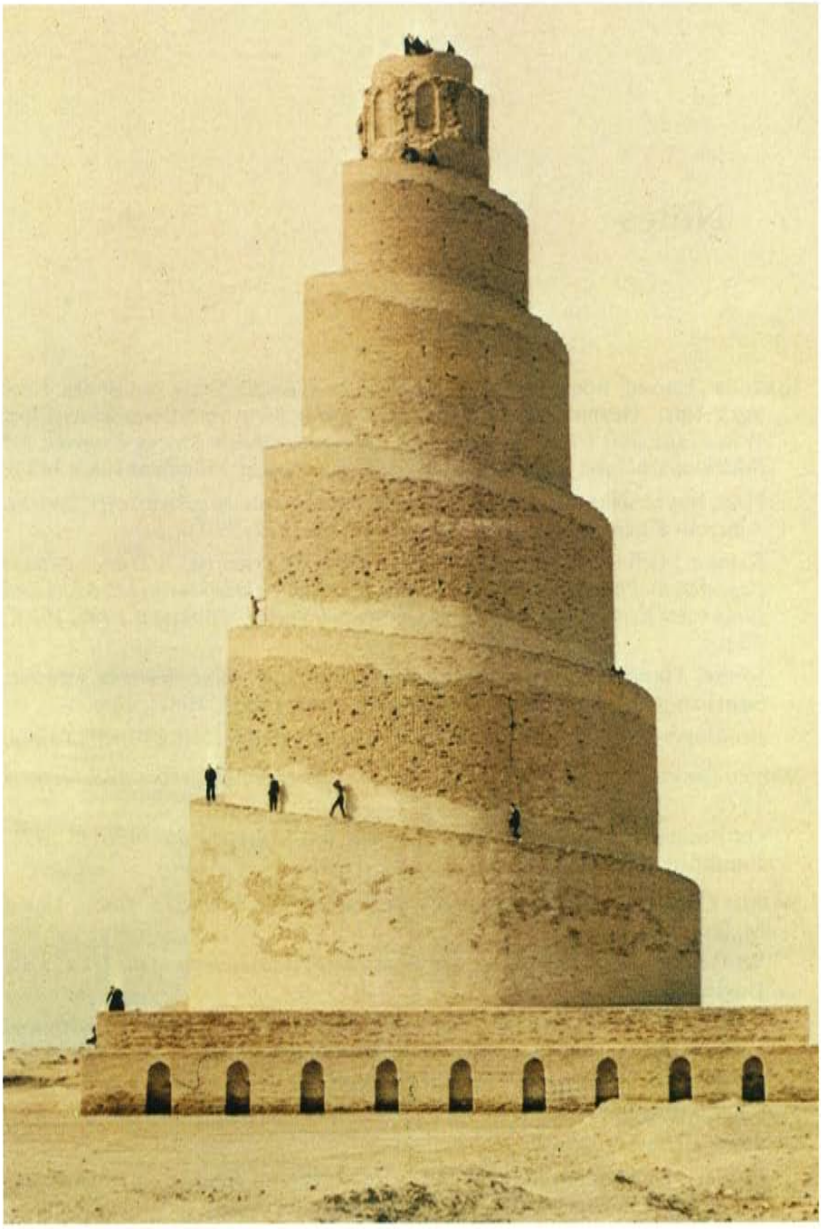
Caregivers then become able to share *compassionately* in the suffering, which frees them in certain phases of working through crisis – mainly in *aggression*, *negotiation* and *depression* – temporarily to renounce, totally or partially, the usual spiritual help, like biblical words of consolation and theological arguments. In this *transitional* stage such things would be of little help and would even block progress. On the other hand, something *unique* becomes clear. Their presence, their staying close and their refusal to play a role by not hiding their own feelings of helplessness or the way they too are tested, provide the sufferers with precisely what they need. In their apparent powerlessness, they communicate to the afflicted vicariously, in silent *solidarity*, that God bears with those who are battling and railing against Him and does not let them go. In this way caregivers – and this can be any one of us – give those in crisis the experience of communion that takes them out of their hopeless loneliness. *Both* experience the *acceptance of God*, who shares in humanity's darkness.

Spiritual care is so difficult because the caregiver is always only a companion – in a secondary role, not in the lead – accompanying

the sufferer on his journey, rather than striking out on one's own account.

This means:

- walking alongside the other person while *listening*, not walking in front or behind;
- *sensing* when ways of helping block progress, when they encourage and when they offend;
- *trusting* that God holds us and helps when no one else knows a way out;
- *hoping and believing* that in their *weakness both* people involved will be able to experience new *strength*.



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
Spiral ascent to the minaret of the mosque at Samarra, Iraq,
9th century

Notes

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[5] HABEL, L.: *Herrgott, schaff die Treppen ab!* Stuttgart/Berlin 1978, p. 167-170.

[6] HÄMER, P.: *Rehabilitation von unten.* Der Platz der Körperbehinderten im Aufgabenfeld der Kirche. Mainz 1978, p.11.

[7] HABEL, L.: loc cit, p. 65/66.

[8] ZAHRNT, H.: *Warum ich glaube.* Meine Sache mit Gott. München 1977, p. 320.

[9] SCHLETT, C.: *...Krüppel sein dagegen sehr – Lebensbericht einer spastisch Gelähmten.* Wuppertal-Barmen 1970, p. 72/73.

[10] LEGRIX, D.: *Born Like That.* London 1962. French original: Née comme ça. Paris, p. 57. German translation: Und doch als Mensch geboren. Freiburg 1963 – Berlin 1977.

[11] MIQUEL, A.: *Warum mußt du gehen?* Freiburg 1971, p. 88.

[12] WEBER-GAST, I.: *Weil du nicht geflohen bist vor meiner Angst.* Mainz 1978, p. 34.

[13] HÄMER, P.: op.cit., p. 12.

[14] BROWN, C.: *My left foot*, New York 1955. German translation: *Mein linker Fuß.* Berlin 1970, 1978[8], p. 102.

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[15] HÄMER, P.: loc cit, p. 52.

[16] WEBER-GAST, I.: loc cit, p. 34.

[17] GÖRRES, S.: *Leben mit einem behinderten Kind.* With an epilogue written by GÖRRES, A. Zürich/Köln 1974, p. 129/130.

[18] MEISINGER, E.: *Über die Schwelle.* Aufzeichnungen einer spastisch Gelähmten. Berlin 1957, p. 74ff.

[19] DIAKONISCHES WERK DER EV. KIRCHE IN DEUTSCHLAND, EKD (ed.): *Hilfe für Behinderte.* Zweites Schwerpunktprogramm der Diakonie. Jahrbuch '75. Stuttgart 1975.

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- *sinnesbehindert.* Sinnesbehinderte brauchen des anderen Auge, Ohr und Hand als Brücke zum Leben. Stuttgart 1977.
- *körperbehindert.* Behinderte Menschen unterwegs aus dem Abseits zur aktiven Partnerschaft. Stuttgart 1977.
- *geistigbehindert.* 'Gemeinsam leben' mit geistigbehinderten Menschen muß durch Zuwendung, Ermutigung und Begleitung verwirklicht werden. Stuttgart 1978.
- *lebensgestört.* Evangelische Familien- und Lebensberatung hilft Menschen in Krisen und Beziehungsstörungen, ihr Leben neu zu entdecken. Stuttgart 1979.

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[20] SCHUCHARDT, E.: *Biographische Erfahrung und wissenschaftliche Theorie.* Soziale Integration Bd. 1. Mit Bibliographie der Lebensgeschichten seit 1900 bis zur Gegenwart (alphabetisch-gegliedert-annotiert, 52 p.). Bad Heilbrunn 1980, 5., durchges. u. maßgebl. erw. Aufl. 1993[5], 225 p., 8 Graphiken.

[21] While E. KÜBLER-ROSS (*Interviews mit Sterbenden*, 1979) sought to answer the question "How can I learn to die?", we are concerned with the question, "How can I learn to live in the face of circumstances in which I seem no longer able to live?"

[22] SCHUCHARDT, E.: *Krisen-Management und Integration.* Doppel-Band mit DVD. 8. überarb. und erw. Auflage Bielefeld 2003.
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DVD mit Jahrhundertbibliographie u. 18 Filmdokumentationen ‚Best Practice International'. Bestseller der Reihe ‚Theorie und Praxis der Erwachsenenbildung'.

[23] ibid, p. 209, P.S.Buck [24] ibid, p. 232, C.Brown [25] ibid, p. 220, Helen Keller

[26] ibid, p. 246, C.Park [27] ibid, p. 255, Aggression [28] ibid, p. 259, Kate Keller

[29] ibid, p. 261,C.Schlett [30] ibid, p. M. Shave [31] ibid, p. 272, R.D'Ambrosio

[32] HABEL, L.: *Herrgott, schaff die Treppen ab*! Erfahrungen einer Behinderten. Stuttgart 1978.

[33] WEBER-GAST, I.: *Weil du nicht geflohen bist vor meiner Angst.* Ein Ehepaar durchlebt die Depression des einen Partners. Mainz 1978.

[34] Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt, DAS, Nr. 44, 22. Oktober 1978, p. 29.

[35] cf. the author's, INGRID WEBER-GAST's own statement, loc cit, p. 35.

[36] LUSSEYRAN, J.: *And There Was Light.* New York 1987. German translation: *Das wiedergefundene Licht.* Stuttgart 1963, 1975[7].

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[39] GÖRRES, A.: *Kennt die Psychologie den Menschen?* Fragen zwischen Psychotherapie, Anthropologie und Christentum. München 1979.

[40] LEE, L.: *Walking through the Fire.* New York 1977. German translation: *Wenn du durchs Feuer gehst, sollst du nicht brennen.* Gütersloh 1978.

[41] GORNIK, H. A.: *Begegnung am Rhein*: Die amerikanische Bestsellerautorin LAUREL LEE in der Bundesrepublik. "Zauberhafte Dinge im Tod". Eine Krankheit wird im Buch für Ärzte und Kinder angenommen. In: Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt, DAS, Nr. 36,3. September 1978, p. 9.

[42] ibid, p. 9.

[43] KIRCHENKANZLEI DER EV. KIRCHE IN DEUTSCHLAND, EKD (ed.).: *Leben und Erziehen wozu?* Eine Dokumentation über Entschließungen der Synode der EKD 1978, Gütersloh 1979.

[44] ZINK, J.: *Vorbemerkungen*, S. 9. In: HABEL, L.: *Herrgott, schaff die Treppen ab!* Stuttgart, Berlin 1978.

[45] MOLTMANN, J.: *The Passion for Life: A Messianic Lifestyle.* Philadelphia 1978. German original: *Neuer Lebensstil.* Schritte zur Gemeinde. München 1977, p. 22.

[46] Projekt, Studentin 1. In: SCHUCHARDT, E.: Projektorientiertes Studium in Bethel: "*Integration durch Interaktion*", mss., Hannover 1979.

[47] ibid, Studentin 7.

[48] ibid, Studentin 11.

[49] ibid, Student 15.

[50] ibid, Studentin 3.

[51] BODELSCHWINGH, F. von: Gespräch mit Dr. BRANDT, dem Abgeordneten HITLERS. In: *Bote von Bethel*, Sonderdruck 66, Bethel 1964, S. 9ff. Cf. also: Hephata Hessisches Diakoniezentrum (ed.), GÖBEL, P., THORMANN, H. E.: *Verlegt – vernichtet – vergessen ... ?* Leidenswege von Menschen aus Hephata im Dritten Reich. Eine Dokumentation. Plag-Druck, Schwalmstadt/Treysa 1985, 1986², 88 p.

[52] BODELSCHWINGH, F. von (nephew of the afore-mentioned pastor), loc cit.

[53] Projekt, Student 4, loc cit.

[54] ibid, Student 8.

[55] SCHMIDBAUER, W.: *Die hilflosen Helfer.* Über die seelische Problematik der helfenden Berufe. Reinbek bei Hamburg 1977, p. 12.

[56] Projekt, Studentin 13, loc cit.

[57] ibid, Studentin 13.

[58] ibid, Studentin 13.

[59] SCHMIDBAUER, W.: loc cit, p. 10.

[60] ibid, p. 42,43,44.

[61] ibid, p. 90/91.

[62] ibid, p. 219.

[63] BROCHER, T.. Vortrag auf dem 17. Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentag vom 8.-12. Juni 1977. In: Kirchentag: Dokumentarband. Stuttgart 1978.

[64] FISCHER, M.: *Das Geheimnis des Menschen.* Theologische Überlegungen zur Zielsetzung der Behindertenhilfe. In: Diakonie. Jahrbuch des Diakonischen Werkes 1975. Stuttgart 1975, p. 75.

[65] MOLTMANN, J.: *The Open Church.* London, SCM Press, 1978.

[66] RICHTER, H.E.: *Lernziel Solidarität.* Hamburg 1974, p. 222, 223.

[67] WEIZSÄCKER, C.F. von: *Der Behinderte in unserer Gesellschaft.* Vortrag, gehalten in der Bayerischen Landesschule für Blinde, anläßlich ihres 150jährigen Bestehens. Oktober 1976. In: *Der Garten des Menschlichen.* Beiträge zur geschichtlichen Anthropologie. München, Wien 1977[3], p. 107.

[68] ibid, p. 112.

[69] SÖLLE, D.: *Die Hinreise.* Zur religiösen Erfahrung. Texte und Überlegungen. Stuttgart 1975. p. 9.

[70] ibid, p. 10ff.

[71] GENFER WELTKIRCHENRAT: Leben und Zeugnis der Behinderten in der christlichen Gemeinde. Memorandum einer Konsultation 1978. In: Dokumentation epd., evang. Pressedienst Nr. 36 a, 1978.

[72] This chapter emerged as a consequence of intense conversations with the theologians Dr. Erika REICHLE, Dr. Gertha SCHARFFENORTH and Prof. Dr. Klaus THRAEDE.

[73] KÜNG, H.: *Gott und das Leid.* Einsiedeln 1967, 1974 5.Aufl.

[74] Cf.: SELLIN, Ernst and FOHRER, Georg: *Introduction to the Old Testament* Minneapolis 1975. German original: *Einleitung in das Alte Testament.* Heidelberg 1965, 10. Aufl., § 50, p. 352-365. And: KAISER, Otto: *Einleitung in das Alte Testament.* Gütersloh 1978, 4. Aufl., § 34, p. 344-353.

[75] Also in 1952 was published C. G. JUNG *Answer to Job.* Princeton NJ 1973. German original: *Antwort auf Hiob,* Zürich, 3. Aufl. 1952.

[76] Had they had better knowledge of their own tradition of thought and experience, perhaps the critics of Ernst BLOCH's *Atheism in Christianity.* New York 1972. German original: *Atheismus im Christentum,* Frankfurt 1968, p. 148-167 (on Job) in Tübingen and elsewhere would have been less assiduous. H. Gollwitzer's knowledgeable critique (*Krummes Holz – aufrechter Gang,* München 1970, p. 224-250, esp. p. 247-250) was, in my opinion, taken up by EHRENBERG and developed to a large extent, long before BLOCH's book had been published.

[77] BARTH's views, taken down in 1955, seem to differ considerably from D. BONHOEFFER's chapter "*Discipleship and the Cross*" in: *The Cost of Discipleship.* New York 1965. German original: *Nachfolge* (München 1937) 39/46. In general, whoever spoke about 'suffering' in the past was referring almost exclusively to 'suffering for God's sake" and suchlike, and therefore, as in the New Testament, to the 'cross' Christians take upon themselves.

[78] SÖLLE, D.: *Suffering.* Philadelphia 1984.

[79] A number of more 'dogmatic' authors were included in this discussion, who saw MOLTMANN as on the way to a speculative theodicy (D.L. MIGLIORE, ibid p. 42) or at least preoccupied with the question of theodicy (H.H. MISKOTTE, ibid, p. 76-89).

[80] More information on the "apathy axiom" can be found in E. JÜNGEL: *God as the Mystery of the World.* Grand Rapids 1983. German original: *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt,* 3. Aufl. Tübingen 1979, p. 508 and p. 511. "That this God, who is love, must be able to suffer and suffers enormously when giving away what is his very own for the sake of finite human beings is an insight

gained in recent theological research inspired by LUTHER's *christology* and HEGEL's *philosophy*" (p. 511). – JÜNGEL's thorough discussion of *God is Dead theology* (p. 55-137), in particular § 4 on "*Sense and Nonsense in speaking of the Death of God*" (p. 55-58), enables us lay people to prepare ourselves against the at times fashionable opinions on this matter. JÜNGEL took up the question of theodicy (p. 69 f.) and turned it into the question, "Where is God?".

[81] G. EBELING: *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens* II, Tübingen 1979, p. 202-205, also opposed the concept of God's death that "has become fashionable in recent years and is now already going out of fashion" (p. 203). In reality, the Early Church's christology had already mentioned it; the fixation on modern atheism was less than careful with the past. Consequently, EBELING's extensive § 19 bears the title "*The Death of God*" (p. 128-255), however, he first discussed the "*Dying of the Humankind*" (p. 132-149), and secondly (B), in the main part (!), the "*Reconciliation of God and Humankind in Jesus Christ's Death*" (p. 149-255). How superficially, compared to JÜNGEL or EBELING, H. ZAHRNT deals with the topic (which appeared in the USA in 1961)! H. ZAHRNT, *The Death of God – a Contradiction in Terms*, in: *What Kind of God? A Question of Faith*. Minneapolis 1972. German original: *Gott kann nicht sterben*, 3. Aufl. München 1970, p. 52-60.

G. EBELING's treatment of the problem of theodicy (Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens III, Tübingen 1979, p. 511-519) within the chapter on "God's justice" (p. 509-528) may be recommended for further information. "*God's justification of himself*" (K. BARTH!) "is the justification of the human being through God. This is the decisive answer to the question of theodicy. Job's question is not repressed thereby, but taken into Christ's death and resurrection, so that all sufferers may believe that their suffering and dying is taken up in Christ's suffering and dying." This is by no means the justification of evil, which must remain inexplicable darkness (p. 518f.). Certainly, a philosophical theodicy has little to offer the suffering, "because it cannot address them in their being before God", while a theological discussion of God focuses on solidarity with suffering human beings and their why-question (p. 518); however, this means that the key word 'theodicy' reminds us always in a concealed manner of the true God, who claims that his power is identical with his love – 'in faith', in spite of all our doubting, nurtured by suffering, of this unity.

In closing, I would like to refer to W. Sparn (ed.): *Leiden – Erfahrung und Denken*. Materialien zum Theodizeeproblem, München 1980 (Theol. Bücherei, Bd. 67), where all the necessary material is provided, with an appendix on "Comments on the Revision of the Problem of Theodicy" in the present (p. 247-274), combined with an extensive bibliography. I found there statements like "even if the lamentation of a sorely tried faith can, before God, progress to the praise of God, no experience of suffering is explained or resolved. NIETZSCHE and LUTHER have been proved right, though for very different reasons. To give meaning to suffering in the form of a 'theodicy' is no longer possible" (p. 274).

I lack the space and competence to follow these most recent clues; however, they may serve as a hint or, in a short quotation, as a corrective to some of the ideas presented in extracts here. In an appendix, Sparn gives an excel-

lent concise summary of recent theological solutions (BARTH, EHLERT, GOGARTEN, TILLICH) [p. 248-252]). He then discusses philosophy, psychology, sociology, before returning at the end to the "Theological Tasks" (pp. 264-272), described against the background of the "post-theistic situation".

[82] JÜNGEL, E.: *Death: The Riddle and the Mystery*. Philadelphia 1975. German original: *Tod*. Stuttgart 1971.

[83] MÜLLER, A.M.K.: *Der Sturz des Dogmas vom Täter*. In: *Lutherische Monatshefte*, 13.Jg. 1974, p. 468-474.

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[84] GRESHAKE, G.: *Der Preis der Liebe*. Besinnung über das Leid. Freiburg 1978.

[85] ZAHRNT, H.: *Leiden – wie kann Gott das zulassen? Warum ich glaube. Meine Sache mit Gott*. München 1977.

[86] To a large degree, GRESHAKE agrees with the "prolegomena to coping with suffering theologically" (p. 257-266) developed by WOLFINGER, F., in: *Leiden als theologisches Problem: Versuch einer Problemskizze* (*Catholica* 32, 1978, p. 242-266).

[87] GERSTENBERG, E.S., SCHRAGE, W.: *Suffering*. Nashville 1980. German original: *Leiden*. Kohlhammer Taschenbuchreihe Biblische Konfrontationen. Nr. 1004, Stuttgart 1977.

[88] SCHARFFENORTH, G., THRAEDE, K., "*Freunde in Christus werden ...*" Die Beziehung von Mann und Frau als Frage an Theologie und Kirche; Reihe Kennzeichen, Band 1, Berlin 1977, p. 18-95.

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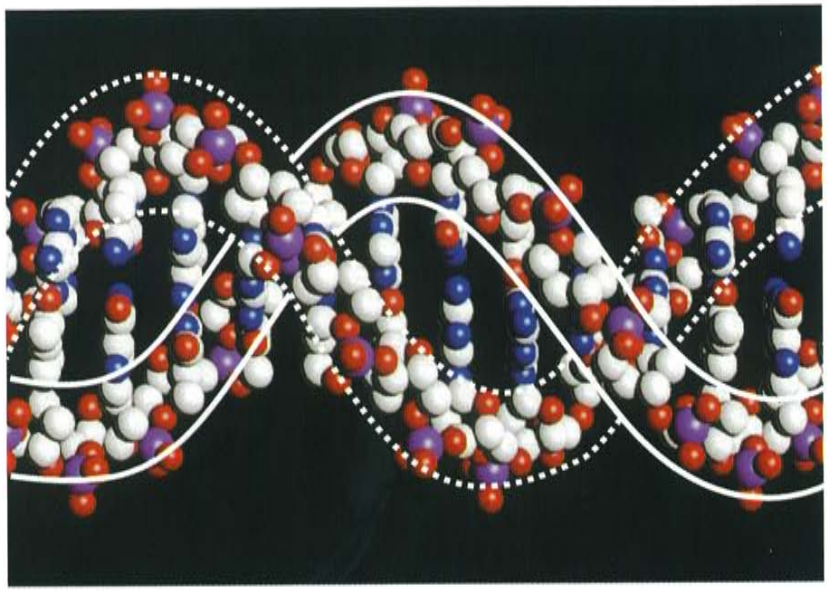
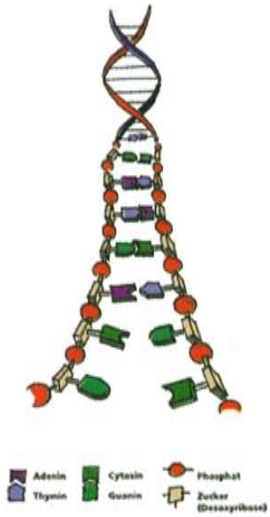
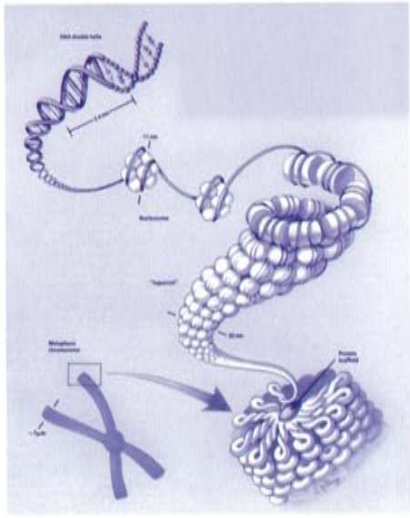






The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
Double-helix - complementary spiral of life -
Basic structure of organisms, e.g. of flora, fauna and human beings
Organisational sturcture of the DNA - James Watson and Francis Crick, 1953

Bibliography of Over 2000 Life-Stories on Working through Crises

from 1900 to the Present, with Annotations, a Subject Index and a Brief Statement on Content

On the website of the World Council of Churches, www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/pubs/why-me-bibliog.html, I introduce you to more than 2000 books on the question *Why me?*, on *suffering and faith* and on *learning to live in crises.* (The list of these books is printed in full in the German edition of *Why Me?*, on pages 184-304.)

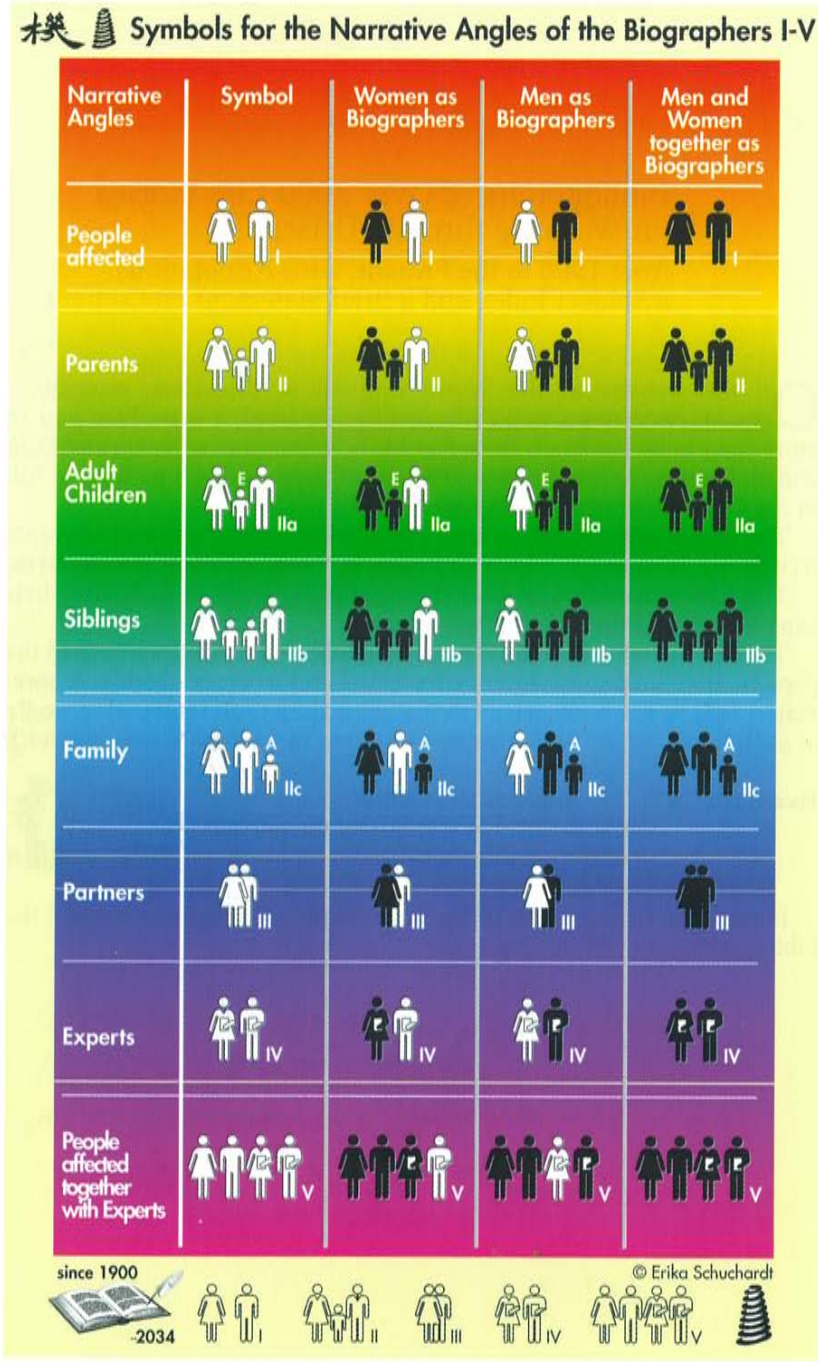
The people affected tell us their life-stories, and reports and accounts written by partners, relatives and experts reveal different perspectives.

The reader is invited to allow these people to speak of their fate, their experiences and their thoughts.

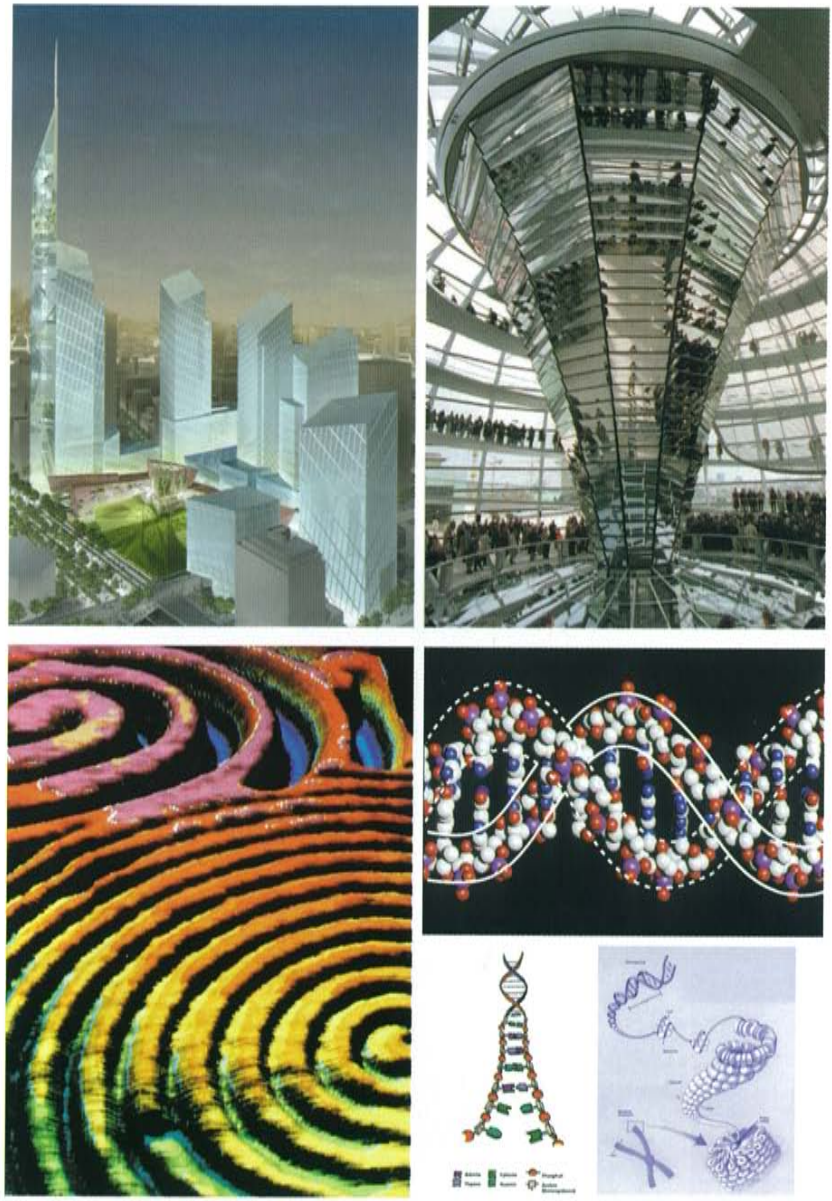
The bibliography is ordered according to the **events** which caused the person concerned to experience the crisis and to write about it (abbreviated as C = crisis event), as well as according to the **narrative angle** of each book (i.e. by which person or group of persons it was written).

Example C8^{III}: The crisis event is cancer **(C8)**
the report was written by the partner
of the person concerned (III)

Please turn to pages 138-39 for more details about the structure of the bibliography.


Symbols for the Narrative Angles of the Biographers I-V
Narrative Angles
Symbol
Women as Biographers
Men as Biographers
Men and Women together as Biographers
People affected
Parents
Adult Children
Siblings
Family
Partners
Experts
People affected together with Experts
since 1900
2034
© Erika Schuchardt


Overview: Structure of the Bibliography C1-C17
Until 2001
Critical Life Events
176
Disruptions to life – Causes of Crises
p. 184
C1
• Dependant women • Abortion • Unemployment • Family problems • Critical pregnancy • Mobbing • Sexual orientation • Diabetes • Epilepsy • Heart attack • Brain tumor • Coma • Locked-In syndrome • Migraines • Dermatitis • Kidney disease • Parkinson's • Stroke • Tourette-syndrome • Transplants
48
Sexual Abuse – Maltreatment
p. 195
C2
• Incest • Rape • Sexual exploitation
196
Dying – Death – Suicide – Grieving
p. 198
C3
39
Separation – Abandonment – Loneliness
p. 209
C4
• Consequences of adoption • Divorce • Children of divorced families • Abandoned children • Abandoned partners
489
Persecution – Imprisonment – Violence
p. 213
C5
• Holocaust • Concentration camps • Forced labor • Exile • War • Escape • Racism • Asylum-seeking • Misogynous traditions
Until 1980
Long-term Illnesses
54
Aids
p. 238
C6
21
Alzheimer's Disease
p. 242
C7
199
Cancer
p. 244
C8
27
Multiple Sclerosis
p. 254
C9
258
Psychological Disorders
p. 257
C10
• Anxiety • Autism • Borderline syndrome • Bulimia • Anorexia nervosa • Depression • Schizophrenia/Multiple personalities • Self-injury • Compulsive behaviour
154
Addiction
p. 271
C11
• Alcoholism • Drug dependence • Nicotine dependence • Substance dependence • Gambling
Until 1970
Disabilities/Special Abilities
92
Mental Handicaps
p. 280
C12
126
Physical Handicaps
p. 285
C13
9
Learning Disabilities
p. 292
C14
112
Sensory Handicaps
p. 293
C15
• Vision impairment • Blindness • Hearing impairment/Deafness • Deaf- and Blindness
17
Speech Impediments
p. 300
C16
17
Behavioural Disorders
p. 302
C17
© Erika Schuchardt
KRISEN-MANAGEMENT UND INTEGRATION
DIE 8.2003
Band 1: Biographische Erfahrung und wissenschaftliche Theorie
Band 2: Weiterbildung als Krisenverarbeitung
DVD • mit Jahrhundert-Bibliographien • mit AV Best Practice International



The Spiral - Symbol for the Journey of the Soul
Complementary spirals: A message and appeal
In stone, in glass, in molecules of life

Bibliography of Over 2000 Life-Stories on Working through Crises

From 1900 to the Present: Authors and Titles Arranged Alphabetically

This bibliography can be found on the WCC website at www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/pubs/why-me-bibliog.html. (It is published in full in the German edition of this book, on pages 305-50.)

After each book title you will find the letter C with a number (C1-C17) and a Roman numeral in superscript (I - V), indicating the crisis event and the narrative angle.

If you want to find more details on a particular book, please turn to the structure of the bibliography C1-C17 on page 139.

C1-C17 = crisis events < C 1 to C 17 >

I - V = narrative angle: I Person affected 

II Parent 

III Partner 

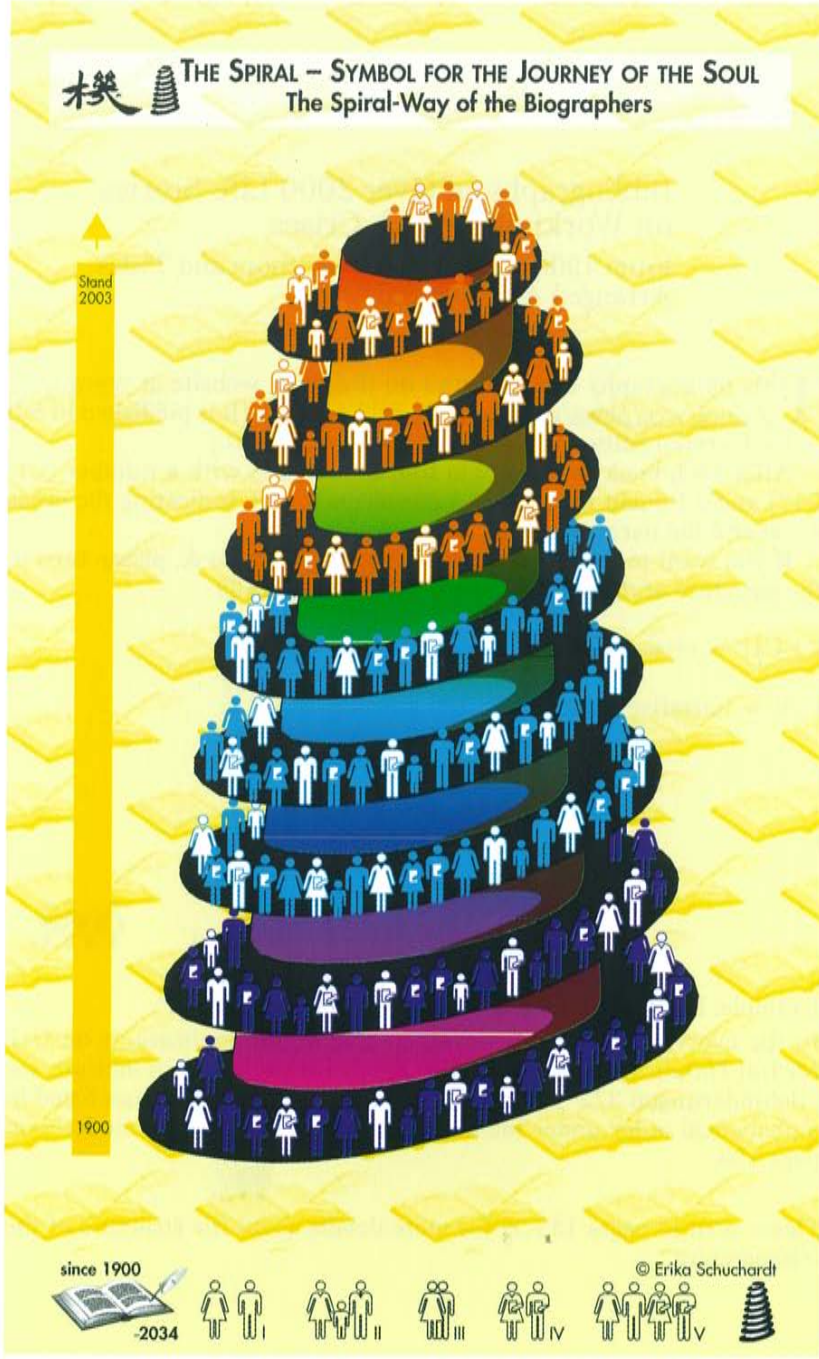
IV Expert 

V Person affected with expert 

Example: Pearl S. Buck *Beloved, Unfortunate Child.* – C12[II].

In the overview on p. 139 you will see that the publications on C12 *Mental Handicaps* are listed on p. 280ff. (of the German edition: see "Behinderungen 372"). You will then find the authors' names listed in alphabetical order under the narrative angle II = parents/mothers on page 138. 

Please turn to pages 138-39 for more details about the structure of the bibliography.


THE SPIRAL – SYMBOL FOR THE JOURNEY OF THE SOUL
The Spiral-Way of the Biographers
Stand 2003
1900
since 1900
-2034
I
II
III
IV
V
© Erika Schuchardt

Epilogue

The subject "suffering and faith" opens up a basic human situation that reaches far into our everyday world but that we largely tend to repress. It sets one thinking to discover how people in crisis situations see those around them, including the churches and their staff and volunteers. Rarely do the afflicted experience a kind of care that takes their struggles and their experiences seriously as full expressions of human nature. The ecumenical associations of churches present no exception to the findings of this critical investigation, as Erika Schuchardt reveals in the beginning of her first chapter. This is especially important in a time in which the feeling of helplessness at the sight of the undeserved suffering of countless people in the world becomes more and more distressing.

We believe that Erika Schuchardt has been remarkably successful in providing us with a guideline through her book, now also in English, "*Why me...? Learning to Live in Crises*". With the vivid biographies of people in crises – a kind of "*theology of life stories*" – and by the application of astute religious, psychological and educational insights, the author shows how people suffering from crisis, illness or disability can participate with dignity and wholeness in a free and truly human community. And on suffering itself there are new insights in this book that point the way and give us hope.

The cry in this book is loud and clear. The churches, and the ecumenical movement, must respond. They will respond.

Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
Lutheran World Federation

Konrad Raiser
General Secretary
World Council of Churches

Geneva, 2001

"Good-bye," said the fox. "And now here is my secret, a very simple secret. It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

"It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important."

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Dear Reader,

Before you close this book I'd like to give you the message of the Little Prince to take with you on your way. In the language of the fairytale it tells us what is important. To see with the eyes of your heart means to recognise the other, with whatever he needs. This is the perfect description of felicitous care.

And the second part of the message? In studying more than 2,000 biographies, I have found that telling their story helps many people powerfully in coping with their life crisis. Perhaps you too have dived into this or that biography – out of interest or your own suffering – and perhaps in reading it you feel personally addressed, with your own experience. Perhaps you feel affirmed, disturbed or challenged. Perhaps you discovered in your own life also the interweaving of preservation and support, as explained in this book in the final section of chapter 5. Then I'd like to encourage you in your own work of remembering. Your story is like the rose in the fairytale: it is important precisely because it is your story which you dig up, spread out for display, and hold on to. Tell your story! Tell it, in dialogue with your partner, with the help of notepaper, a diary, a cassette recorder or a computer.

Trust that there are people who are prepared to listen. I am one of them. If you wish, we may keep in touch.

Spring 2001/2005

On that note, God bless!
Yours
Erika Schuchardt

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Germany
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www.prof-schuchardt.de

"This is an extraordinary book that every one of us should give ourselves as a present... Every page is a precious pearl..., enriching, indispensable..., for meditation, discussion, research, teaching and for life in general..."
Prof. Dr Aalen Leenderts, Oslo, Norway

"An exciting and provocative read... From whichever angle you approach the book, it affects your life, opens up new dimensions of understanding and new methods in practice... Is there anything else one could ask for?"
Prof. Dr Ulrich Becker, former staff member of the WCC, Geneva, Switzerland

"Rarely have I felt that the author of a book has so much to give and understands me so well... I was surprised to see my life and the experiences of many a parent portrayed so authentically..."
W. Ruprecht, mother of an affected child

"For medicine, theology and education, for counselling, diaconal ministry, youth work and adult education, Erika Schuchardt's book is a challenge – for the affected and for us all it is of personal help, altogether a work for which one should be grateful."
Prof. Dr Karl E. Nipkow, University of Tübingen, Germany

"Erika Schuchardt frames her 'questions for theology' such that theology has to return to the suffering... This book is full of experience and insight. It points to a more human society."
Prof. Dr Jürgen Moltmann, University of Tübingen, Germany

"I have found your book an insightful, even prophetic, statement about pastoral ministry... It is an open door and invitation to such companionship."
Rev. Dr Arie R. Brouwer, former general secretary, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, New York, USA

"More than any I have ever read, this book probes into suffering, fear, loneliness, reaction. Few books haunt me like this one... If this book were in every pastor's library, our congregations would have the wisdom and warmth of a newfound ministry."
Alvin N. Rogness, president, LTS, St Paul/Minneapolis, USA

Why Me?

Learning to Live in Crises

Erika Schuchardt

People affected by crises describe their successful – or unsuccessful – attempts at living with their crises, their struggles with God and the people around them, and their experiences with professional support and counselling in fellowship.

By analysing over 2000 life-histories covering a century, and through her decades of experience in crisis counselling, the author has discovered a way to work through crisis which she describes here – illustrated by the image of the ascending spiral. She also draws our attention to people who support others in their crises and are themselves changed in the process, becoming able to live their lives creatively and actively.

Erika Schuchardt is professor of philosophy at the University of Hanover, Germany.

The German edition of Why Me? *has been awarded the Literaturpreis, the German literary prize designated by publishers of religious books.*

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