The Search for Meaning in Grief

A Comparison of Victor Frankl's *Search For Meaning* with Douglas Hall's *Theology of the Cross*, and their Implications for Grief Ministry

by

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Abstract

This paper addresses the *Search For Meaning in Grief*, by attempting to examine two theoretical perspectives: Victor Frankl's *Search for Meaning* and Douglas Hall's *Theology of the Cross*. These two models serve as paradigms for different polarities, in critically reflecting upon the grief experience. By exploring the psycho-therapeutic and theological issues raised by both Frankl and Hall, weaknesses and deficiencies in one are effectively addressed by the other, resulting in a more holistic model for grief ministry.

I begin by exploring the perspective of Victor Frankl where such topics as the *freedom of the will*, the *will to meaning*, the *discovery of meaning*, as well as the *meaning of love* and *suffering* are covered.

The discussion on Douglas Hall attempts to outline his contextual theology in addressing the *search for meaning*. I examine his *theology of the Cross* as well as his *Christology* as they relate to suffering in grief. His model serves as a particular demonstration of *God with us* by focussing upon Divine self-identification and present care with those who grieve.

The purpose of this study is to reflect upon and critique these two sources, using them to inform pastoral practice. The aim, in this process, is to draw conclusions in order to become a more effective pastoral agent to those who grieve.

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So much of our culture attempts to deny loss and its ensuing grief. And yet, much of my professional life in police work and later in ordained ministry has involved ministering to people in the midst of real crises and grief. It is because of this exposure, that I have become more and more curious about the dynamic between bereavement and spirituality. Our cultural response is often to relegate pain to the private and personal realm of understanding. Grief, in predominant Western thinking, is generally seen as something "you get over". Our language about grief confirms this through the frequent use of statements such as ~ "How are you doing after your loss? Don't worry. Things will get back to normal in no time".

The purpose of this project is to investigate, in a hermeneutical method, the *search for meaning in grief*. I will attempt to do this by examining two theoretical perspectives: Victor Frankl's *Search for Meaning/Logotherapy* (emphasizing creative potential and future hope) and Douglas Hall's *Theology of the Cross* (emphasizing comfort and consolation). These two theorists, although very different in their philosophical/theological emphasis, in dialogue with each other, can effectively address weaknesses in the other, and serve as paradigms for two different polarities in understanding the grief process. Through this study, I will attempt to reframe the *search for meaning in grief* and critically reflect upon and challenge my own assumptions, and thus, learn to be a more effective pastoral agent to those I encounter in the midst of grief, supporting, upholding, encouraging and fostering hope.

Among the various roles clergy are called upon to fulfil is the role of pastoral counsellor. Although it is safe to say that most clergy don't have the same degree of expertise as trained

therapists (and it is for this reason that clergy need to gain awareness of these issues and a knowledge of their own limitations), they are, however, generally well trained in the resources of Scripture and the traditions of the Church. Through these strengths, they are often called upon to assist people in their discovery of meaning, particularly when they are grieving.

A. Definition of Terms

i) Inclusive Language: In the writings of Victor Frankl, and to a lesser degree Douglas Hall, there is the dated inclusive use of male pronouns in reference to humanity. I recognize that this convention is no longer acceptable in English usage, so in my quotations from both Frankl and Hall, I use brackets around their use of male pronouns, to signify that this language applies to all people.

ii) Loss and Grief: The kernel of this discussion will be applicable to a variety of losses including the more serious aspects of bereavement. Physical death is the culmination of a life full of many deaths or losses. Life equals relationship, where death is separation. The experience of death is perhaps the most universal human experience. In the Greek New Testament, the word *apollumi* is used by Jesus to refer to death. This term has a wider content than the mere death of the body, which is *nekros*. This is an important and yet subtle differentiation, reminding us that in life, we experience many deaths and many losses.

When people are confronted by loss, a sense of order and purpose is disrupted and a

search for meaning begins. Loss in this paper is defined in its broadest sense, as the loss of someone or something which is precious. Loss is often spoken about in its more severe manifestations, but it is recognized that all losses are included in this definition. The stress from loss often causes the individual to question his/her assumed values, sense of order, and the way he/she perceives the character and nature of God. This process of searching for meaning is a journey synonymous with life, because in life, we continually learn, reconsider and reshape what we may have previously held to be certain.

Often people will impute an overall purpose to why death or loss happen in the first place. In an attempt to put order into chaos, many will say such one-liners as, "things always happen for a reason". Such statements display an extreme view of God's sovereignty that leads to a belief of God in absolute control, overriding human free-will and orchestrating calamity. It is an assumption in this paper that God is not pernicious. The created order has a fallen nature to it and things are simply not perfect. Recognizing these realities, Hall's *theology of the Cross* affirms that God joins us in our human suffering (1976). Frankl's model *logotherapy* affirms that even in the midst of this suffering and loss, there are creative possibilities both in that moment and in the future. This creativity should not be viewed exclusively in terms of "task" but rather as an orientation or attitude, which Frankl maintains is truly transforming. Even though we encounter grief and loss, there is within that experience, the hope of positive creativity for the future (1959).

iii) Spirituality: Part of being fully human is being open to the spiritual dimensions of life. Frankl rightly emphasizes that humankind has this spiritual dimension which he describes as

conscious, pre-conscious and sub-conscious (1955). Human beings are spiritually created and have within them both a capacity and a need to be in relationship. This capacity can be non-conscious and, although a person can completely disregard the possibility of a divine relationship, God nevertheless is active and searches them out even if they are not aware of this prevenient grace. In other words, people experience spiritual questions, needs and desires even if they are not consciously aware of being engaged in that process.

iv) Meaning and Hope: According to Frankl, the *search for meaning* is a primary process in life and not a secondary result of attempting to explain instinctive drives. Meaning is not only derived from experience, but something that can confront experience. Meaning in our lives, therefore, is not something which is invented by ourselves but rather something that we discover and can come to a deeper understanding of, through experience. Meaning making is important for Frankl because meaning is what will motivate people to endure suffering with a sense of hope.

Hall derives his theology of hope from his *theology of the Cross*. He maintains that hope is derived from the Incarnation and not from what Frankl calls "meaning-making". Hope, then, is not the result of human activity but rather the Divine activity of self-identification with human suffering. Therefore, entering into the experience of grief would be essential in finding the risen Jesus who is present to those who suffer (Vanier, 1988).

During his time in a concentration camp in World War II, Frankl found that those who had a sense of meaning in their lives were more apt to survive. He went on to reject the narrow

psychology of his day which focussed only on social transaction and did not try to deal effectively with the need for meaning as a motivation.

B. Conclusion

All death is experienced as loss in that someone or something that has given a sense of meaning and definition has been taken away. Our sense of self is therefore challenged in relation to significant others, social systems and to God. The experience of loss has a way of opening basic questions of meaning to the survivor like, "Why is this happening to me?", "Where is God in the midst of this?", and "If God is so good, why do I hurt so badly?" Loss is a universal experience, but it is manifested and experienced by each individual very personally. The grief experience and how one processes that grief will be uniquely contextual, in relation to a variety of variables such as personality, experience, family of origin, religious traditions, cultural contexts and economic realities. Loss has a way of engaging and triggering us on all of these levels and ultimately causes us to question previously held assumptions. We feel loss as an emotional and psychological shock and its fallout can often produce social, economic, personal and spiritual changes.

What about human relationships to God? What about the spiritual dimensions of loss? How can individuals and families move through this experience in such a way as to learn new things about self, each other and about God? How does the experience of loss affirm or correct our notion of what really matters? What will hold as having ultimate meaning? How can pastoral

care during bereavement bring a person and a family into a closer, deeper relationship with God, with self, and with others in the relational system?

Chapter One ~ Victor Frankl: Meaning and Meaning-Making

He who has a why to live can bear almost any how.
Nietzsche

During my initial research for this project, it was suggested that I might read some Victor Frankl and apply some of my findings to the *search for meaning in grief*. I was overwhelmed by his story and the experience he went through while a prisoner at Auschwhitz. I could see applications of his model, not only to therapeutic relationships, but also to theological reflection. Although Frankl tends to downplay a theological consciousness within his model, it is very much there. In applying Frankl to a purely non-theological *search for meaning*, one can only go so far. It is Frankl's model as applied within the context of Christian theology that interests me most.

According to Victor Frankl, the capacity for meaning-making is the most fundamental and basic element of our humanity. Frankl focusses his attention on two aspects of human nature ~ the freedom to will, and the will to meaning (1969). These two pillars affect the way one would apply Frankl in ministry to grieving persons. Frankl is highly positive with a high regard for human free-will and potential, regardless of the conditions in which persons may find themselves. It is this positive view of free-will that forms the basis for his sense of agency in people; the creative possibilities in the present and future for every person. Applying Frankl to grief ministry is positive overall, but it does have some limitations which can be effectively addressed by the use of Hall's *theology of the Cross*. I will begin by outlining the strengths of Frankl's model.

A. Freedom of the Will

For Frankl, what is basic to human nature is free-will. Any approach to therapy and to ministry (hermeneutically), that does not begin with a respect for the person's freedom, will de-humanize and abuse that person. Stemming from this paramount view of free-will, Frankl disputed the prevailing wisdom of his time that individuals are primarily determined by psychological "instincts", "drives" or even their "social contexts". This doesn't mean that Frankl sees people as free from these influences since "(man's) freedom is no freedom from conditions but rather the freedom to take a stand on whatever conditions might confront (him)" (1969, p. 16). Frankl contends that human beings are free and, therefore, responsible for how they respond to conditions, and are ultimately capable of discovering and fulfilling meaning. Frankl suggests that North American society has lost this important balance between freedom and responsibility. "That is why I recommend that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast be supplemented by a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast" (Frankl, 1959, p. 109). The potential for the present and the future is rooted in a sense of freedom and responsibility.

Although not a theologian, Frankl uses categories applicable to theology . Nevertheless, in applying freedom of the will to the grief experience, Frankl would hold that in the midst of pain and suffering, there is still the potential and possibility for growth, creativity and hope for the future.

i) Capacity for Self-Detachment: Frankl bases freedom of the will upon what he refers to as the human capacity for "self-detachment", which he observed in fellow prisoners in concentration camps during World War II. It was in places like Auschwitz that Frankl witnessed people who, despite horrible conditions, were able to remain objective about their circumstances, displaying both humour and heroism. In these camps, Frankl formed his view around the human capacity to be "free" in spite of physical and psychological conditions that many believe could "determine" a person's character, attitudes, and behaviour. Reflecting on his experience, Frankl formed his belief that a capacity for self-detachment from one's circumstances is crucial in exercising human free-will. In this sense, Frankl sees that, although people may suffer, within that suffering, there are (redemptive) possibilities for both the present and the future.

For Frankl, the sense of human "freedom" comes from a person's willingness to be responsible for his or her attitudes and responses to situations in which they find themselves. This is key in understanding how to apply Frankl to grief ministry. He would see a possibility while descending into the experience of grief, to transcend the conditions of grief. This is not to say that this transition is easy, or ever complete, or even that people don't need time to grieve, but rather that there is a possibility for growth and re-engagement over time.

ii) The Noological Dimension: This capacity for self-detachment demonstrates that there is a dimension of the self which makes it possible to rise above one's circumstances. This is what Frankl calls the *Noological Dimension.* People exercise this dimension by standing back and reflecting upon themselves and their experience. The *Noological Dimension* gives people the

capacity for self-detachment and it is this capacity that makes freedom, responsibility and ultimately the discovery of meaning possible. The *Noological Dimension* is what makes people truly human.

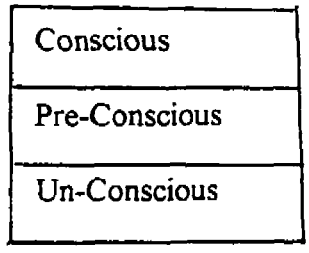
Sigmund Freud held that the conscious and unconscious aspects of a person are primarily important. The unconscious contains repressed drives, instincts and impulses. The task in therapy then, is to reclaim these repressed impulses. In Freudian thinking, there is communication from the conscious to the unconscious parts of the psyche. Frankl suggests that the real question is whether something arises from the psychological-biological dimension, or from the *Noological Dimension*. "Authentic existence is present where a self is deciding for (himself), not where the id is driving (him)" (Frankl, 1973, p 27). In therapy or in ministering within the grief process, one should be attentive to this *Noological* process in order for understanding and growth to happen.

When I read Frankl, I got the sense that he had somehow inherited "muscular Christianity" with its emphasis on "doing" and "overcoming". But upon closer examination, Frankl is clearly more concerned with attitude than behaviour. Frankl doesn't see his *Noological Dimension* so much as an instrument to lay blame at the feet of victims or those who suffer, but rather as a model of restoring freedom, dignity and creative potential. Applying Frankl to grief ministry has to be done selectively and with sensitivity. Over time, there is the possibility for growth through a grief experience, but this potential should never become the dominant motivation to those who walk with the grieving. People, particularly in the beginning stages of grief, need to be supported and comforted.

Although Frankl accepted the psycho-therapeutic wisdom of his day with its emphasis on drive or actualization theory, he warned against thinking strictly in these terms because, in doing so, one can make a misrepresented assessment. For this reason, he adapts three models developed by Max Scheler which progressively represent truer pictures of human wholeness.

Frankl's "Models of Human Wholeness"

I



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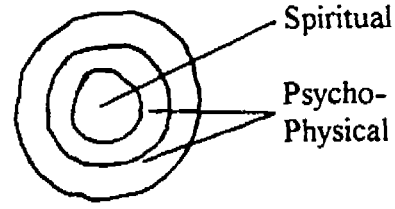

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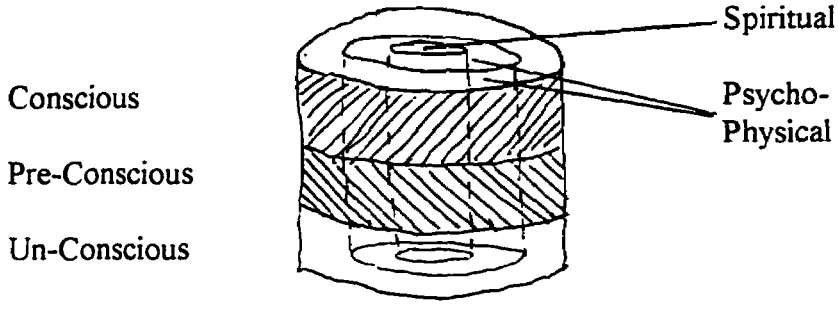

[From: The Unconscious God. Frankl, 1975, p. 29]

In Frankl's opinion, Model I misses the spiritual dimension of human beings entirely. Model II is an improvement in that the "who" of what the person is (ie. spiritual centre), is surrounded by the psycho-physical layers. As Frankl puts it " ... the person 'has' a psycho-physical overlay, whereas the person 'is' spiritual" (Frankl, 1975, p. 28). It is only when these 'layers' are gathered around the spiritual centre, as in Model III that integration and wholeness takes place.

The spiritual element, then, is at the very core of a human existence. It permeates all other aspects of life surrounded by the psycho-physical. The core and its layers extend through the levels of conscious, preconscious and unconscious. Understanding then, can be conscious, preconscious, and unconscious. This explains Frankl's belief that there is a spiritual unconscious. Theologically, this is an important point as it affirms that, although a person may not think that they have an orientation toward spiritual matters, it is something that is nevertheless part of what it means to be innately human. Applying this principle to grief ministry, the one ministering may notice a heightened sensitivity toward God on the part of the bereaved, even though the bereaved person may not be aware of it much less able to articulate it.

B. The Will To Meaning

i) Self-Transcendence: Another pillar of Frankl's understanding of what it means to be human is what he calls the ***will to meaning***. "What I call the 'will to meaning' could be defined as the basic striving of (man) to find and fulfil meaning and purpose" (Frankl, 1969, p. 35). The *will*

to meaning happens because of our uniquely human capacity for self-transcendence. This is unique because, unlike animals who are bound by their environment and instincts, humans have the ability to self-transcend. Self-transcendence is the ability to transcend oneself toward others or toward meaning. "Thus, human existence...at least as long as it has not been neurotically distorted ...is always directed to something, or someone, other than itself...be it a meaning to fulfill, or another human being to encounter lovingly" (Frankl, 1973, p. 78). People of faith would understand this portion of human identity as able to transcend toward God and toward vocation. It is this element that can give a sense of meaning or purpose, even when he/she is enduring horrible conditions. To paraphrase Frankl, even in the midst of grief and sorrow, there is hope.

Frankl holds that what is basic to being human is not a Freudian notion of drives and instincts, but rather the motivation to chose against conditions, even in the midst of grief, loss and suffering. It is this capacity that calls us forward and helps us to consider the possibility of future creativity and meaning. This is an important practical application to those who mourn because, although there is pain in loss, there is also a future full of possibilities and potentialities present in the midst of the pain. These possibilities will become more recognized and dominant in the grief process over time.

ii) Response to Other Motivation Theories: Frankl contrasts the *will to meaning* with three motivation theories which he views as dehumanizing and reductionistic ~ Freud's *pleasure* or *homeostatic principle*, Adler's *status principle*, and Maslow's principle of *self-actualization*.

Frankl maintains that pleasure, power, and self-actualization do not ultimately motivate because they are not goals at all, but rather by-products of, or the means to meaning.

Freud maintains that an individual is motivated by the need to lower inner tension to maintain "an inner equilibrium which is called *homeostasis*" (Frankl, 1973, p. 77). In other words, Freud sees human beings as entirely motivated by a desire to reduce tension, unpleasant feelings and to satisfy needs, drives and instincts. Frankl agrees that these desires are present but argues that these things, in and of themselves, do not *determine* human behaviour.

Seeing people as motivated entirely by these forces is dehumanizing, according to Frankl. It results in the "levelling of all potential human aims," and it "devaluates every genuine moral impulse in (man.)" (Frankl, 1955, p. 36). It reduces acts of human kindness, bravery, and love to merely a desire to maintain *homeostasis*. Frankl holds that Freud's *pleasure principle* can't stand as a goal in its own right:

> Normally pleasure is never the goal of human striving but rather is, and must remain, an effect, more specifically, the side effect of attaining a goal. Attaining the goal constitutes a reason for being happy... But even more, one can not pursue it. To the extent to which one makes happiness the objective of (his) motivation, (he) necessarily makes it the object of (his) attention. But precisely by so doing, (he) loses sight of the reason for happiness, and happiness itself must fade away (Frankl, 1969, p. 34).

Adler's *motivation theory* states that individuals are motivated by the need and desire to attain status. Frankl dismisses this *motivation theory* as being a "parallel" to the *will to pleasure*, believing that such motivation is self-defeating. Status is normally only given to those who are genuinely trying to fulfil their meaning, not to those who are attempting to gain power. Individuals receive acceptance and respect as by-products of meaning-making. The paradox is that when people primarily pursue power or status, these usually end up being withheld, for meaning comes from the power of love rather than the love of power. To Frankl, the pursuit of pleasure, power and self-actualization, as ends in themselves, is a neurotic distortion. Those who pursue and achieve status for its own sake are not truly healthy because they are acting in a way which is not basic to being human. Frankl also sees power as something which is really a means to an end and not an end in itself (1969). Frankl uses the same argument against the *pleasure principle* as devaluating human motivation. For Frankl, happiness is not something which one pursues but rather something which ensues from meaning.

In response to Maslow's motivation theory of *self-actualization*, Frankl's arguments follow the same lines. The individual discovers his/her full potential only as a by-product. It is rarely attained if pursued directly. Self-actualization happens in the process of pursuing goals or ideals. Frankl uses Maslow's own words to support his viewpoint: "Or, as Abraham Maslow put it, the 'business of self actualization' can best be carried out 'via a commitment to an important job' " (Frankl, 1973, p. 78). Frankl contends that, in actual fact, the pursuit of *self-actualization* is a distortion of the true human strive for meaning. People will end up centring only upon themselves when the *pursuit of meaning* (that "important job" or goal or task) is not sought and

fulfilled. Finally, Frankl contends that pursuing *self-actualization* somehow will not satisfy because it fails to realize an individual's full humanness. There is a difference between the "search for meaning" and the "search for oneself": "The more one forgets oneself ~ giving oneself to a cause or another person ~ the more human (he) is. And the more one is immersed and absorbed in something or someone other than oneself, the more (he) really becomes (himself)" (Frankl, 1973, p. 79).

When reading these words of Frankl, I can not help but think of the paradox in Jesus' teaching about those who, in seeking to save their lives, lose them and those who lose their lives for Him, in actuality, find them (Luke 9:24). There is something truly therapeutic in having a larger context of *meaning making*, to give a sense of direction and purpose to one's life and context. I think that looking to this larger context is very helpful in times of grief and loss. Perhaps one of the most powerful motivating frames of reference, would be the religious or theological context. Although Frankl does not enter the theological realm, he admits that it is there and that often those who are conscious about this context have a real advantage in therapeutic progress.

Such a process of *meaning making* can go far in supplying this larger frame of reference to one who is in mourning. I was further reminded of a man I once met who had lost his wife six months earlier and had recently decided to get involved in a volunteer project. He described to me that having a common purpose with others gave him a sense of meaning and served as "tremendous therapy" at the same time. This does not mean that we should recruit those who

mourn into work gangs in an attempt to keep them occupied every moment of the day, because this would do nothing to allow the person to mourn. Such actions could serve to suppress the grief process and not allow the person to move through and experience their feelings. Nevertheless, such involvement and orientation away from self can actually help a person find themselves.

Frankl sees these other motivational theories (Freud, Adler and Maslow) within the context of his concept of the *will to meaning*. When the pursuit of meaning, remains the primary concern, then pleasure, happiness, status, power and self-actualization will naturally flow as secondary results. These secondary results are seen by Frankl as being somewhat fleeting and temporary, whereas *meaning* has the ability to satisfy by fulfilling a person over the long haul.

iii) Meaning vs. Drive: Interpreting the *will to meaning* as a *drive* suggests that human freedom is limited. If we are "driven", then human beings are only seeking *homeostasis*, which, as earlier stated, Frankl considers to be dehumanizing. He maintains that there is a big difference between being "driven to" something and being "pulled by" meaning. For Frankl, "meaning fulfilment always implies decision making" (1969, p. 43). He doesn't see his theory about *freedom of the will* and the *will to meaning* to be a "relapse into preaching willpower" (Frankl, 1969, p. 44). For him, we do not <u>will</u> the *will to meaning*, it only happens as meaning itself is discovered (Frankl, 1969, p. 44). Essentially, we do not <u>make</u> meaning as much as we <u>discover</u> it.

I find this principle of Frankl to be quite similar to the Christian understanding of vocation.

Vocation is defined as a Divine "call" or a sense of "fitness". We usually understand this term in reference to an occupation or career, but it is much broader than that. Vocation has within it, a sense that God is constantly calling us forward to new challenges and discoveries. This call may be in the midst of some of the worst circumstances and conditions that one could imagine. Christian theology affirms that even in the midst of suffering and grief, God is present, offering comfort and hope. It is precisely this reality of Divine care for those who suffer, missing in Frankl's theory, that we see later in this paper is well developed in Hall's contextual theology of the Incarnation.

C. Meaning in Life

Frankl does not try to answer the meaning and purpose of the whole world. He does, however, admit that this is a real question beyond mere human understanding. Although Frankl in a way ignores the existence of *overmeaning* (Divine meaning of the universe), he does see that belief in such a dimension makes a difference in treating someone therapeutically (1971).

> Belief in a super-meaning--whether as a metaphysical concept or in the religious sense of Providence... is of the foremost psycho-therapeutic and psycho-hygienic importance. As a genuine faith springing from inner strength, such a belief adds immeasurably to human vitality. To such a faith, there is ultimately nothing that is meaningless.
>
> (Frankl, 1955, p. 33.)

From a pastoral perspective and with reference to Frankl, I would conclude that the realm of faith

is important in helping people cope with the challenges of life, as well as encouraging life to the fullest, both experientially and existentially.

i) Objectivity: Frankl sees meaning and value existing as *objective realities*. In other words, what's considered to have meaning and value, isn't simply determined by psychological needs, desires and unconscious motivations. While these dimensions exist, they don't take away from the fact that meanings and values have an objective dimension to them. Frankl accepts *motivational theory* but doesn't think it is an adequate explanation of values and meanings.

> According to one definition, meanings and values are nothing but reaction formations and defence mechanisms. As for myself, I would not be willing to live for the sake of my reaction formations, even less to die for the sake of my defence mechanisms.
>
> (Frankl, 1969, p. 54)

ii) Uniqueness: Frankl holds that meanings are "unique", in the sense that they relate to a specific individual in a specific time and place. Meanings vary according to the context of that person ~ social, ethnic, economic, religious and developmental factors have a part to play . Not one person's *Sitz-im-Leben* (situation in life) is identical to another's, nor is their discovery of meaning identical. For Frankl, meaning is not relative but subject to personal perspective (1955).

iii) Values: It is important to note that values are simply shared meanings. This doesn't mean that because there are universal meanings, we are individually free from having to make decisions

and search for our own meanings. There is still the task of "valuing" (choosing one value over another). Moral and ethical values may differ and it is the individual who must decide according to his or her own conscience. A quote from Frankl will sum up his understanding of the objectivity of meaning: "Human beings are transcending themselves toward meanings which are something other than themselves, which are more than mere expressions of their selves, more than mere projections of them selves. Meanings are discovered, not invented" (1969, p. 60).

iv) Discovering Meaning: This leads us, finally, to the definition of what Frankl calls *meaning.* He defines meaning as "what is meant, be it by a person who asks me a question, or by a situation, which, too, implies a question and calls for an answer. I must try hard to find out the true meaning of the question I am asked" (Frankl, 1969, p. 62). For Frankl, the individual is in a sense, the "answer" to the questions which confront him or her.

> Ultimately, (man) should not ask what the meaning of (his) life is, but rather must recognize that it is (he) who is asked. In a word, each (man) is questioned by life; and (he) can only answer to life by answering for (his) own life; to life (he) can only respond by being responsible. Thus, Logotherapy sees in responsibleness the very essence of human existence (Frankl, 1969, p. 62).

Responsibility then is a major concern for Frankl in his search for meaning. For Frankl, we are truly human when we make decisions or take actions in response to our conditions. That is why being "responsible" and finding "meaning" are one and the same for Frankl (1969). Meaning can be found in the fulfilment of being responsible.

D. The Search for Meaning

i) Conscience: Conscience is understood by Frankl as the guide in the search for meaning. Conscience helps the individual discern what the "fitting response" might be when a situation presents itself, and helps discover how to answer questions of personal decision. Making decisions under the guidance of one's conscience is what responsibility is all about (1975).

Conscience, like responsibility, is one of those foundational aspects of what makes us human as it is rooted in the unconscious and, therefore, ultimately free from being "determined". Conscience is not a part of the superego, since it can contradict the very norms and morality which the superego is thought of as protecting (1969).

Frankl sees conscience ultimately free from the determining factors of instincts or drives. Conscience isn't just the superego or memories of what parents taught us. For Frankl, understanding conscience only in psychological terms falls short of the complete picture. We need to see it in terms of "its nature". There is something about conscience that is open to transcendence. Conscience needs an objective standard, a *to what* which lies beyond itself (1975). Therefore, it is impossible to speak about being in dialogue with one's conscience because in reality, this discussion is only with self. This so-called dialogue is really only a kind of "transference". For Frankl, the conscience functions in reference to something beyond it. For people of faith, this other would most often be God, but Frankl falls short of identifying God as that reference point.

In a real sense, our human responsibleness is rooted in and connected to conscience. Responsibility is meaningless without understanding *to what* we are responsible." Just as I can only answer if I am first questioned, just as each reply requires a "to what", and such a "to what" must be prior to the reply itself, so the "to what" of all responsibleness must necessarily be prior to responsibleness itself" (Frankl, 1975, p. 58).

From this we see the role conscience plays in discovering and fulfilling our unique meaning. At one point in his writing, Frankl states that responsibility can not be understood apart from meaning; "the specific meaning of a human life" (1971). The implication of the above is that the word heard from conscience is in fact a response, a responding to questions which life itself puts to us. Conscience guides us in responding and taking responsibility for our lives (1971).

ii) Specific Task: The experience of being questioned by life is central to understanding responsibility and meaning in our lives. It is the basis of what Frankl speaks of as the *doctrine of the specific task* (1971). According to this idea each person and situation is unique. Within the unique person and situation, value can be found by responding to the demands made upon us. Value is discovered not as something which comes from us (subjective projection), but has an objective contextual reality. We discover objective value in our actions in concrete situations. In each situation, there is an appropriate response. This does not mean that there is necessarily only one task, one way to find value. As the questions of life change, so our situations of life change, the demands change, and our sense of responsibility changes. Tasks vary from person to person and from situation to situation, but the important thing is fulfilling our own task (1971).

iii) Three Kinds of Values: Frankl contends that in every situation, one has freedom and therefore responsibility to seek meaning. Frankl sets forth three groups of values: *creative*, *experiential*, and *attitudinal*. These are the three principle ways in which one can find meaning. For most people, questioning the meaning of their existence is responded to by *creative values*. In this context, life's *task* or assignment involves accomplishing one's job, or utilizing one's abilities to the fullest in creative ways (art, music, etc.) or working for a cause, a mission. However, should this avenue for finding meaning be cut off for some reason (for example, one retires, or has an inhibiting illness) one is still responsible for realizing meaning in life. This can be done through what he calls *experiential values*. This refers to finding meaning through experiencing other persons, the beauty of art, music and even nature. Of course, it should be noted that we probably all find individual worth and meaning through both ways. This is why Frankl speaks of our responsibility for finding meaning. Finally, even in those moments of life when both creative values and experiential values are cut off, such as in loss or bereavement, Frankl would contend that we still have freedom to take responsibility for our lives and to find meaning. Frankl calls this *attitudinal value*. Frankl knew this experience himself in the concentration camp where he experienced some horrific conditions. This third group of values, then, concerns the stand we take toward unalterable conditions, and more particularly towards suffering; how we face our biological, psychological, and sociological contexts. The courage and dignity with which we face this represents what Frankl considers to be among the highest of human values. From this standpoint, as long as a person has consciousness, one has responsibility to find meaning for one's life (1971).

iv) Temporality and Singularity: We humans are mortal and one day we will die. This reality affects our understanding of meaning according to Frankl , or as he would say, we understand our meaning in terms of "temporality and singularity" (1971).

One is responsible in relationship to the "time" aspect of life. One does not exist in a timeless state in which meaning can be reached whenever one gets around to it. Instead, we have a responsibility in the here and now to decide to make decisions. We live in the flow of time where meaning of specific moments and times in our life can not be reclaimed once they are past. Some day, we are all going to die. This adds to our responsibility to realize the possibilities which present themselves at this very moment. This is what Frankl calls the "fragmentary quality" of life (1971). Our sense of responsibility, therefore, will grow as we become aware of "our time" and all that we have to discover, learn and accomplish.

Along side the limitation of time is the sense of limitation of our own selves. We are imperfect. This does not mean that we are therefore not responsible. The fact that I have strengths and weaknesses, for example, means I can make a unique contribution to the whole that others cannot. Because I am limited, I depend upon others for those areas of my weakness to be fulfilled. Our human limitations make for interdependence and the importance of each member of the community. Here Frankl, echoes Paul in his analogy of the church being a body which has different members all having different gifts (I Cor. 12:12f). Because we are interdependent, each member of the community has value and worth. We can transcend ourselves in relation to others. My individual limitations make me unique from the rest, and at the same time provide me with a

need to be linked to others. We see an avenue for this needed link present within the gathered body of faith known as the church. Ideally, this is a function that the church can supply. People are relational and have a need for community which they should be able to find in the church.

For Frankl, this sense of community is important and should never overshadow the individual and his or her value. The community provides a framework for meaning, by providing avenues for fulfilment. "The meaning of the community is constituted by individuality, and the meaning of the individual by community" (1971). There is a real difference for Frankl between belonging to a community and being a lost face in a crowd. A community is composed of persons who maintain their individual uniqueness, and as a result, their responsibility. If we see ourselves as members of a nameless society (where a sense of community has effectively been deconstructed by that society), our individuality is effectively taken away from us -- thus we become irresponsible and "faceless".

E. The Meaning of Love

Humankind has, at its very core, the need to be "in relationship". The paradox in the need for community is that this need contributes to how we form our identity as unique individuals. This relational "script" in our human nature is particularly true when it comes to the need for intimacy with others, especially significant others. In love, the *actualization value* is completely passive and we experience being loved as something which we receive without labour or effort. Love in its purest form is what is demonstrated to us in the *theology of Grace* (1971). Love, like

grace, is unearned, unmerited and even unattainable but rather conferred upon us as a free gift. This gift, then, is the result of God's activity and not our own. While we are called to respond to God's initiative through faith, this is in itself a gift. Prevenient grace is something that initially, and in the final analysis, we are completely passive in receiving. This is the radical nature of grace ~ freely given to be freely received.

Frankl uses the parallel of grace as an archetype to describe how love ideally should function within human relationships. He admits that this parallel to Divine love is seldom if ever attained, but nevertheless serves as an ideal for human intimacy. He demonstrates this parallel by applying it to his thesis that humanity has a physical-psychic-spiritual dimension. The first layer is the sexual which concentrates on appearance and what one can receive from the object of one's affections. Frankl rightly points out that this is a rather selfish notion of love, where the object of one's affection is really oneself. The next on the continuum is the erotic, which Frankl sees as distinctly different from the sexual. The erotic interest, although having a physical element to it, permeates into the psychic layer, where the object of the affection is the other's psyche. The third possible attitude is "love" itself, where the person is able to look through these two other aspects of the loved one and come into real intimacy, a relationship with the other's spiritual being (1955).

This is interesting as it approximates, with some distinct differences, the classical Greco-Roman notion of the three loves: *Eros*, *Philio* and *Agape*. *Eros* is the kind of love that is physical with an orientation toward the "inner person". It is also understood to be similar to what Frankl views as the second stage of love, the psychical. *Philio* is the love of friendship and *Agape*

is perfect love, the kind of love that God has for us.

Love, for Frankl, involves entering into relationship with the personality of the beloved and all that makes that person unique. It is not necessarily a negation of the sexual and erotic aspect of the "loved one", but it is an orientation towards the uniqueness of the partner's spiritual core. "The true lover does not 'care about' particular psychic or physical characteristics 'of' the beloved person, (he) does not care about some trait that (she) 'has', but about what (she) 'is' in (her) uniqueness" (Frankl, 1955, p. 109). Frankl holds that the spiritual core is the object of what is true love. It is a relationship involving this inner orientation that causes people to form attachments for prolonged periods of time. This attachment generally outlasts physical attraction.

In the death of a loved one, a person experiences shock and grief because that person who had been the object, as well as the source, of that love, has been taken away. Even though there is pain and loss through death, one would not want to have missed the opportunity of having had the relationship. Mourning is therefore a by-product of loving.

Frankl sees love not in terms of an emotional condition but rather an intentional act. Here I found a great deal of theological interface with the model of Divine love. God's love for us, as I understand it, is not "feeling" based, but "attitudinally" based. We can see God's love for us not in sentimentality but in action. In the Incarnation, we see that God came to us in our condition, reconciling humanity to God through the work of Christ. Love, then, in human relationships is similarly not so much a feeling but an action. C. S. Lewis echoes this in his book, Mere

Christianity in which he writes, "Love in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of feelings but of will, that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people" (1958, p. 115). It is this attitude, a being for, a regarding of, an orientation to another, that Frankl sees as the essence of love. This attitude and action of the will would by no means be seen as neglecting or relegating self to a secondary importance. Rather, loving another unconditionally and with regard to their singular uniqueness, has within it both freedom and self-affirmation.

Because of the intense and most intimate attachment to the spiritual core of another, love can outlast the death of that other person. Although the person's physical form is gone, there is still often the connectedness to the other person's spiritual core (1955). It is because there is this spiritual connection that people need time to grieve the death of those they love. They did not love that person only for their physical attractiveness nor were they merely infatuated with them. Some form of intimacy was established. Love outlasts death, because, for Frankl, the object of that love was not really the body in the first place. In loving, one gives to the other and so paradoxically comes into a greater awareness of self.

Frankl is not against physical attraction or erotic expressions of love but rather is careful to add that "these things work as by-products of love rather than a means in which to achieve it ... The sexual element is not primary; it is not an end in it self but a means of expression. Love can exist without it, but where renunciation is called for, love will not necessarily cool or die" (Frankl, 1955, p. 112). True love does not need the body for arousal nor fulfilment, though it makes use

of the body for both. As a culture, we tend to forget how unimportant physical attraction is, at least in the long term.

Frankl challenges the notion that one has to be in an intimate relationship in order to have meaning in one's life. "If a person is neither loved nor loves another, that individual can still come to meaning" (Frankl, 1955, p.113). Theologically, of course, this is challenging because God is the one who "loves the world" and has a desire to be in a loving relationship with those whom he has created. Because God is the great lover of humanity, no one is unloved.

F. The Meaning of Suffering

Earlier in our discussion, I spoke about Victor Frankl's three kinds of values. The first category comprises those which are "actualized by doing" or, in other words, *creative values*. The second category, *experiential values*, are merely passively acquired, experienced through mediums like art and music. The final category discussed *attitudinal values*, which are actualized whenever a person faces an un-alterable situation. From this frame-work, Frankl holds that human life can be fulfilling not only in creating and experiencing, but also in abiding with an experience. Applying this to grief ministry, there can be fulfilment in suffering or grief. This does not mean that Frankl is a sadist, but rather that he sees that there can be "value and dignity to many things independent of the success or failure which may attend them... Lack of success does not signify lack of meaning" (1955, p. 85).

Generally, I think that this is something with which we in Western society wrestle. We live in a culture that worships "success" as defined in terms of the "health and wealth" theology of personal peace and affluency. But, pleasure in itself, is incapable of supplying meaning.

"...in creating, (man) actualizes creative values; in experiencing, experimental values; and in suffering, attitudinal values" (Frankl, 1955, p. 86). Frankl maintains that beyond attitude, suffering has a meaning in itself. Emotions can reveal to us things that our intellect cannot. Grief has a reflective, redeeming quality that can be very healing. From the point of view of "common sense", it doesn't make sense to mourn for someone because that won't bring them back. Nevertheless, in grieving, we are abe to continue a "processing relationship" and, in a sense, bring that loved one back from "empirical time" to help us in our "inner time" (Frankl, 1955). In grieving, there is an opportunity to make past events fruitful for one's own inner growth through reflection and self-awareness.

Suffering can also, in a sense, be redemptive for Frankl as it can function in the same way that physical pain does by serving as an indicator of biological illness. In the psycho-spiritual realm, pain can also function in this way (1955). Pain of a psycho-spiritual nature can indicate a psycho-spiritual condition which needs to be attended to in order to promote health and well-being in the person. Here I would like to sound a note of caution. Although I see the value in reflection, I think we need to be careful in doing so in order that we don't perpetuate what Virginia Satire would describe as ***blame*** stance, (where an individual "takes on the identity" of blaming others for tragedy) or ***super responsible*** stance (where a person takes on responsibility

for things they are not responsible, such as another person's tragedy) (1991). Interpreting suffering as somehow deserved carries with it its own theological pitfalls which do not take the Biblical record seriously. Likewise, an unhealthy dwelling on the past can not bring back a loved one or recreate the past. *Creatively valuing* in the past is limited because it can not change the past, only our perception and understanding of it.

When all is said and done, suffering is synonymous with life for "in the midst of life, we are in death "(Anglican Funeral Liturgy, Book of Alternative Services, p. 576). Frankl echoes this by saying that suffering and death are as much a part of life as birth and health. Ultimately, suffering and death cannot be removed from life without destroying its meaning. To subtract trouble, death and suffering from life would mean stripping life of its form and shape (Frankl, 1955). The troubles that life offers serve a two-fold function ~ they shape our lives when it is necessary to endure them "...suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Romans 5:3-5). In this point, Frankl and the apostle Paul are in agreement. Frankl is not advocating suffering for its own sake, or that we should be looking around in a kind of sado-masochistic way for things to go wrong and to suffer in order to be more alive. Every situation holds out the opportunity of shaping values, be they *creative* or *attitudinal*. Frankl maintains that this "endurance constitutes a moral achievement only when such suffering is unavoidable" (1955, p. 90).

Here we can pick up an essential element of Frankl which distinguishes his *logotherapy*

from the conventional psychotherapy of his day. Psychoanalysis aims at making a person more capable of experiencing pleasure, while *logotherapy* with its emphasis on *meaning making* attempts, among other things, to help people face suffering by actualizing *attitudinal values*.

G. Conclusion

Victor Frankl is relevant to the pastoral care of the grieved although I hasten to add that in its application, a degree of pastoral sensitivity is required. The greatest strength of Frankl's paradigm is also his greatest weakness, and that is his sense of personal agency. Frankl holds that people are free but, with that freedom, they are also responsible. Even in the midst of the crippling conditions of personal tragedy and suffering, such as one experiences in the grief process, Frankl maintains that the individual is still free to *make meaning*. There is, of course, a problem here if we don't remember the context of Frankl's high view of responsibility. For Frankl, the person's own meaning is what is important. This is why Frankl believes that, although a person may be suffering, there is still a possibility for that person to have a sense of meaning and, as a result, a deep sense of well-being even though they may by physically or emotionally hurting

Frankl maintains that it is not the conditions that drive us to despair, but rather our reaction to these conditions. I accept this to be true with a great deal of caution. The danger in the extreme is to slip into preaching "will-power" or "muscular Christianity" to people who find it difficult to "stand up to the conditions of their grief", such action can end up blaming victims and those who suffer as being somehow deserving. When applying this to ministry with those who

grieve, one could do a lot of damage. I think the challenge, in terms of helping a person regain a sense of agency, belongs in grief ministry, but only after a great deal of consolation and when that person is ready to move on. What can more readily happen is a situation in which the person who is ministering to the bereaved can react out of their own uncomfortableness with grief and convey that they want to somehow not be with the sorrow in the moment.

I have found it interesting that Frankl refers to his theory as *logotherapy*. This, as he explains, is concerned with assisting people in *meaning-making*. The Greek word *logos* literally means "word" and has the connotation of "meaning". The word *logos* is mentioned several times in Scripture as being the Word made flesh in Jesus Christ. When put into perhaps simplistic terms, meaning can be detected and confirmed when discovered in its divine and eternal perspectives.

If we share an assumption that God is loving and in the business of redemption (and that things will one day get better), we will be able to find the strength to carry on, even in the midst of loss. I am not preaching false hope, but rather a sense of present and future hope that deals seriously with the reality of present conditions while, at the same time, sees God's ability to transcend them. Frankl's *logotherapy* or *search for meaning* focusses on assignments and meanings to be fulfilled in the future, as well as in the present. Frankl's *search for meaning* centres upon a process in which people are invited to refocus on questions of meaning as rooted in positive assumptions about human potential. The goal is in no way to burden people with a hyper sense of responsibility or to blame them for circumstances that are beyond their control, but rather to help them discover what their life task is. This process helps people become aware of what they

truly yearn for at the core of their being and assists them in actualizing it. Theologically, this would be seen in terms of *vocation*, to help the person become more aware of what God may be calling them to be and to do. God is good and there is the promise of new life, new birth and new creative possibilities even in the midst of pain and sorrow. True meaning in grief is found not only by looking at self as an isolated individual, but rather as one who is in relationship with the "to what" of others, causes, ideas and ultimately, God. Frankl's *search for meaning* assumes that true meaning cannot be found in "self-actualization" or "fulfilling drives". True meaning comes only from transcending self to the "to what" of meaning, which I contend ultimately is God.

Even in grief and suffering, this frame of reference has a place of importance. For Frankl, suffering ceases to be suffering when the one who is suffering finds meaning and purpose. I think that Frankl is onto something, but I affirm this with a note of caution. Such a view could lead to a hyper view of God's sovereignty where people suffer because God somehow orchestrates it. Such a theology can lend itself to all sorts of abuses. Such an abuse, for instance, would be a notion that those whom God really loves don't suffer, or that if one were really "right with God", then calamity would not happen. Such a theology of "health and wealth" does not deal seriously with the Biblical record. The next chapter of this thesis will pick up some of these themes. Douglas Hall stands as a corrective to some of the problems that could be derived from Frankl's paradigm. Conversely, Frankl also stands as a corrective to Hall. These two theorists, although seemingly worlds apart, actually speak well to each other's weaknesses and fill out the *search for meaning in grief.*

Chapter Two ~ Douglas Hall: Theology of The Cross

> *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,*
> *but to those of us who are being saved, it is the power of God* (1 Cor. 1:18).

Up to this point, our discussion has centred around the *search for meaning* in grief as derived from Victor Frankl. It is this *search for meaning* that makes us uniquely human. Often, as I have noted before, this *search for meaning* becomes apparent in a person's life when going through an experience of loss. It is precisely during these times that previously held assumptions are tried, tested and reshaped. Often it is in the grief experience that we see the hand of God reaching out to us. And it is in these moments that we can become more sensitive to and aware of our co-creative potential with God.

No theological discussion of the *search for meaning in grief* would be complete without speaking about the mystery of the Incarnation. As Christians, we affirm that God became one of us, walked with us and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is present to us in all that we face. God became one of us, took on flesh of the Virgin Marry, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. The crucifixion, then, is central to Christian theology both in terms of the atonement, but also in the stark identification that God makes with us in our human condition, a condition which includes suffering. As John Webster states, "in Jesus, *God Incarnate*, God identifies himself with us in the particular person of Jesus of Nazareth" (1983, p 11).

Salvation, then, in the broadest sense, means that in Christ, we <u>are</u> delivered from evil and

are being delivered from evil. This deliverance was bought for us, as the apostle Paul asserts, by the Cross of Christ. Readers of the Gospel story can see that the Cross was something that Jesus willingly submitted himself to, though he went through his own "garden" experience. In Gethsemane, Jesus experienced what it was like to ask that the cup would pass from him. In a real sense, Jesus' experience of the Cross began not on Calvary, but at Gethsemane where he pondered something that he would not humanly want to encounter. This is why we hold that the Cross not only is the instrument of our salvation, but also the sign of God's self- identification with us in our human condition.

It is this aspect of the *theology of the Cross* that is most pertinent to our discussion. To understand just such a *theology of the Cross*, I turn to Douglas Hall, a professor of Theology at McGill University in Montreal who has spent his career exploring a contextual understanding of the *theology of the Cross*. This contextual reality focusses on understanding the Cross in light of human experience. We humans experience being "crossed" daily; grief and loss are but two of the things that we would not choose for ourselves, things that "cross" us.

Hall's focus is on what the Cross means for those who suffer. He tends to view this suffering from a North American political and social standpoint. Hall contextualizes (primarily in social and political terms) the Cross without abandoning classical categories, and adapts them to his theology.

A. Theology of the Cross

Hall's *theology of the Cross* concentrates on seeing the Cross as symbolic of the human condition. He doesn't see *the theology of the Cross* only in reference to *the doctrine of the atonement* but sees it more as a *faith posture* (1989). He even goes further to say that the *theology of the Cross* is a way of understanding what Christian theology is all about, seeing the Cross as a symbol of something more far-reaching; essentially as a way of understanding the whole content of faith (1976).

Hall does not focus on individual experience. In others words, his approach to the Cross is not its "micro" application in individual lives, but its "macro" application, specifically as it relates to systems and societies. He sees the Cross as a sign of "solidarity" in which God identifies with broken creation and seeks to heal it. For Hall then, participation in society's problems is part and parcel of theology (1989).

In reading Hall, I got a strong sense of an influence of the "social gospel" tradition in which there is a high emphasis on faith having a social and even a political focus. Hall sees the Cross mainly in terms of its societal contextual application. Politics then, for Hall, is an area for the Church to engage in and comment upon. He sees a need to address "context" in order for the "scandal of the Cross to be heard and understood today" (1989, p.335). Hall doesn't abandon classical categories but sees theology as historically rooted, engaging in classical concepts and understandings. Theology for Hall must have both traditional and contemporary ways of

understanding. Hall sees God as both transcendent and incarnational, although his emphasis is upon a present application of the Incarnation.

> The tensions in question may then be stated as follows: while the core of the Christian message (kerygma) is discontinuous with human experience, the message is nevertheless obviously intended for human beings and must therefore in some way be, or become continuous with their experience (Hall, 1989, p.327.)

Hall's *theology of the Cross* focusses upon the Incarnation where he sees the Cross as the sign of God's self- identification with humanity. Hall doesn't speak much of the Cross in terms of "atonement". God then, is not so much the God who stands above all, but rather the "God of my condition". To truly hear the message of the Cross, Hall maintains that one needs to look at societal context, in order to hear the relevance in the story. We can extrapolate from this view an application, not only to wider systemic processes, but also to individual experiences such as grief. I would be amiss, however, not to say that Hall is a little wary about a more "grass roots" application of the Cross because it is then in danger of being privatized and "used only for personal interest" (1989, p. 327) Hall's *theology of the Cross* focusses on the Incarnation as showing solidarity with humanity, in the universal sense.

i) The Incarnation: "The theology of incarnation is and remains a theology of the Cross, for it proclaims a God whose will it is to be with us, where we are (Immanuel)" (Hall, 1976, p. 121). The Incarnation shows "God's abiding commitment to the world" (Hall, 1989, p.

25). Hall definitely focusses upon Christ's humanity although not at the exclusion of his divinity. He speaks of Christ's humanity not so much as *perfect* but *real.* For Hall, this focus on "real humanity" is what makes Christology believable. This is a great strength to emphasize with those who mourn ~ that God in Christ experienced life as less than perfect. Certainly, Jesus did not live a theology of "health and wealth", but experienced all of what humanity suffers. This solidarity with humanity can be lost, according to Hall, through a *theology of glory*.

ii) Reality of Suffering: Hall sees the "majority Christian emphasis" in North America on *triumphalism* as almost denying the crucifixion. For Hall, theology is authentic when it has a willingness to speak of, as Paul would say, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. The *theology of glory*, which tends to focus on the Easter "event", can downplay the Cross. For Hall, Christ's triumph can function as a way of removing the church's theological interest from the problems of the world. Applying this logic to the grief experience, an overemphasis on the resurrection could serve as a denial of suffering and loss as well as a denial of God's present care and identification with those who suffer. It seems to me that here is perhaps one of the greatest strengths of Hall's paradigm which serves as a corrective to Frankl. Frankl's emphasis on meaning with its understanding of hope can serve to usurp the grief process, attempting to fast forward people through their experience of loss. An example of this usurpation could be a funeral service that only celebrates the deceased person's life as a gift from God and speaks of the hope of the resurrection to eternal life, while at the same time ignoring that fact that people are suffering loss. Such a denial of grief is blatantly abusive to the suffering of the deceased person's loved ones, and serves to deny the legitimacy of their grief. It is in such moments, that the desire to be

triumphalistic can ignore God's present care to those who mourn.

The Incarnation and the Cross clearly identify God with humanity in the real world of real conditions in which we live. Hall sees the outflow of this "solidarity" as having political, social and economic ramifications for both the church and society. Not engaging with either the problems of the Church or the culture in which we find ourselves, buys into what Hall refers *to* as *exit theology*, which centres upon a future eschatology (1985). I see this approach to grief ministry as attempting to "rescue" people out of their grief by speaking only about the resurrection without attending to the pain of those who suffer. An over-emphasis upon resurrection, particularly during the acute stages of grief and loss, can, in effect, serve to negate feelings and frustrate not only the grief process but, be perceived as a complete invalidation of a person's experience of grief.

Hall sees the tendency not to want to speak about suffering and loss as rooted in "the official religion for an officially optimistic society" (1976, p. 73). For Hall, the Church's true identity is discovered when we enter into "solidarity with the suffering" and identify with those whom Jesus became incarnate. For Hall, the Church is called to be a *society of beggars* having solidarity with those who beg (1976, p.152). Seeking solidarity with suffering humanity is a mark of the Church. Hall sees the Church, and those in it, as needing to admit to their own brokenness and not to pretend to having "glory". This way, the Cross is a symbol of what is encountered by all people that suffer (1976, p. 121). Again, I think that Hall has hit the mark here. The Cross has tremendous power in identifying God as Immanuel, not only in a completed

work of substitutionary sacrifice, but also in the "here and now" of our experience, including the experience of pain and loss.

B. Outflow of the Cross

> The *theology of the Cross* does not celebrate the world's status quo, and it certainly eschews the brand of "realism" which is simply fatalism in disguise; but it is marked by a determination to be entirely honest about the evil and negation that is "there" in existence, and to work out its strategies of hope only in dialogue with the suffering that is consistent upon that evil and negation (Hall, 1989, p. 28).

Hall, it seems, has a tendency to view the Cross almost exclusively as a political event which has an outflow for structures and political systems. This application at the "macro" level has its positive reality in seeing the structure and political causes to injustice. "Rather than face the *darkness*, our society scurries frantically about, trying to find some little candles to dispel the darkness" (Hall, 1976, p. 222). Hall would prefer that specific problems be addressed in their larger context rather than having "band-aids" applied. The problem is that "the light that is offered is mostly artificial, for we have not exposed ourselves to the darkness" (Hall, 1976, p. 222). For me, Hall's emphasis on "macro" contextual realities is both his strength and his weakness. Hall is "bang on" to relate the cross to the wider realities of our social-economic system. The problem in doing so is a perception of being incongruent with more immediate relational systems and personal needs, such as one would encounter in the grief experience. Although I affirm his view

of the systemic realities of society, for the purpose of this paper, I have focussed more on his application to a "micro" systemic content. Although the Cross calls for political change, it also calls for creative change on a more immediate personal level where people can move through their journey of grief.

Optimism is a word of caution for Hall because of its political implications. He holds that North American culture generally, and Christianity more specifically, have tried to be "optimistic". The church in this optimism has actually co-opted into perpetuating injustice and the denial of suffering. In pastoral counselling, however, one will often look for the strengths within the system in order to build upon them and restore a sense of personal agency. In other words, *optimism* is a key quality in ministering to someone in grief while admittedly, in so doing, we can sometimes deny a person's present experience of grief.

Hall believes that people should be encouraged to "enter the darkness" of their "condition" because it is there they will find Christ and him crucified. "Christ is the one who meets us in our own darkness and death" (Hall, 1976, p. 149). Like the psalmist then, Hall acknowledges that there is nowhere one can flee from God's presence. God meets us in our suffering and offers us hope, not only toward creative future possibilities as Frankl would emphasize, but also the hope of strength to face the next moment.

This entering into darkness is something which again is more readily seen on the "macro" level for Hall, but also can be applied in a more immediate relational system. We have to listen to

what is being said by those who suffer. Listening helps us first recognize those who suffer and then respond to them. We need also to listen to what Hall refers to as *tradition* in which he includes both the tradition of the Church and Scripture itself. There is much to be heard from Scripture in the area of human grief and loss, stories where people are given strength and hope in the midst of their pain, as well as hope toward future possibilities. Its also important to listen to the Christian community where there are many people within the body of Christ who are hurting and in need of being attended to.

Hall sees these sources as helping us not only to be present to suffering but also to help us to discover what it means to be truly human. The problem for Hall is the fact that the social voice, the voice of the dominant culture, tends to dominate these other voices. This dominant voice tends to deny suffering by speaking about *triumphalism*, using images and themes of power.

Hall has many difficulties with this *master* or *power image* of humanity. This, to Hall, is another reason for our inability to enter into suffering as *triumphalism* can often lead to violence and war (Hall, 1976, p. 83-4). Needless to say, Hall doesn't have much use for the image of the Church "militant" or for the image of conflict both within Scripture and in particular hymns. [Don't ask Hall for a rousing chorus of "Onward Christian Soldiers"!] The image of (man) as master has what Hall refers to as the "smell of death" on it (1976, p. 163).

Hall also sees *triumphalism* as tending to lead to "technocratic "attitudes towards human life and social relationships (1976, p. 85). Hall refers to this as the *Christendom paradigm* which

assumes that the purpose of the church is to solve problems or cure human faults. This, too, is something that Hall sees as rooted in *glory theology*, a system that assumes one can fix all problems. The truth is that we cannot fix everything, nor is God in the business of ordering the universe according to the desires of any specific individual or group. Some may feel that God's task is to keep order, whereas God's order may mean dis-order for us.

Positivism based upon the view of Christ as victor can, in its extreme, deny the *theology of the Cross.* In concentrating upon a *theology of glory*, according to Hall, we fail to take seriously the evil that exists in the world (1976, p. 205). *Positivism* tends to encourage people to think of themselves as having a false sense of agency which, in its extreme, can lead to a view that humanity is the master of the universe. " We are neither good enough nor wise enough to be masters" (Hall, 1976, p. 164).

This sense of being "master" is death for both the individual as well as the relational system. This sense of "master" breeds not only a desire to master self but also to master others, which works against honesty with self and a sense of community with others. Having to master ourselves can foster a stoical approach to the grief process and so halt the journey toward healing. Hall sees this failure quite clearly in humanity's attempt to master the planet rather than demonstrate the Biblical notion of dominion or care (1989, p. 219). "Unless (man) turns from mastering to serving, from grasping to receiving, from independence to inter-dependence, (he) will simply not last very long on the face of the earth" (Hall, 1976, p. 170). Hall, I think, is on the mark here where he suggests that what is needed is to give up this notion of having to master,

for another notion of being honest with ourselves and with others. Again, this too has its more immediate relational application in fostering intimacy and community, two conditions which enable healing in grief and loss. Hall refers to this admission as a *theology of beggars* that is willing to admit that human beings are not truly capable of independence but rather are created to live in relationship. Hall's *theology of the Cross* sees people as beggars and invites others to make this same identification. Here again, there is great application to those who grieve; we don't have to appear to have it all together. Ideally, we can be honest about our grief with self and with others.

i) Implications of the Cross: The way towards Resurrection is through the Cross. Easter follows Good Friday. Without the Crucifixion, there would have been no Resurrection. Christ rose from the grave only after facing and moving through the Passion. Bob Deits articulates this well in his book Life After Loss that "the way of grief is not around it, or under it or over it but through it" (1988, p. 62-65). This willingness to experience the journey is in itself useful at every stage. Hope is seen when failures are faced. Pain is acknowledged and death is experienced. Hall sees this as having a "macro" dimension in hearing the voices of those who are marginalized. Nevertheless, it is also equally applicable in a more "micro" experience of death and loss. He refers to *optimistic theology* as "official Christianity" which tends to deny negative experience.

> Official Christianity not only failed seriously to question the spirit of audacity but provided religious sanction and a theological rationale for the belief in (man's) mastery, the limitless range of (his) authority, and (his) own potential as the crown and jewel of

> creation. From the frontier pulpit which gave (man) (the white man!) the right to dominate and possess nature (including those "lesser breeds without the law") to that secular theology which celebrated (man's) emancipation from sacred cows and holy trees, the general impact of the Christian religion on the life of this continent has been to foster and undergird the technocratic image of (man) (Hall, 1976. p. 215).

The church, in Hall's paradigm, is primarily concerned with society and transforming it, although here again I also see his framework as having equal application in more immediate relational systems. Hall has harsh words to say about the church "escaping" into *eternal theology*. I think there is another word of caution to grief ministry in focussing only on eternal life. In doing so, we can deny the need for those who are left behind to grieve and experience the Cross. This same thing is true for those who are suffering in any manner. Focussing only upon eternal life can deny the present reality of suffering and, more seriously, can deny the presence of Christ with the person in the here and now, as they go through the "vale of misery". The church's job, for Hall, is to name darkness while listening for and being aware of hope.

C. Christology

When I read Hall's *Christology*, I was struck by the fact that it seems to be directed more toward process than content. Hall begins with the *concept of revelation* and holds that God has been self-revealed in a particular person, in a particular place and in a particular time as Christ Jesus. The big "but" for Hall is that many in the church fail to recognize the implications of the

Incarnation. Hall doesn't seem to have much time for the notion of God's transcendence and views this as potentially being a projection of an image of what we think we would like God to be. In other words, the danger is that we can make an image of God in our own image. Hall would not see Christ so much as ascended and glorified but rather as crucified. For Hall, the crucifixion is incongruent with triumph. This is the heart of his *theology of the Cross* (Hall, 1989, p. 408). Hall highly emphasizes Christ's humanity and His work upon the Cross almost to the extent of excluding other important elements of His life as well as His nature. Perhaps one of the reasons that Hall does this is to emphasize the relevance of present human experience (suffering) to Christian theology. The down side to Hall is that he metaphorically leaves Jesus on the Cross and his functional story of the passion ends with the crucifixion and does not seem to have any space for the Resurrection. I see this as ultimately hopeless, although Hall rightly emphasizes hope in the immediate. I believe that a *theology of the Resurrection* is congruent with the grief journey, offering a unique perspective for the future, while at the same time not denying the reality of the present. Perhaps this apparent bias within Hall can make more sense in his societal context in focussing people on the need for transformation of society rather than putting hope off for the future.

Hall sees God not only as revealed but also as revealing. He sees that relying upon revealed faith tends to lead to a *theology of glory*, which has those pitfalls we previously discussed. Hall's *theology of the Cross* challenges us to ponder the hidden as well as the revealed aspects of God. It assumes that there is more to be learned about God while much is still hidden. He sees this as a strength because it encourages Christians to be humble in their

assumptions about God. I see a great strength here, particularly in grief ministry ,where a non-expert stance is adopted and we can accept not knowing the answers or where meaning is hidden.

i) **Faith:** For Hall, faith comes from the reality of the Cross, but it is a faith without triumphalism. Hall sees the *theology of the Cross* as a *theology of beggars.* The Cross teaches us to trust God in our struggles and fears, yet this trust is incompatible for Hall with a *theology of glory.* Not surprisingly, Hall does not spend a whole lot of time speaking about future hope or of an eternal perspective. This, I think, has a lot to offer in response to the "health and wealth" gospel currently so popular among defunct high-profile television preachers. A strength of the Cross is that it helps us to experience defeat and despair, knowing that God is with us. People without security are beggars, and in the light of the Cross, we are all beggars. A beggar's faith, while lacking in security, has at the same time, an openness to new and creative possibilities which has its definite application to grief ministry.

ii) **The Atonement:** The difference for Hall between the *theology of glory* and the *theology of the Cross* is in the way salvation is viewed. In the *glory theology*, salvation is a final resolution while Hall sees salvation as God with us, a presence of God which can help us to endure suffering. Atonement in *glory theology* is concerned with the "full perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world" (Book of Common Prayer, 1962, p. 82). Hall much prefers a notion of the Cross as an archetype for what we face in life. In classical atonement understanding, the Cross is something that has reconciled us to God and in Hall's *theology of the Cross,* the Cross is seen as a central symbol of God's solidarity with us in

our condition. I tend to hold both as equally true and important. The strength of Hall's paradigm is that it emphasizes God's present care and concern in our suffering.

I find Hall's view of the Cross to have a great deal of strength in his emphasis on divine identification, for surely this is part and parcel of what the incarnation means. But at the same time, I find it challenging to my own Anglican theological grid which tends to emphasize the Cross in a forensic way, the strength of which emphasizes salvation as the result of divine activity and not as a result of our own effort, or as Anselm of Canterbury stressed, "Christ's death as complete payment for a debt humanity was completely unable to pay" (Hall, 1986, p.135). Although I affirm Hall's understanding of the immediate intimacy of God, I find his downplaying of divine transcendence as ignoring an equally important and hopeful aspect of the divine nature. Hall tends, in a practical sense, to leave Jesus on the Cross as mentioned earlier. It is the liturgical tradition, particularly in the eastern church, that every Sunday, the Resurrection is celebrated. While I concede that fast-forwarding to "Easter" can, in a sense, deny the process of "Holy Week", surely "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile..... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:17-19).

Nevertheless, God's identification with suffering people is relevant in the here and now. It is God's love which can alter our view of our conditions, and that love is most vividly expressed in the suffering on the Cross.

I can also see room here for problems as we place too much emphasis upon seeing Jesus

as victim. In North America, we have in some ways become a culture of victims. While it is most assuredly true that people have been victimized not only as individuals but also in larger social systems, concentrating on identification as a victim can cause a person not to stand up to their conditions and find a sense of freedom and responsibility. Here is perhaps one of the greatest strengths in Frankl's response to Hall. Freedom is exercised within the context of responsibility. In such a paradigm, people can be empowered to change not only conditions but also their own response to conditions. This has a powerful co-creative aspect to it.

The problem with Hall is that theologically, he tends to go so completely toward the pole of suffering that he forgets the Resurrection. Part of the mystery of the Incarnation is that Christ is also other than human. Since the council of Calcedon, the church has affirmed that Christ is both fully human and fully divine. This divine self-identification with our suffering is tremendously powerful not only in its present contextual application but also in its reference to future creative and redemptive possibilities. It is this understanding of creative hope echoed in Frankl that "fills out" Hall so well.

The strength of Hall's theology is that it places God right where suffering people are. For one who is encountering grief, Hall has some very powerful things to say about God's love for us in our circumstances. We hear in this paradigm the truth that life is not always easy or pleasant and that we need to acknowledge our own grief and be present to the grief of others as God is present to us in our suffering. This image emphasizes the reality that God is not always going to "do" something when we suffer, but is, and will be, present to us. Hall's *theology of the Cross*

emphasizes that God is with us and God is for us.

D. Conclusion

Hall tends to have a Christology which centres on human nature and his theology seems to be oriented toward political and social ethics. The weakness in this seems to lend itself to a kind of hierarchical theology that tends to look at people in the general rather than in the specific and views solutions as something rooted on the "macro" level. Nevertheless, his emphasis on non-triumphalistic faith seems to open a path for discussion and listening. His *theology of beggars* is a great image. Hall emphasizes the Cross in terms of process rather than content which, although it has pulled up some great strengths in the Christian tradition, tends also, at the same time, to push down others. Nevertheless, at the end of the day, we see most dramatically demonstrated for us in Hall that God is with us, and, in grief and loss, no one thing is perhaps more comforting and hopeful for the moment than this.

> I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38-39).

Chapter Three ~ Implications for Pastoral Care

> *If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me becomes night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.* Psalm 139:11-12

In attempting to construct a spirituality of bereavement, a good place to begin is with the grief experience itself. The anguish and affliction of loss, the sense of imbalance and shattered expectations are mingled mysteriously with a sense of wonder in what can be a spiritual encounter with God. We see, in a sense, our own mortality next to the immortality of God.

When someone dies, there are always many unanswered questions. Often these questions can act as a catalyst for spiritual growth and creative possibility, but they can act also as an inhibitor to faith. We have seen in the preceding chapters that a person's theological/philosophical orientation can impact upon these questions and, more specifically, how they see God as active or passive in the event. Hall's *theology of the Cross* is helpful here in his Christological understanding of *God with us*. Within the experience of grief, we can mysteriously encounter God's enduring presence in the midst of our pain and sorrow. This can be a time of great questioning and rethinking previously held assumptions. Hope then, for Hall, is not something which is future-oriented. Theologically speaking, Hall is not oriented toward a "wait and see how good things are going to get" approach. Hall would not have such a future view of eschatology. Hope, for Hall, is primarily rooted in the present. This is not to say that he does not call for transformation, because he certainly does. Rather, God's abiding presence in the world, and with those who suffer, is of primary interest to him.

Hall rightly emphasizes Biblical faith as honestly dealing with the problem of human suffering. Both the Old Testament and the New, have at their very core, an honest portrayal of suffering. The Hebrew Canon is full of stories that face human tragedy head-on. The Psalmist, at various points, laments, in a forthright manner, his experience of negation (Hall, 1986, p. 20). The New Testament fully portrays Jesus as the One who came for us and suffered under Pontius Pilate. Therefore, unless we are able honestly to face up to this reality of suffering, we will never experience what grace is truly about. A theology that too easily minimizes or ignores the reality of suffering is not rooted in Scripture, and is seriously flawed.

Frankl, on the other hand, can be interpreted as ignoring the reality of suffering. I don't think that this is his intention, because he does reference his theory to real pain and suffering, both his own and that of others known to him. However, I think it is easy to read Frankl with "rose-coloured glasses". He tends to focus upon meaning as being something which can be seen as devoid of context. In other words, Frankl's emphasis upon transcendent values can be understood as almost ignoring the contextual problems with grief, or at least minimizing them.

Pastoral care at times of grief is critical in order to help persons address some of the questions they may have around suffering. It allows them to see God's present care and concern in the midst of suffering *(theology of the Cross)*, as well as the creative potential for present and future *meaning making* (*logotherapy*). Such an approach takes the pain of loss seriously but is also open to redemptive threads within the person's story as they interface with the story of the Gospel. Transformation and new life can emerge in the "letting go" of former things, allowing the

embrace of new life. In letting go, there is a process of negation, of being crossed, in encountering something that we would not choose for ourselves, but nevertheless encounter as part of life.

Both theorists, as previously mentioned, function as paradigms for two polarities within the grief process. In the initial stages of grief, support is needed to address the personal and social systems needs of those who grieve. Hall's *theology of the Cross* exemplifies comfort and support to those who are in initial pain and suffering, whereas Frankl's *search for meaning* can be used in a more predominant way with people who find themselves in the latter stages of grief. In essence then, although this paper first examines Frankl followed by Hall, one would actually initially rely almost exclusively on Hall and later turn to Frankl's theory. Present care is more important than future creative possibilities to a person who is in the midst of the initial shock and pain of loss. Pastorally, this implies a great deal of sensitivity on behalf of the person who is ministering to the sufferer.

In John's Gospel, there is a passage which reads, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Like the seed changing into new life, change in human life can be painful; letting go can be painful. This process of change can express itself in grief as we grieve and return to grief again and again. There is something in expressing our sorrow, pain and grief that can cause these things, over time, to fall to the ground and die in order for new life to come forth. Entering into suffering can be a journey of growth and discovery about ourselves and God. The dual paradigms of God's present care

and future *meaning making* are essential in the grief process. Hall serves to remind us of God's presence within this experience of grief, while Frankl emphasizes our co-creative potential.

A. A Case Study

The following case study is a composite sketch designed for demonstration purposes only. Any resemblance to real persons and/or known situations is entirely co-incidental.

It was the May long weekend and the grade eight students from the local Public School were having a car wash to raise money to go on a class trip. All seemed to be going well. There were more cars than could be dealt with and it became apparent that the class would benefit from having another hose. It was around that time that Christine's father came by to see how things were going and, upon hearing that another hose was needed, offered to take his daughter home to pick up a new hose. So off they went to their new home in one of the city's new subdivisions, the sun glaring as they travelled down the four lane road.

There was another man driving on a different road which would eventually intersect with the one on which Henry and Christine were travelling on. Henry, the child's father, had no idea how bright the sun was and how small a stop sign was which guarded the intersection of their road with that other much smaller street. The sign was so small and the sun so bright that the other driver didn't see it as he sailed through the intersection just as Henry and Christine were also moving through it. In the twinkling of an eye, the front end of the man's car ploughed into the passenger side of Henry's van at full speed, killing Christine instantly and sending the critically injured Henry into a coma which lasted three weeks.

The death of Christine left a large hole in the family and with her loss came a series of events that left the family members numb. Henry's coma and loss of income put a severe strain on the family of five children. Not knowing if her husband was ever going to regain consciousness, Susan buried their twelve-year-old daughter and had to cope the best she could with the needs of a young family, two in diapers.

The doctors did not think Henry would ever regain consciousness. When he did, there was much relief. But an additional burden was placed on Susan: it was the medical wisdom of the time that Henry be spared the shock of Christine's death until such time as he would be in a less critical state from his own severe head injury. Each time Susan came to visit Henry in the hospital, he would ask about Christine. Susan, obeying the doctor's advise, would say that she was just fine. Finally, Henry left the hospital with the knowledge of his daughter's tragic death, a man broken both physically and emotionally from this experience.

The family moved on under this incredible pain and loss, facing it individually with courage and with strength from their faith, knowing that one day they would see their daughter and sister again, hoping that one day the pain would stop. They did not grieve as without hope but neither did this experience cease to generate questions and problems. The parents eventually divorced, a custody battle over the youngest children ensued, and every member of the family became isolated one from another ~ a situation which would never completely correct itself. Susan to date speaks of how she wondered at the time how her faith and her sanity could have endured such suffering. Twenty years later, she will still say she doesn't understand why it

happened, having retraced her steps since that fateful day, but is willing to let the questions go unanswered and move on, taking one day at a time.

B. Where Is God In The Midst Of This ? A Theology of Suffering

Where is God when it hurts? Does God cause suffering? Where is God in suffering? These are all tremendously important theological questions which cannot be answered easily. It is at this point that Hall's *theology of the Cross* has perhaps its most potent relevance. The world in which we live is not an automated, predictable environment, where things go according to a *perfect* plan. It is in this sense that Hall emphasizes Christ's real nature and experience. The beauty of the Cross stands as a stark reminder that, although we encounter pain and suffering in life, God has self-identified with suffering humanity. It is precisely at the intersection of the Cross that we can find God's presence.

Hall maintains that the most important aspect of God's character is that God is present to those who suffer. The incarnation for Hall is the source of strength for those who grieve because it focusses away from a triumphalistic view of events, where there is a need to ignore grief and our experience of negation. The focus shifts away from trying to appear to have it all together to experiencing and entering into our suffering where we will find the risen Jesus. The Cross for Hall is symbolic of our human condition. Henry, Susan and their family experienced that day and every day since the personal reality of the Cross. The chain of events unleashed that day still have their implications to the family and the mark of grief is still very much present within the system.

For a long time, the parents, as well as the children ask why without any apparent sense of answer to this question. This experience was for them both a test of faith and a confirmer of that faith. In their pain, they experienced God's presence and comfort to them through what was to become a very rocky road indeed. It is in this present care that they experienced the incarnate God, the one who came among us and is with us in all that we face. God has self-identified with suffering humanity. In Hall's *theology of the Cross*, God is not so much the God of triumph as much as he is seen as the God of our condition.

Hall criticizes modern culture for its emphasis upon trying to "make it all better". Hall points out that not everything can be made all better. We are not safe in the world from danger, loss and sorrow. God doesn't promise that we are going to experience a life of "sunshine, lolly-pops and rainbows" all the time. Susan and Henry discovered that things were not all made better. The stress of their lives continued, Henry couldn't work after the accident and there were insufficient social programs to assist the family. Susan became the main bread-winner as well as caregiver of the remaining five children. This was certainly a time when both Henry and Susan experienced a real and lasting death. Their child was dead and the family system that had functioned prior to the accident was also dead. The re-assignment of roles and responsibilities as well as the ensuing theme of guilt placed incredible strain upon the system from which it did not survive.

The Family had a theological matrix of triumphalism where God helped those who helped themselves. Both Susan and Henry were immigrants from Germany after the second world war

and had brought with them a strong work ethic stressing self-reliance and control. Much of their theological grid emphasized self-control and prosperity. God's care and blessings were often associated with material blessing and the sense of agency and self-reliance that comes from hard work and planning. Into this system came the events that would radically remove these elements, especially for Henry.

Hall emphasizes that in the Cross, we are not intended to master ourselves nor our environment. We are not intended to master our emotions and feelings, but rather to have an honesty with ourselves and with others. Having to master ourselves denies entry into our grief and therefore usurps the grief process, denying the possibility of healing. Henry, like most other men, was not able to express his grief in a straight forward manner but rather tried to be a model of self-control and reliance, even to the point of denying any kind of financial assistance which could have been made available to him. Hall would emphasize here that hope would increase for Henry when he would be able to embrace the feelings of guilt and responsibility for his child's death and to acknowledge the pain around the accident.

For Hall, what is truly hopeful and full of faith is the model of the Cross which stands over and against the theology of glory that seeks to negate suffering. The strength of the Cross is to give us power to experience defeat and despair, knowing that God is with us. Henry, although not at fault in the accident still, on some level blames himself for what happened. Susan, although knowing that the other driver was charged in the accident, also, on some level, blames Henry for not having prevented the accident. Both Henry and Susan, with their strong affirmation of

personal agency and self-reliance, on some level, feel they should have triumphed over the events in the accident and prevailed over the other driver and vehicle.

After the accident, there was little in the area of support services for them. As all too often is the case, when the funeral was over, those who lent support went back to their lives, and left the family with little support. Again it seems clear that within the cultural matrix of those who were in their circle, having something tangible to do for the family was important. If one could not do something for either Henry, Susan or the children, there was little point in even contacting them. The *theology of the Cross* emphasizes that doing something is not always necessary nor helpful, but rather what is needed is to offer a ministry of presence and care. The aim of pastoral care in this paradigm is to help people to acknowledge their pain and reassure them that God is with them in all that they suffer.

When people experience grief, the church has a pastoral opportunity to be present to them in their experience, allowing them the space to ask questions as well as to seek answers. The best model, it seems at this acute stage of grief, is to be supportive and to lend a listening ear.

In applying Frankl to this scenario, one would need to be highly selective and sensitive. Frankl has within his model highly positive notions of human free-will and personal agency, regardless of the conditions in which people find themselves. Although this can be tremendously creative, especially in the latter stages of grief, to apply this assumption to the beginning stages of grief would be catastrophic. Susan didn't need anyone a week after the accident to come along

and tell her about *attitudinal* values or the orientation to keep strong. She was already getting enough of the self-talk from her own cultural background. What Susan and Henry needed and indeed discovered through this horrible experience was a deeper sense of God's abiding presence and support. What Susan and Henry, as well as the children, needed was to hear more about how God was with them and to have that demonstrated to them through the caring concern of others.

Free-will is what is considered basic to Frankl and because we have free will, we are, in theory, able to come to a form of detachment from the circumstances we find ourselves in. Now, Frankl is not preaching "will power" here or trying to lay blame at the feet of victims if things are not going well. Rather the intention is to see hope as related to positive attitudinal and actual possibilities for the present and the future. Frankl bases this understanding on what he refers to as the *Noological dimension* or the capacity to rise above one's circumstances. It is "attitude" for Frankl, that is essential. Attitude is something that will help us to rise above our circumstances and restore freedom and dignity to an individual. A positive example of this attitudinal orientation then in relation to Hall would be an orientation toward the Cross and an openness to the negation of experience.

Caution is called for here in reference to grief ministry. A high view of human free-will has the potential of being either very affirming and empowering or crippling and blaming. Celebrating personal agency in the latter stages of grief is more beneficial than concentrating on attitude when people are in the initial stages of grief. Although neither Henry nor Susan received this kind of talk from others, they did receive it from themselves. People, particularly in the

beginning stages of grief, need to be supported and upheld, rather than be told to get over and on with it.

Frankl holds that at the very core of human existence, there is a *will to meaning* or a basic sense to fulfil meaning and purpose. We have a transcendent quality that helps us transcend toward meaning. For people of faith, we are invited to transcend toward God. The Christian Gospel affirms that even in the midst of grief and despair, there is hope. The quest for meaning, for Frankl, is the ultimate motivator. The motivational theories of Freud, Adler and Maslov maintain that pleasure, power, and self-actualization are not ultimately motivating because they are not goals at all, but rather by-products of meaning.

Although the family often asked "why", it was not an answer but the journey of questioning and searching that helped them learn more about themselves and grow in their faith in God, the one who was present to them. Frankl refers to a faith orientation as having over-meaning which contains a recognition of the religious sense of providence. He holds that within this practice, those persons who have had a religious orientation are most able to cope. Letting faith be operative in one's life can be challenging, affirming and encouraging. Henry and Susan were never the same after the accident. They and their children suffered terribly from the events that happened that day; they still grew in a positive notion of "God with them" through their pain. This was perhaps the greatest redemptive element, both had a strong theology of God being with and for his people , and this orientation and grid sustained them through the transition and seeming chaos that ensued from the accident.

Frankl does not see meaning making as a destination but rather as a journey. Meaning is something that is discovered in various circumstances and situations. This is consistent with both Susan and Henry's experience. Although the event happened twenty years ago, it is still something which they learn from and process. Frankl sees that in discovering meaning, we are aided by three kinds of values ~ experiential, creative and attitudinal. In the experience value, we can learn more about ourselves and others. Creative values involve fulfilling one's sense of mission in utilizing one's abilities in working for a cause. Attitudinal values are cultivated through taking a stand toward unalterable conditions and towards suffering. Both Henry and Susan have experienced more about themselves and others. They are older and wiser from the experience but at the same time, would never wish such an event on their worst enemy nor be grateful it happened to them. They nevertheless can say that they have learned a lot through the experience.

For Frankl, there is a sense that modern society has de-constructed community as a value. Although there is a deep-seated sense within the human soul that needs relationship, society tends to emphasize individualism at the expense of community. This sense of need for community is a relational script within our very human make-up.

Love is something which is rooted with our need for community. To be unconditionally affirmed and accepted is perhaps the most sought after gift. Love is unearned, unmerited and even unattainable and is conferred as a free gift. Frankl sees love not so much as an emotional condition but as an intentional act. Love, then, is not so much feelings based as it is attitudinally based. Because love is something which goes beyond the physical, there is a sense that love is as

strong as death and love can outlast death. Anyone who has lost a loved can tell you that you never cease to love that person even though many years may have passed and other persons have come into your life and take on previously held roles of the loved one. Love is the source of grief and this grief is the grief of loss and separation. Mourning is the by-product of loving

Without the attachment and commitment that one has toward another who is loved, there is no sense of loss. Grief, then, is loss which is an experience relived and processed often over a lifetime. When someone you love dies, you never fully recover. Over time, the experience is processed and reflected upon, and, although the griever never truly gets over the experience, new growth happens and they do learn to laugh again.

Spirituality today is often defined as "a capacity for self-transcendence which gives integrity and meaning to the whole of life" (Oxford English Dictionary). The way this process is experienced varies greatly according to one's own personality as well as religious and cultural contexts. In contemporary spirituality, perhaps there is too much emphasis upon an interior life of the inward person without reference to a larger context of spiritual meaning. According to Reginald Bibby, we live in a paradox of faith in Canada because people have never before been more interested in questions of meaning. Yet, they look to organized Christianity and see an apparent disinterest in questions of meaning (Bibby, 1987). According to Bibby, people have a need for meaning and purpose and a desire to meet God within the pivotal passages of their lives. People are looking for a context for big questions to be addressed. Why is there suffering in the world? What is the purpose of life? (Bibby, 1993).

These questions are often what surface when we experience grief; when loss causes us to rethink some of our previously held assumptions. There is, I believe, a deep longing within the human heart to address these questions, particularly when personal and systemic homeostasis is upset. It is in these experiences of loss that this *search for meaning* often heightens, and the potential to encounter God becomes for many, very real. Both Frankl and Hall have useful elements to the *search for meaning in grief.*

The Psalmist expressed this best when he penned, "Who going through the Vale of Misery use it for a well" (Psalm 84:6 Book of Common Prayer, 1962). Often, it is at our lowest point that we as human beings reach instinctively for God as a child would call out for his mother.

I have found both Victor Frankl and Douglas Hall to have their strengths in application to grief ministry. Perhaps in a simplified way, they function as archetypes for two contrasting ways of interpreting reality as well as understanding the nature of God. I have mentioned before the function that these two theorist have in representing two differing polarities in both of their conceptualizations of hope. Frankl sees hope as something which is potential in its relation to creativity, whereas Hall sees hope as rooted in the present outflow of God's self-identification with suffering humanity. Frankl has the conceptual framework of transcendence, whereas Hall is oriented toward "God with us".

In terms of the nature of Christ, Frankl, lends himself to emphasizing the Divine, whereas

Hall's strengths seem to be in emphasizing Humanity. This is not to say that both could not be used in seeing the other nature, but in terms of emphasis, they tend to gravitate toward either pole. Theologically, one could see Frankl as very much lending himself to a transcendant notion of God. We see in Frankl a strong element of co-creative potential in humanity, a co-creativity that accepts responsibility as a pre-condition for freedom. The notion of discovering meaning has a strong similarity to the Christian notion of *vocatio*, or *call* where the journey metaphor is realized and God is seen as calling the person forward to new tasks and purposes. It is a strong element in seeing potential in the midst of grief and loss. Even though what has been loved is lost, and even though there is pain and suffering, there is also creative potential for the present as well as the future.

Hall, from a Christological point of view, emphasizes God's self-identification with suffering humanity. He emphasizes that things are seldom perfect and God is present with us, even in times of tremendous pain and suffering. From an experiential point of view, I have noticed that the times in my own life when I was experiencing grief were consequently times when I felt most spiritually needy and open to the presence of God. I have further noticed within pastoral ministry that when people go through an experience of grief, often theological questions come forth, particularly questions of theodicy. Hall's *theology of the Cross* allows for serious criticism of a triumphalistic theology that seeks to quickly fast-forward to the Resurrection without addressing present implications for the Incarnation.

When people encounter grief, the church has a pastoral opportunity to be present with

them in their experience, allowing them the space to ask questions as well as seek answers. The best model, it seems, at this acute stage is a ministry of presence lending support and a listening ear. I see this model articulated in Hall's theology. Further down the road, there will be time for the person to further examine a creative future. Frankl's *search for meaning* well suits itself to this reflection and integration with an eye to the future.

The *search for meaning* is at the heart of human spiritual need. Often this natural search takes on heightened reality during a time of intense grief and loss. This is perhaps the "silver lining" of the loss experience because it is precisely then that we become more open to the movement of God towards us. Bereavement seems to have, as a built-in component, the desire for meaning and wholeness: "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God" (Psalm 42:1).

As previously stated, the *search for meaning* is often heightened in the experience of loss. This is not to say that one has to experience loss only through physical death of a loved one. The experience of death is perhaps one of the most universal experiences. In the Greek New Testament, the word *apollumi* is used by Jesus to refer to death. This term has a more inclusive content than the mere death of the body which is *nekros*. This is an important and yet subtle differentiation reminding us that in life, we experience many deaths and many losses. I have found in my pastoral experience that many feel a need to explore the meaning of death in an attempt to understand the experience. Even in the midst of despair, the Christian faith holds that death does not have the final say. As the bereaved explore death, what often happens is that they begin to

explore the meaning of their own lives.

C. Ministering To Those Who Grieve

Is there something I can do? This is often the question asked by well-meaning people in response to the bereaved and it is terribly important to offer support and assistance at this time. However, I am convinced that one must be sensitive and should not attempt to put the pieces of the puzzle together for others but rather give those who grieve a ministry of presence, realizing that when it comes to allowing people to express their grief and move through the experience, casual advice doesn't help. Hall's *theology of the Cross*, in reference to the experience of negation, is helpful here. As previously discussed, Hall's greatest strength is how he articulates God's present care to those who suffer. The ministry of support is especially crucial in the first stages of the grief process, in supporting a person in overcoming the initial shock of loss. Grief counselling or support groups can often help the person regain a sense of personal equilibrium. Taking time to listen not only to the person who is grieving but also encouraging them to take time to listen to themselves and to see God's care and concern around them, are two important ingredients of the ministry of presence.

Coming face to face with grief has a way of opening up questions of meaning even in the most sceptical or perhaps most non God-conscious person. Loss of a loved one often leaves such a void which all the activity in the world just can't seem to fill. It's within this void that a person can step into an encounter with the *search for meaning*. From a Christian point of view, this

search is contextualized within the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. In the Christian tradition, pastoral care seeks to assist people to deepen their relationship with God and with other human beings. Each one of us experiences this search for relationship from within our own contexts. It is through just such events of grief that we can experience an expanded spiritual capacity. Out of respect for this dynamic and the integrity of the person, the best way to assist another is always to adopt the role of "visitor", respecting the boundaries that the other places upon their own grief. Through this respectful care, the griever will receive space to move beyond the initial shock toward acceptance of their loss in the time-frame that they need.

The experience of loss can work to bring about an increased sensitivity to deeper questions of meaning and spiritual wholeness. The assistance of a pastoral counsellor as a sensitive listener, in hearing the story of loss, can allow questions of meaning to surface in their discussions and look for moments of grace, echoing signs of hope and of transformation. Within this process, there can be a search for meaning, a search for the presence of God who is already there. In order to do this, the person extending pastoral care to the griever needs patience and hope.

Human nature desires the familiar. When life as we have experienced it breaks down, often our first response is to try to fix things as quickly and as painlessly as possible. Hall reminds us that things will not always work out the way we want and sometimes, there may not be any answers.

D. Conclusion

In the midst of the experience of loss, we can encounter the mystery of life and the mystery of our faith. Often when we experience grief, questions of meaning will come forth. Questions of *why* are, for the most part, beyond our human ability to understand, and although perhaps therapeutically good to ask, will seldom bring any concrete answers. Perhaps, then, we are asking the wrong question. Perhaps the question is not *why*, but *how* and *where*. Hall addresses the question *Where is God is the midst of this ?* by answering that God is with us, Immanuel. Frankl answers the question *how* by reframing it into how one makes meaning and sees creative, attitudinal possibilities for moving through one's conditions, not being defeated by them. Perhaps this is where Frankl and Hall both inform the journey metaphor ~ God is with us in all that we face and calls us forward to journey with Him.

Grief can open us up to question our preconceived notions about ourselves and God. When that which is familiar is taken away, our familiar secure ways of understanding life are challenged and reframed.

Questioning is good because, in the search for answers, we will find new treasures of which we had no previous knowledge. Grief is an experience in a person's life when questions about meaning will begin to surface. In experiencing loss, questions about God begin to surface and a process of searching will begin or perhaps be reshaped and intensified. This seeking will cause us to encounter God in deeper and more profound ways. This search for meaning in grief is

a journey which takes a lifetime to pursue.

Pastoral care for the bereaved should take into account this experience as a moment of grace when, those who we minister to, can experience a spiritual quest. Surely our response to this reality should be to foster the quest. "In the midst of life we are in death, of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord" (Book of Common Prayer, p. 601). Grace can surely be experienced even in the midst of pain and sorrow. God is most surely with us in all that we face. God's spirit is present to us even in the depths of pain, offering a journey toward deeper relationships, with self, others and God. We are with God, by grace, co-workers even when we feel as if we are certain to fail, or be crushed. In this mystery, God is at work and there is hope for healing and transformation. For me, the following expresses this interface between Hall and Frankl.

> *"See, the home of God is among mortals.*
> *He will dwell with them as their God;*
> *they will be his peoples,*
> *and God himself will be with them;*
> *He will wipe away all tears from their eyes.*
> *Death will be no more;*
> *mourning and crying will be no more,*
> *for the first things have passed away."*
> *And the One who is seated upon the throne said,*
> *"See, I am making all things new"*
>
> (Rev. 21:3b-5a)

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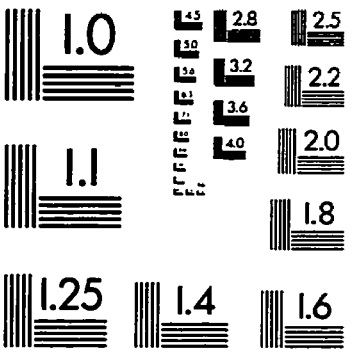

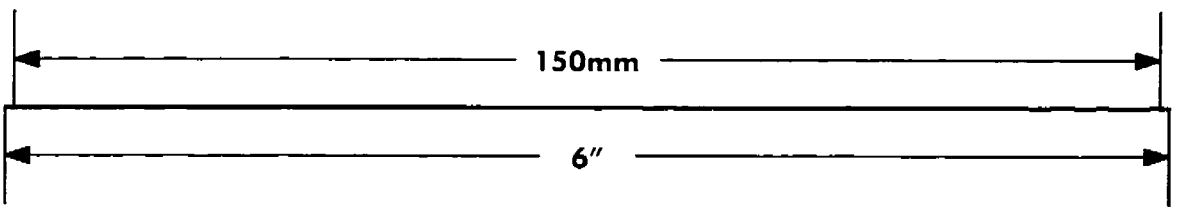

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