

# LIFE DYNAMICS AND FIVE MASTER IMAGES

(RS-I in a Nutshell)

What you and I know about life is that that Life is a struggle. It is both awesome upagainstness and fascinating possibility. We tend to forget one or the other of those at various times. And so there is need for some kind of rock-bottom story about life to use as a constant reminder of The Way Life Is.

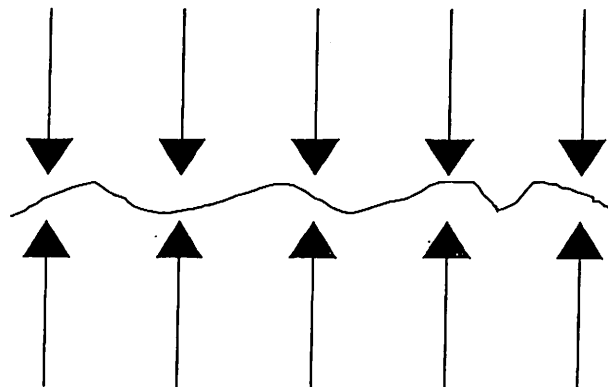
The Ecumenical Institute / Institute of Cultural Affairs out of its research developed a course featuring such a rock-bottom story. We called it RS-I. It attempted to say as clearly and forcefully as possible what life is like, how life comes to us, how we can relate meaningfully to life, and why we are on this earth. Although we do not use these learnings directly in facilitation, they keep on bleeding through in lecturesses, short courses and one-line zingers, as well as the method itself.

Several people have sensed that there is something deeper behind the methods, and suggested we pull back the curtain. That is what we plan to do. Formerly it took a weekend, 44 hours, to stage this course. It will now be done, at least in outline, in two hours.

If you wanted to relate this more directly to facilitation, I guess we would have to say that the five images we'll talk about in laying out this rock-bottom story are really describing the LIFE STANCE of the ICA facilitator. You will have to make up your own mind on whether this is the way you experience life, and whether this is the life stance, that, as a facilitator, you wish to adopt. No one can do that for you. We're going to get these five images up front here, say a word about each and do a bit of grounding in our own lives.

## I. THE BIG SQUEEZE

Life comes to us both as dread and fascination, as OH NO! And OH YES! That's just the way life is. Sigmund Freud or someone like him, described the human situation this way: "Life is an infinite passion; the problem is that there is no infinite satisfaction." There, now, How do you deal with that?!



This first image is often called THE BIG SQUEEZE. It's a symbolic description of

the life dynamic that every human being encounters. The top arrows hold the 'Drivens' in life related to knowing, doing and being. Consciously or unconsciously, every human being is driven by care: care about the sustenance of life, about knowledge of life, and about living life.

The bottom arrows stand for the limits of life, the finiteness of all of life that means that sustenance is never satisfied, knowledge is cut off, deeds are not completed or miscarried, and longing for perfection is never realized. There seems to be a kind of enigmatic power that makes a comedy of all our care for the morrow, that brings to an end all our great experiences, that casts love into final solitude, that calls us out of life just as we are getting somewhere, and is always throwing us into the struggle between self-assertion and duty.

Where are we in this diagram?

What do we say when we realize we are there?

On your grocery list, you figure you've thought of everything and ...

You have put n a great party, and you are about to congratulate yourself on how well it is going, when...

Your strategic planning is going along just as you planned, when suddenly...

Others???

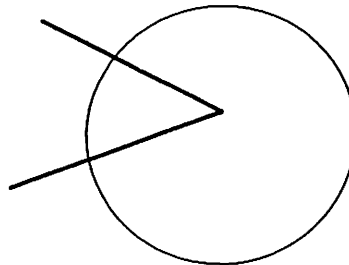
We laugh at this, but we all know that when it's happening to us, we experience real angst.

What does a truck driver call this?

The big question here is not whether or not this is the way life is?! Anyone who is half aware, knows it is this way. The really big question is how we relate to it: that is, how we name it? We all know people who say: 'Life is a bitch and then you die!' We can relate to the crunch as cynics, or romantics, or as hose who dare to affirm the Big Squeeze as life-giving. But what does it take to affirm life this way?

## II. THE INTRUSION

Every human being is an illusion-maker. We flee from the radical insecurity of life by manufacturing illusions. Illusions about ourselves and the universe that give us a way to deal with the dread of being alive.



The intrusion is an occasion in which reality destroys the picture of our self and the universe that we have created, and reveals the actual situation to which we must respond. The intrusion is not an idea, but an event in the middle of everyday life that calls one's whole life perspective into question and throws you into a struggle to come to terms with it -- either to deny its relevance or to create a new life out of the new situation.

There is a second part of this dynamic in the form of a word about life, a word of life. It is a word of possibility that can speak to you in the midst of this struggle you are in.

ALL IS  
GOOD

THE PAST  
IS TOTALLY  
APPROVED

THE FUTURE  
IS OPEN

MY LIFE  
IS RECEIVED  
BY THE UNIVERSE

**This is an in-spite-of Word. Not Pollyanna!**  
In spite of the pain and tragedy of life, life is good just as it is.  
In spite of my bag full of neuroses and faults, I am received.  
In spite of all the pain I have brought to others in the past,  
and my own foul-ups, that past is approved.  
And the past of the whole human race in spite of .....

And in spite of all the problems and crises and bad news,  
and my own fears, the future is wide open.

**ALL IS POSSIBLE.**

This is a scandalous word and it has its own set of dynamics.

The two dynamics of intrusion and word only achieve their full impact when one dies to all previous understandings of life and the self and rise up to live the new understanding and style that goes with it. This is a death and resurrection. It is the stuff of change and transformation.

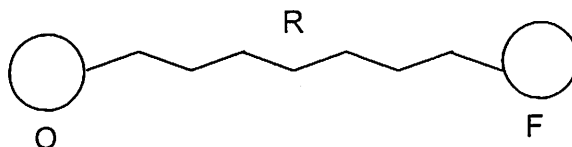
**PAUSE.**

The impact of this word is to destroy all excuses for escape from the real situation and releases the possibility of creative engagement in what was previously seen as an impossible situation.

### III. THE TENSION

This symbol reflects the two poles of obedience and freedom. On the one hand we show up as obligated human beings in a network of duties and obligations, all crying for our attention. On the other hand we are free human beings, who decide for ourselves what is right and dare to act without support. The figure shows that both are connected and are in tension with each other.

If, to make decisions easier, we just pick one of them and ignore the other, we cut off the tension and become either a slave to duty (O) or an irresponsible floater who does exactly what she likes and to hell with everybody else.



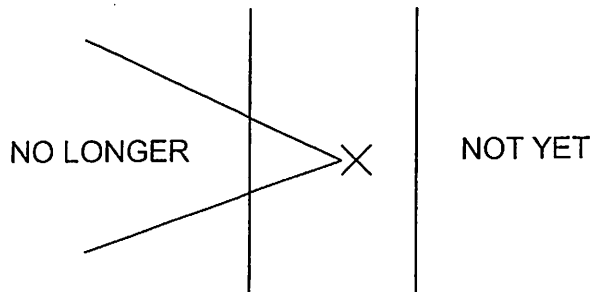
The guide to which we turn is the concept of **RESPONSIBILITY** to world, self and neighbor, and the coming generations. It is Responsibility which holds the tension between freedom and obedience.

When faced with a tough decision, the freely obedient one asks, "What does it mean to decide and act with responsibility in and for this situation?"

In our time we are clear that right and wrong are relative terms, and we refer to the twilight of good and evil. Decisions are made in ambiguity, in not knowing whether the decision is right or wrong, only that it is necessary. Who says it is necessary? I say so! It is I myself who must observe, judge, weigh up, decide and then act. Responsibility to all of life provides the context for the decision which must then be surrendered to history for judgment.

### IV. THE WEDGEBLADE

The image of the Wedgeblade is about creating the future. It shows where the future is built -- between the No Longer and the Not-Yet. Back behind the No Longer are the established structures of society that care for people more or less adequately. That is the territory of the Establishment. Back there everyone knows what is right and wrong, and how things are done. And it is the land of the Disestablishment who spend their time telling the Establishment what is wrong with the present structures.



Out beyond this line is the Not Yet ---the unknown future and the future generations of people who will inherit the kind of society that we create. In between these two lines is "No Man's Land"; out here you tend to get shot at by both sides, both the Establishment and the Disestablishment. The Wedge is the direction history seems to be moving in.

Between the No Longer and the Not Yet are self-conscious people with selfhood who observe the trends of the times, see which way history is trying to go, have a model and work together to get it into history. The "X" holds the commitment, the bodies on the line, laying down their lives to create the necessary future. And the deed of building the future is done on behalf of all those who do not choose this path, and on behalf of the future generations.

These people have always existed in history. They are "Those Who Care"; Hermann Hesse referred to them as "The League"; Kenneth Bolding called them "The Invisible College". They are people committed to the future; they receive none of society's rewards; no brownie points; they prefer a low profile over publicity. And the decision they have made to play this role is a very solitary one. No one else can make it for you. There is, however, a strange peace and joy that comes to those who expend themselves for the sake of the future.

We believe these are universal dynamics of life. Different traditions give them different names. The Christian tradition refers to them as God, Christ (Event and Word), Holy Spirit and Church. The Hindu tradition: Brahman, Shiva, Vishnu and Ashram. The Aztecs: Quetzalcoatl.

### Two Questions:

Where did you identify with any of these images?

How are these images related to, or helpful in, the task of facilitation?

# THE CRISIS OF FAITH

by  
Rudolf Bultmann

**#1** When we speak of a 'crisis of faith', we mean something different from the crisis in morals, for example in reliability and loyalty, or in political ideology and respect for the laws; indeed we mean something other than a crisis in religion. For in all these instances the crisis is one of human attitude and human character, and is concerned with the problem of a particular age or generation -that is, with a sociological phenomenon. Although faith is connected with morality and religion, and is always at the same time a human attitude, it is nevertheless differentiated from them by its being a particular faith, faith in an up-againstness, in something beyond mankind. Faith is not religiosity, not a disposition of the soul to devotion, gratitude, reverence and awe of the world and of life as a whole. On the contrary, it understands the world and life in the light of a reality lying beyond them, of a power lying beyond them, which is their origin and their Lord - i.e., God. A crisis of faith therefore arises when their supramundane reality has been called in question.

**#2** The situation is exactly the same as in relation of man to man, to which indeed also we apply the term 'faith' - for the friend or the lover has faith in the other person. Faith here does not mean an attitude of love - for that can persist even when faith wavers or collapses. Nor does it mean an attribute of character, for that can also exist before and after love. But it is faith in the particular of the other person, who is recognized as such in just this faith - giving love. Such faith undergoes a crisis when it is established that the other person is not what faith in him made him appear to be.

**#3** To speak, therefore, of a crisis of faith in the sphere of religion does not mean that we are referring at all to a crisis in religion or religiosity, as, for example, in regard to their being shaken by events in the history of the world or of the mind - or to their awakening under the influence of these factors. Nor does it mean that we are referring to indifference in regard to religion, but rather to the crisis of a particular faith. For us there is point only in speaking about the crisis of our own Christian faith.

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**#4** What then is this Christian faith, the crisis of which is our concern? What is that supramundane reality which is the object of Christian faith? What is God in the Christian sense?

**#12** It is God who makes man finite, and who makes a comedy of man's care, who allows his longing to miscarry, who casts him into solitude, who sets a terminus to his knowing and doing, who calls him to duty, and who gives the guilty over to torment. And yet at the same time it is God who forces man into life and drives him into care; who puts longing and the desire to love in his heart; who gives him thoughts and strength for his work, and who places him in the eternal struggle between self-assertion and duty. God is the enigmatic power beyond time, yet master of the temporal: beyond being, yet working in it.

# YOU ARE ACCEPTED

by  
Paul Tillich

"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound," says Paul in the same letter in which he describes the unimaginable power of separation and self-destruction within society and the individual soul. He does not say these words because sentimental interests demand a happy ending for everything tragic. He says them because they describe the most overwhelming and determining experience of his life. In the picture of Jesus as the Christ, which appeared to him at the moment of his greatest separation from other men, from himself and God, he found himself accepted in spite of his being rejected. And when he found that he was accepted, he was able to accept himself and to be reconciled to others. The moment in which grace struck him and overwhelmed him, he was reunited with that to which he belonged, and from which he was estranged in utter strangeness. Do we know what it means to be struck by grace? It does not mean that we suddenly believe that God exists, or that Jesus is the Saviour, or that the Bible contains the truth. To believe that something is is almost contrary to the meaning of grace. Furthermore, grace does not mean simply that we are making progress in our moral self-control, in our fight against special faults, and in our relationships to men and to society. Moral progress may be a fruit of grace; but it is not grace itself, and it can even prevent us from receiving grace. For there is too often a graceless acceptance of Christian doctrines and a graceless battle against the structures of evil in our personalities. Such a graceless relation to God may lead us by necessity either to arrogance or to despair. It would be better to refuse God and the Christ and the Bible than to accept them without grace. For if we accept without grace, we do so in the state of separation, and can only succeed in deepening the separation. We cannot transform our lives, unless we allow them to be transformed by that stroke of grace. It happens; or it does not happen. And certainly it does not happen if we try to force it upon ourselves, just as it shall not happen so long as we think, in our self-complacency, that we have no need of it. Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual, because we have violated another life, a life which we loved, or from which we were estranged. It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "You are accepted. You are accepted, accepted by that which is greater than you, and the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now; perhaps you will find it later. Do not try to do anything now; perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything; do not perform anything; do not intend anything. Simply accept the fact that you are accepted!" If that happens to us, we experience grace. After such an experience we may not be better than before, and we may not believe more than before. But everything is transformed. In that moment, grace conquers sin, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement. And nothing is demanded of this experience, no religious or moral or intellectual presupposition, nothing but acceptance.

# FREEDOM

by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The responsible man acts in the freedom of his own self, without the support of men, circumstances, or principles, but with a due consideration for the given human and general conditions and for the relevant questions of principle. The proof of his freedom is the fact that nothing can answer for him, nothing can exonerate him, except his own deed and his own self. It is he himself who must observe, judge, weigh up, decide and act. It is man himself who must examine the motives, the prospects, the value and the purpose of his action. But neither the purity of the motivation, nor the opportune circumstances, nor the value, nor the significant purpose of an intended undertaking can become the governing law of his action, a law to which he can withdraw, to which he can appeal as an authority, and by which he can be exculpated and acquitted. For in that case he would no longer be truly free. The action of the responsible man is performed in the obligation which alone gives freedom and which gives entire freedom, the obligation to God and to our neighbor as they confront us in Jesus Christ. At the same time it is performed wholly within the domain of relativity, wholly in the twilight which the historical situation spreads over good and evil; it is performed in the midst of innumerable perspectives in which every given phenomenon appears. It has not to decide simply between right and wrong and between good and evil, but between right and right and between wrong and wrong. As Aeschylus said, "right strives with right." Precisely in this respect responsible action is a free venture; it is not justified by any law; it is performed without any claim to a valid self-justification, and therefore also without any claim to an ultimate valid knowledge of good and evil. Good, as what is responsible, is performed in ignorance of good and in the surrender to God of the deed which has become necessary and which is nevertheless, or for that very reason, free; for it is God who sees the heart, who weighs up the deed, and who directs the course of history.

With this there is disclosed to us a deep secret of history in general. The man who acts in the freedom of his own most personal responsibility is precisely the man who sees his action finally committed to the guidance of God. The free deed knows itself in the end as the deed of God; the decision knows itself as guidance; the free venture knows itself as divine necessity. It is in the free abandonment of knowledge of his own good that man performs the good of God. It is only from this last point of view that one can speak of good in historical action. We shall have to take up these considerations again later at the point at which we have left off.



# THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CHURCH FOR SOCIETY

by

H. Richard Niebuhr

## The Church as social pioneer

Finally, the social responsibility of the Church needs to be described as that of the pioneer. The Church is that part of the human community which responds first to God-in-Christ and Christ-in-God. It is the sensitive and responsive part in every society and mankind as a whole. It is that group which hears the Word of God, which sees His judgments, which has the vision of the resurrection. In its relations with God it is the pioneer part of society that responds to God on behalf of the whole society, somewhat, we may say, as science is the pioneer in responding to pattern or rationality in experience and as artists are the pioneers in responding to beauty. This sort of social responsibility may be illustrated by reference to the Hebrew people and the prophetic remnant. The Israelites, as the major prophets ultimately came to see, had been chosen by God to lead all nations to Him. It was that part of the human race which pioneered in understanding the vanity of idol worship and in obeying the law of brother-love. Hence in it all nations were eventually to be blessed. The idea of representational responsibility is illustrated particularly by Jesus Christ. As has often been pointed out by theology, from New Testament times onward, he is the first-born of many brothers not only in resurrection but in rendering obedience to God. His obedience was a sort of pioneering and representative obedience; he obeyed on behalf of men, and so showed what men could do and drew forth a divine response in turn toward all the men he represented. He discerned the divine mercy and relied upon it as representing men and pioneering for them.

This thought of pioneering or representational responsibility has been somewhat obscured during the long centuries of individualist overemphasis. Its expression in the legal terms of traditional theology is strange and often meaningless to modern ears. Yet with our understanding of the way that life is involved with life, of the manner in which self and society are bound together, of the way in which small groups within a nation act for the whole, it seems that we must move toward a conception similar to the Hebraic and medieval one.

In this representational sense the Church is that part of human society, and that element in each particular society, which moves toward God, which as the priest acting for all men worships Him, which believes and trusts in Him on behalf of all, which is the first to obey Him when it becomes aware of a new aspect of His will. Human society in all of its divisions and aspects does not believe. Its institutions are based on unbelief, on lack of confidence in the Lord of heaven and earth. But the Church has conceived faith in God and moves in the spirit of that trust as the hopeful and obedient part of society.