

**Trinitarian Ground of Healing of Families**  
**Presentation to ACT Conference 2015**  
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Since the early 60s trends in both theology and therapy have moved away from focus simply on the individual to seeing the person as essentially relational, conditioned by interaction in a social system which affects both sickness and health. I came to this view theologically through an interpersonal view of Trinity and the Holy Spirit which led me to a Scripture based intergenerational view of spiritual development and healing.<sup>1</sup> Contact with the work of the family therapists Murray Bowen,<sup>2</sup> and Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy<sup>3</sup> showed me a similar dynamic in family emotional systems. Bowen focused on differentiation in relationship as the process of freeing creative healing from binding negative patterns. Nagy pointed to trust and the balancing of receiving and giving as the way to freeing loyal self-delineation and growth. The "illnesses" of their patients were revealed as functional disorders of the whole family's interdependent emotional system, much as Scripture speaks of the "sins of the fathers being visited on their children to four generations." I was helped by these therapists to ask more precise theological questions, and in turn, my theology has helped reveal both the strengths and limitations of their systems. Insights from both have provided guidelines for healing prayer.

In this presentation, I presuppose the truth that we are influenced by our parents and ancestors, and I raise the question of how our Triune God, "in whom every family takes its name" as Ephesians 3:12 says, brings healing if we are so influenced by our parents and ancestors back to Adam and Eve. I also presuppose the Scriptural view of social/religious development that I presented in an earlier article.<sup>4</sup> Since that time, I have become acquainted with Bert Hellinger's work on "Family Constellations." Bert Hellinger had been ordained a Jesuit priest in Germany and had worked as a missionary among the Zulu tribe in South Africa for 16 years. He learned of the importance of community from them and of group dynamics from an Anglican priest. He left the Jesuits, studied psychoanalysis in Germany, learned about Arthur Janov and trained in primal therapy, and several therapies – neurolinguistic therapy, Gestalt, TA, and family therapies and addressing unconscious loyalties, and gradually developed an adaptation of Virginia Satir's method of family sculpting. He found that representatives in family sculpting would pick up the feelings of those they represented, and he could use their information to help the client. Gradually, from experience with many people, he developed certain principles that were repeatedly verified in family constellation work. I will begin by reflecting on some of these principles and then correlate them with my scriptural view of faith development and more recent insights into God's way of healing families.

### **Family Constellations**

In family constellations we first embody the impasse (the issue we seek healing for), then examine how it is rooted in the family and cultural system, and then we look for the resolution -- how to see it in a restored way that releases hope and love. An example from my personal experience will illustrate the process. A woman who was angry at her husband for not helping her to care for their children was presenting her issue. I was invited to represent her husband and simply respond as felt right. As soon as I felt her husband's situation I wanted to get away from my wife. I felt she was asking me to do what I could not do. Her mother's representative also felt overwhelmed, as did her grandmother and great grandmother. Finally, her greatgrandmother felt joy in mothering and the facilitator had her hold the greatgrandmother, who held the grandmother, till my wife's mother could hold my wife. I then felt moved to connect with my wife with understanding and sympathy. She was

looking to me for the mothering she hadn't gotten. I later realized it was also my issue since my mother did not relate well to her mother.

Hellinger does not start with faith – God's Triune Love – but with the experience of working with people and their families. In a recent book, *Rising in Love* (2008)<sup>5</sup>, he put his reflections in light of **three levels of conscience** he had found by working with people: the **personal conscience**, the **collective or systemic conscience**, and the **spiritual conscience**.

**The Personal or Family Conscience** is based on **belonging** to our foundational group. “Good or bad are related to thinking, feeling, and/or doing something that is not in resonance with the expectations and demands of those people and groups to which we want to belong, on which we may even depend for survival.” (RIL, 55) We feel a “good conscience” when our sense of belonging is not endangered. We have an “uneasy” or bad conscience when we feel our actions will not be accepted by the group (family, peer group, culture) which we depend on for belonging. All depends on what serves one's survival or the individual's group's survival. For example, the “child” in us may feel “guilty” for doing well in school out of a disordered “loyalty,” if her mother had failed in school, for children feel an innate loyalty to please and benefit their parents, as Nagy points out.

**The Collective or Systemic Conscience** is wider and extends over generations. While the personal conscience attends to the individual's belonging, the collective conscience attends to the family as a whole and to the group as a whole. It represents the general interests of one's whole nation or culture, beyond personal feeling. Unresolved violations, even of past generations, will be atoned for in later generations, regardless of whether they were allowed or not in the individual's group of belonging. Revenge, for example, seems just to the individual, but begets a need for further revenge and in the end only causes harm for the group as a whole.

**The Spiritual Conscience** overcomes the limits of the other consciences by extending to all people regardless of good or bad as previously defined. This conscience is a “loving spiritual movement toward everything that is.” (RIL, 67) It moves everything exactly in the way it moves, in a creative manner, whether we want it or not, whether we submit to it or we try to resist it. If we remain in tune with this conscience, we move and think and feel and act only as far as we perceive ourselves to be guided and carried by it. When in harmony, we feel good, calm, and without concern. We know our next steps and have the strength to make them. “This feeling, this ‘knowing,’ can be called the good spiritual conscience.” (RIL, 60) We sense a bad spiritual conscience as a restlessness, a spiritual blockage where we no longer know our way or what to do, and we feel devoid of strength, as when we have excluded someone from our loving attention. Through its effects, the bad spiritual conscience guides us back into harmony until we become calm again with loving attention and love for everything and everyone as they are.

### **Principles that apply to each of these levels, especially to the collective conscience:**

**First Law (derived from experience): Completeness:** Every member of the group has an equal right to belong. When a member has been excluded for any reason, a later member of the group will have to represent the excluded member (by taking on his or her fate, feelings, similar illnesses and even dying in a similar way), even though unaware of the connection. **This drive to inclusiveness seems blind in the choice of its means**, such as who will represent the excluded member. There is no predictable reason.

**a. No one loses the right to belong through death.** The system contains its dead and its living members in the same way.

**b. Who belongs:** **1) children**, including those stillborn or aborted and often also the miscarried ones, or those kept secret and who were given away. **2) Parents and their blood siblings**, those who made it and those who did not, those who were kept and those who were given away. **3) Former partners of the parents** belong to the family and will be represented by one of the children until they are remembered with love or grief and brought back in. They made room for what occurred after. One feels when love reaches the other person allowing them to find rest. Then one's collective conscience finds rest. **4) Grandparents, but without their siblings** (unless the sibling has had a special fate), and the grandparents' former partners. **5) Sometimes great grandparents and distant ancestors** in my experience, who initiated a wound or a special blessing in the system. **6) People whose loss or gain – of life or of fortune – created an advantage or disadvantage for our family.** Eg. when one's family inherited large sums of money or property at someone else's expense. *Victims* of violent acts at the hands of members of our family, esp. those who were murdered. Or vice versa, *Perpetrators* when members of our family are victims of crime, esp. if they lose their lives, the murderers belong to our families too. Murderers and victims feel incomplete until they have been reunited to the other.

**c. The Balance:** -- **Guilt** is felt here as an obligation from having received or taken something without having returned something of equal value. **Innocence** is felt here as freedom from obligation, by passing on something of equal value to others, or passing to children or life what we received from our parents whom we cannot fully repay.

**Atonement and penance:** When we have caused suffering to someone, we also want to suffer as a form of balance. This doesn't directly help the other though they may feel less alone. **Revenge** is also a form of balance, but in the end causes harm to all. The collective conscience wants to bring back something that has been lost, as when someone suffers for the sin of another. **Healing** may come from that balancing, though the persons involved in it may not understand why.

**Second Law: The law of priority** “requires that those who belonged to the system earlier take precedence over those who came later.” (59) The **collective conscience** will try to restore the place that is appropriate for each one's rank.

- a.** Parents take precedence over children, the first child over the second, etc. The ranking is fluid; as new children are born, the precedence shifts.
- b.** When each person begins a new family, that person with the partner takes precedence in the new family, and the new family precedes the former one, though the connection and loyalty remains.

**The violation of the law of priority and its consequences:** Eg. When children place themselves above their parents and act accordingly without love. Or more often, when a child wants to take something on for the parents with a “child's love.” This brings a good “personal conscience” but violates the collective conscience by trying to parent one's parents.

The **first consequence is failure.** This happens also in organizations when a lower ranking person attempts to rise above a higher ranking one. Death results.

The law of priority is an order of peace, love and life everywhere. **Note however**, since God is eternal and grounds all time, God's actions are always prior to every order and always take precedence!

**The Different consciences and their roles in Family Constellations:**

All three consciences are involved in resolving individual family issues. They work together and complement each other. From the perspective of spiritual conscience we can see more clearly how the personal conscience serves our belonging to a limited group – especially our family. It loves, but it also rejects those who don't belong. The collective conscience integrates those who were excluded but it is not so much concerned about the individual as the survival of the group as a whole. Movements of the spirit are concerned with all, a love that knows no boundaries. The movements are always “of love.” They may not come to completion, but set in motion something in the souls of those concerned.

**Relation to Stages of Faith Development:**

What Hellinger is describing experientially correlates well with the scriptural stages of Faith Development I have developed (Fig. 1). They help us to integrate those stages theologically.

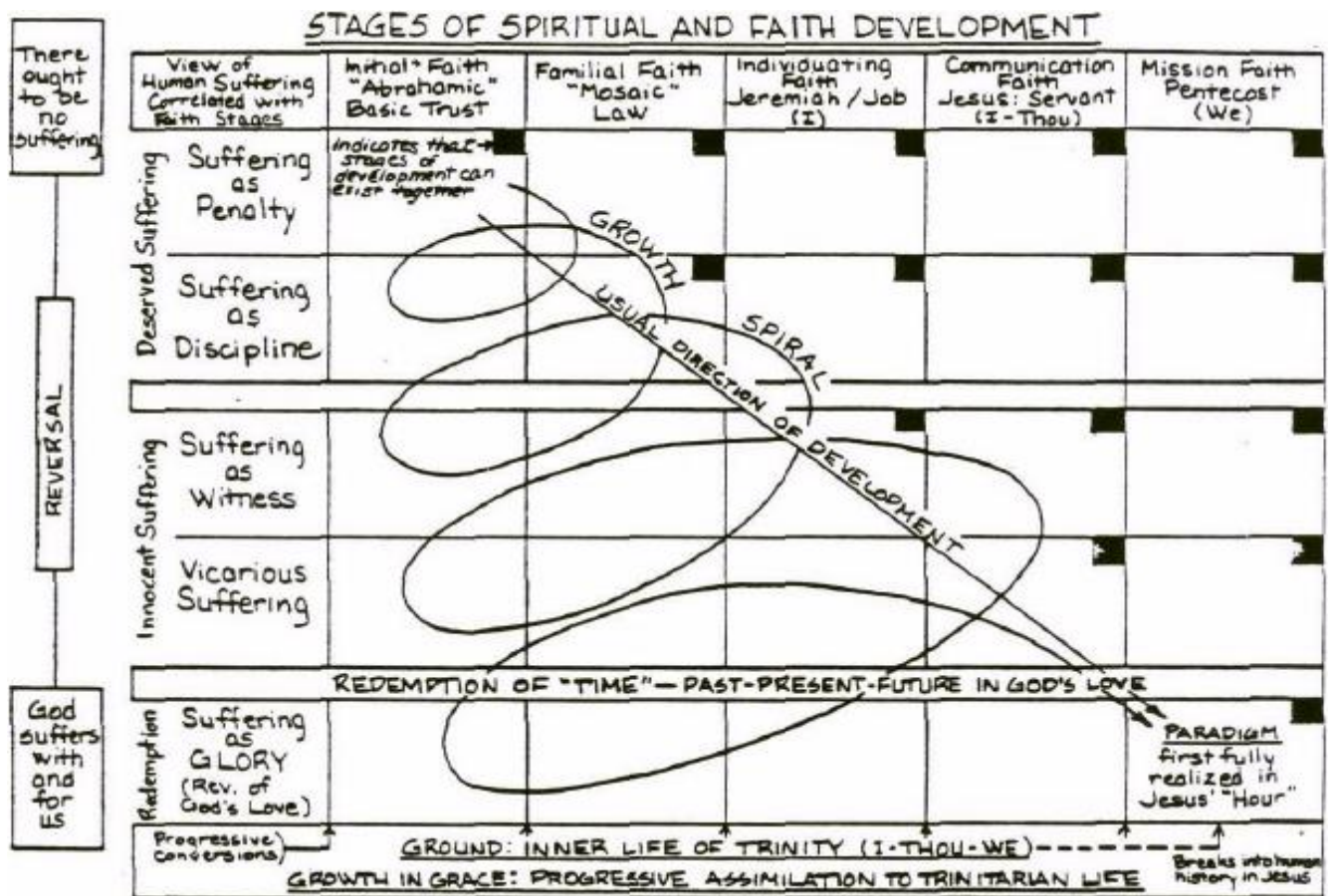


Fig. 1. Dynamics of Scriptural View of Faith Development

“Initial faith” (a felt, “belonging” relation Israel’s God, Yahweh) relates to Hellinger’s *personal conscience*. “Familial faith” (where one is influenced by law and the sins and blessings of fathers and mothers are visited on their children) relates to the *collective conscience* but also includes the personal conscience. What I have called “Individuating” and “Communitarian” faith (which first emerged in the Exile, but was fulfilled with Jesus) relates to Hellinger’s *spiritual conscience*, in that it extends to all people whether good or bad. Since the stages are cumulative and cyclical, as are the three consciences, the final “Mission Faith” stage, Jesus’ death/resurrection, grounds all the stages

and restores what God intended in the beginning for humans, access to the tree of everlasting life, but now that access is through the cross.<sup>6</sup>

If we look closely, we see that God's love is involved in each stage, but is limited by the maturity of those that receive it. **Initial Trust** in God's love grounds initial faith, but Adam and Eve reduced it to self-love, wanting to be "like God" in their narrow view. **Familial faith** broadens awareness to all Israel, but that stage interprets the commandments (Thou shalt not kill, etc.) only for Israel, not for their enemies, which they killed "for God's sake." In the "**Individuating faith stage**" their God is the "only God," and God will give his Spirit to the "least and the greatest" (Jer 31:31ff) despite the "sins of the fathers/mothers." They begin to see their God as also guiding the nations. This prepares the way for Jesus to universalize an active love to God's all-inclusive Love. "Love your enemies," Jesus said, which includes those who were excluded by their previous collective view. This "**Communitarian stage**" begins with Jesus. Finally in "**Mission Faith**" all attachments to what is not God are transcended. This is the ultimate healing, the return to what God intended for Adam and Eve before they sinned, when they were to live from the Tree of Life (everlasting life). This connection to everlasting life was lost because of their sin, not only for them but for all humanity. But it was regained by Jesus's death/resurrection when the cross became the Tree of Everlasting Life through Jesus' resurrection.

### **Further Explanation of the Final Stage ("Mission Faith") that integrates every stage.**

#### **God's Original Intention for Humans Restored:**

Mission Faith is Jesus' final revelation of God's Love, the Father's willingness to sacrifice his own Son for love of us. Jesus said "a Son cannot do anything on his own but only what he sees the Father doing" (Jn 5:19). "Philip, whoever has seen me has seen the Father." (Jn 14:9) Jesus' dying on the cross is a revelation of his Father's laying down His life in sending his Son to die for us. That is the Love that made it possible for the Father to allow sin in the first place, since God, as Love itself, could not allow anything that could not be made good. Allowing sin reveals the absolute transcendence of God's Love, which cannot be ineffectual unless it is rejected by free creatures.

What Jesus restored through his human life/death/resurrection is what humans were created to be before Adam and Eve sinned. Their "Original Sin," choosing to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to be "like God" in their view, brought spiritual death – separation from sharing God's eternal life. As Jesus died on the cross he said, "It is finished" and then "handed over the Spirit." (Jn 19:30). The blood and water from Jesus' pierced side represents the Eucharist (Jesus' body and blood) and Baptism. Believers are reconnected to our heavenly Father's eternal life, the tree of life, through the cross of Jesus. Baptism, being "born again/from above of water and the Spirit" (Jn3:3), restored believers to become again children of God and brothers/sisters of one another. At the resurrection, Jesus' said to Mary Magdalene, when she encountered him as the "gardener," "Do not cling to me (as Eve did after their Fall) but go to my brothers (the first time his disciples are called "brothers" in John's Gospel) and tell them I am going to my Father and to your Father, to my God and to your God." (Jn 20:17). God is now Father, so Baptism brings believers into a restored family of God.

This family also has a mother, Jesus' mother, a "New Eve" as the early theologians Justin Martyr (d. c. 165 AD) and Irenaeus of Lyons (d. 200 AD) proclaimed. Catholic faith interprets Jesus giving his mother to "the disciple Jesus loved" as giving her to all disciples.(Jn 19:26-27). This view is supported by Rev 12:17 which says that the dragon, not able to devour the woman, went to wage

war on her offspring: “those who keep God’s commandments and bear witness to Jesus.” The woman involved had given birth to a son who would “rule all the nations with an iron rod” (Rev 12:5). This woman was Mary, the mother of the church of all believers in Jesus. At the annunciation Mary believed and obeyed, “May it done to me according to your word” (Lk 1:38) and at Cana she told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Where Eve disobeyed, Mary obeyed, and called her children to obey.

Was she also conceived without sin as Eve before the Fall? That is what Catholics have come to believe, after Duns Scotus pointed the way. St Thomas Aquinas had argued that Jesus came because of sin, and no one can be freed from sin except through Jesus’ intercession, so Jesus must have freed from sin, however early. John the Baptist was freed in the womb by Mary’s visitation. John Duns Scotus, a Franciscan priest theologian (1266-1308), c.40 years after Thomas (1222-1274), argued that Jesus would have had to become human whether or not humans sinned, for only in God’s Son can humans live forever, and humans were intended to live forever as God’s children. So Jesus was first in God’s intention to create humans, and he must have needed a mother. If God was to restore us to God’s original intention, his mother also must be preserved from any sin, as Eve was in the beginning, for sin is an abomination to God. God must have wanted this and he certainly could do it, so, Scotus argued, he must have done it. Mary was still redeemed by Jesus, but before her conception for His sake and for our sake, her spiritual children. Like all of us, she also had to choose, and she chose to obey God. Mary told Luisa Piccarreta that in her mother’s womb she made a choice never to do her own will, but only God’s will.<sup>7</sup> If we are “predestined by God in the beloved (Jesus) before the foundation of the world to be “holy and blameless”(Eph 1:4), how much more Jesus’ mother and the mother of the church.

In 1854, the Immaculate Conception of Mary was declared by Pope Pius the IX to be a defined doctrine of the Catholic Church. Four years later, when St. Bernadette, a peasant girl at Lourdes, was told to ask the Lady who was appearing to her what her name was, the Lady replied: “I am the Immaculate Conception.” She had no idea what that meant but the priest did. Maximilian Kolbe, a theologian devoted to Mary, pondered this statement. He eventually concluded, “In God the Holy Spirit is as it were the “Eternal Immaculate Conception,” since the Spirit is breathed forth from the Father and Son as from one principle, from their conjoint love. That would explain why the Son had to ascend to the Father in order to send the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:7; 20:17-23). His humanity needed to be joined to the Father for the Holy Spirit, who unites persons in the Trinity, to be “sent” into the church at Pentecost to unite believers in the Trinity. As one with the Holy Spirit, Mary would unite her children with Jesus and the Father and with each other, as indeed she does. In letting Mary be our mother, we also would be “immaculately re-conceived,” and would share Mary’s mothering of Jesus. Jesus indeed said, “Whoever does the Will on my Father is my mother, sister, and brother.” (Mk 3:35). Through Baptism we have become God’s family, living with Jesus and the Holy Spirit in the Trinity’s inner life.

But God’s life is free and freely chosen. We cannot sustain it unless we continue to choose to let our Baptism and God’s self-giving love continue to be the dynamic of our love. We cannot do that unless we conform our will each moment – each choice – to God’s Will, which is Jesus’ Will and Mary’s Will. We have to be “born again” each moment of our lives until our last breath when we also say to our Father, “Into your hands/heart I commend my spirit.” To do this, as Jesus said, we must “take up our cross and follow him” ( Mk 8:34).

**The Cross has become the tree of life:**

It is through the death of Jesus that this access to rebirth free from original sin is made possible.<sup>8</sup> It was on the cross that Jesus “gave the Spirit” which is the fountainhead of Baptism and Eucharist (blood and water that flowed from Jesus’ pierced side.) But the cross was not just at the end of his life, for Jesus. It was part of his whole life, and to live that restoration we need to freely accept it in every stage of our lives.

Scripture states clearly that Jesus bore our sins (Is 53:4-6) – “The Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all”), and this is confirmed in 2 Cor 5:21: “For our sake he [God] made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” St. Irenaeus explained the significance of Jesus life with a term first used by Paul -- *anakephalaiosis* or *recapitulation* (Eph 1:10). Christ is *head (kephale)* of all things. In him everything coheres and has meaning. This is especially true of humans. Jesus became a *new Adam* so that in him we can be restored to the likeness of God. This could only happen, Irenaeus affirms, if Christ, who is the very truth of God, would take on sinful human nature and relive and transform each stage of human development. In him, then, we could be reunited to God. The case is similar with Mary. “Just as Eve, by disobeying, became the cause of death for herself and the whole human race, so Mary...became the cause of salvation for herself and the whole human race...What the virgin Eve tied through unbelief, the Virgin Mary set free through faith.” (*Adv Haer*, III 22: 4). Jesus went through every stage of human life interceding for every person who ever lived or ever would live, that we would be restored to what God intended for us before Adam and Eve sinned. He said on the cross, “It is finished.” Now we need to apply his intercession to each stage of our lives to live out our restoration.<sup>9</sup> Even now, we are confronted with the tree of life -- our cross, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil -- doing our will or Adam and Eve’s sin. To choose the tree of life is the foundation and goal of all healing since illness came because of sin and our disconnection from God’s life. It is healed through reconnection with Jesus in every stage of our lives. Let us see how this is so.

## II. How Jesus Heals the Stages of Development

Jesus went through stages of human development interceding for us at each state, to make it possible for us to be transformed in His image. But we have to choose his transforming life at each stage of our development for it to apply. Since healing begins with the healer, I will illustrate some of these steps from my own life. God leads everyone differently, but the major shifts are the same for all of us – from childhood to young adulthood to a breakthrough into contact with God, to mature handing on of what we have been given. As we look at the stages, I invite you to let Jesus show you how your choices correspond to his or not.

**Childhood – “Initial Faith”:** We all have our own journeys. The journey begins in the womb. What I found, when I was being prayed for at age 42 or so, is that I had said in the womb, “I won’t be a burden.” I had an older brother and sister and my mother’s mother was also overburdened, so I must have picked that up in the womb. That we do that is increasingly better known. Arthur Janov, a psychiatrist who founded primal therapy, has written a recent book, *Life before Birth*, which documents the influence of such early trauma on later illnesses.<sup>10</sup> My choice had a number of repercussions – 1) What we do to protect ourselves will fail. It will actually cause the very opposite. Life became a burden to me, which later led to depression. 2) My choice isolated me since I closed myself from needing anyone, which prevented me from really connecting with anyone at an intimate level. In the context we are considering, I was carrying the effects of Original Sin, doing my will, which separated me from God and others in attempting to save myself.

**My first healing step** was to repent of that decision and ask God to release me into receiving the mothering He wanted for me. That began a process of God giving me “surrogate mothers” – those who began to open me to receiving a mother’s love. Much later, some 30 years later, I glimpsed the depth of that early hurt. It was “shock”, so overwhelming that I couldn’t “try” to do anything. I just had to receive God’s Love. More recently, God showed me that He had already solved my problem by giving me Mary as my healed mother and his heavenly Father as my father. We are baptized, “born again” into the Holy Family. I saw I needed to dis-identify from my earthly family as my foundation and to see them as my “first apostolate,” the ones God gave me and me to them to help each other open to God. I needed to get my identity from God. I have since invited clients who were receptive to let Mary (and the Holy Spirit) be their mother and their mother’s mother, to avoid the resistance of feeling disloyal to one’s parents. Do that for nine months, and invite Jesus to be in Mary’s womb with you, as he was, to teach you how to open to a mother totally motivated by Our Heavenly Father’s totally freeing love.

**Youth – “Familial faith”.** Youth is a time of learning one’s tradition -- family, cultural, and religious tradition. What we decide in childhood is carried over into our youth. My choice not to be a burden put a great burden on me. I was trying to save myself. I was “eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” thinking that I had to prove I was good. Youth is a time when we develop our skills and vocation, and if it is not based on a peaceful “being loved,” it will be a fearful “proving oneself” and one’s identity will be rooted in one’s accomplishments, not one’s own God-given person.

Jesus lived through youth and left us an example of how that stage is to be lived. He grew up being taught the tradition and Jewish way of life. St. Joseph taught him his trade since Jesus was known as a “carpenter” as was St. Joseph. Then, when he was twelve, his time of growing to adulthood, on their trip to the Jerusalem Temple for the feast of Passover, he stayed behind in the Temple when the others left. His parents had to return three days later and look anxiously for him. His only explanation was, “Did you not know I must be about my Father’s business?” His parents didn’t understand, but Mary “kept all these things, pondering them in her heart.” Jesus then went home with them “and was obedient to them, and advanced in wisdom, age and the favor of God and men.”

All authority is from God. It is God’s will that we be schooled and be obedient to our parents and teachers except in sin. We are to learn the tradition, but what Jesus is showing us is that His only ultimate authority is His Father. Not everything handed down to us is from God. “The sins of the Fathers are visited on their children to four generations.” I picked up attitudes from my parents that were not from God. I was living in response to those attitudes -- uncertainty, scrupulosity, perfectionism. To be “born of God” into Jesus’ Family, is our true “tradition” and all else is to be seen in that light. Jesus shows us how he saw his Jewish tradition. He healed on the Sabbath, and explained, “My Father is at work until now and I work.” The Sabbath is to be dedicated to the Father, to God’s “rest,” and in God’s “rest” healing occurs. To “mature into God’s heart” is to see through God’s eyes, with compassion and Love. In that light, Jesus was obedient to his Father and to his biological parents and modeled for us how to advance in wisdom, age and the favor before God and others.

**Our Unique Call – “Individuating Faith”** At some point in our life’s journey, we may experience a particular call of God, a breakthrough beyond the tradition we have learned. What was our response to it under God’s guidance, to that personal experience of God’s call on our life, our divine



purpose? In Israel's history it was during their Exile in Babylon. The covenant of their youth, their general vocation to obey God's directives, had failed because they did not observe it. Instead of seeing everything in light of God, who had led them out of Egypt, they became like the nations they had conquered, worshiping their gods, getting caught up in their traditions. They didn't listen to the prophets who called them back to their God. The Exilic prophets proclaimed the Old Covenant broken because of their failure to observe it (Jer 31:31ff, etc). Hope would come only from a New Covenant, God's own Spirit given to each one, which Yahweh himself would effect.(Ez 36:26) The "new covenant" would be based on a personal relationship with God, that would free each individual from simply living out "the sins of one's parents" (Ez 18).

I experienced this stage while studying theology in Germany. My lack of self-esteem was coming to a head. I felt unable to do anything adequately. I was depressed and no matter how much I learned about it, the depression only got worse. That was my Exile. But it was also my "breakthrough" to experiencing God's "new creation." God's word to Israel during their Exile spoke to me in my exile: "Do not look at what is behind. See I am doing something new!" (Is 43:18-19). That was the Spirit's word to me. It lifted me from the depression of my mother and ancestors. It encouraged me to accept the suffering I was experiencing as innocent, and it opened me to a surrendered love that I previously knew nothing about. I also became aware of a love beyond what was utilitarian, based on what one could do for others. I later bought a guitar "because I liked it" and found it "good," not in order to help anyone else (though it has blessed many since). I began to see things in light of God's "new creation," what God is NOW doing, so that even suffering was seen as part of purification to open to "new creation."

Jesus experienced this individuating purification as he confronted Satan's temptations after his Baptism. His earlier "finding in the temple" was like his Exodus experience that allowed him to submit to his parents and the culture in a God-directed way. In the desert he confronted the demonic deep temptations of Israel and responded by surrendering all to God – bodily needs, prestige, power, and ultimately his life. It was, as Hellinger put it, the emergence of his "Spiritual Conscience," his Father's transcendent love. He quoted Scripture for each temptation – "we don't live by bread alone, but by every word from the mouth of God" (Dt 8:3), "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test," (Dt 6:16) "God only shall you serve" (Dt 6:13). Israel had grumbled about the manna, had demanded signs and power. Jesus chooses a single-hearted devotion to God. He was not misdirected by family or culture, but saw everything and everyone in relation to his Father. It is this God-centered surrendered love that purifies our relationships and frees us from the negativities of our traditions. God initiates this breakthrough, and surrender to the mystery of God's Will is what liberates us from imbedded destructive tendencies and unifies us with the goodness and blessings planted in our family lineages from the beginning..

This breakdown may happen in various ways, but always involves a breakdown of our previous patterns of life. In midlife many things can happen, divorce, failure in work, sickness, loss of loved ones, children going astray. It may seem as though one had lost contact with God. One might feel alienated from church and family and feel that one's life has been all for nothing. As the Servant in Is 49:4 says, "I thought I had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent my strength..." One's conscious integration in society (i.e. ego development) has left other aspects of one's individual uniqueness undeveloped and suppressed. These suppressed aspects emerge in the form of unwanted tendencies, fears, angers, our primal pain. At some time or other there is hopefully a break-through of "spiritual experience" springing from one's spiritual center, from God

personally experienced. However, experience shows, that this breakthrough is only a beginning. In time, because one's relationships and ways of acting are still patterned on the old model, the experience ebbs, love cools, or one loses the vision. We need God's help to continue choosing it. Each action of surrender to God's Will, the tree of life, moves us a step closer to Living in the Heart of God and away from relying on our will, the tree of "the knowledge of good and evil."

### **Ministry of Reconciliation and Restoration – “Communitarian Faith”**

Jesus takes us even further. Isaiah 53:3-5 says, “He was spurned and avoided, a man of suffering, accustomed to infirmity...we held him in no esteem. Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured...by his stripes we were healed.” Nowhere else in the OT do we see suffering for others even adverted to until Jesus. This stage takes one beyond mere presence to God to become a coworker with God in facing suffering to bring healing to those in need. Jesus “became sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Cor 5:21).

Already in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaimed we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us “That you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust” (Mt 5:45). This is further sign of the “spiritual conscience” Hellinger speaks of. If we are grounded in God, we will see all others through God's eyes, with compassion and desire to heal. This would not be helpful to those who need to learn to stand up for themselves – those in the familial faith stage. Done too early, the effort to love one's enemies may only repress one's hurt. But when we trust God entirely, as Jesus did, we begin to see God's hand in everything that happens. Enemies teach us to love more universally. As Joseph in the OT, when we see with God's eyes, we can get past the hurt to see God's desire to save in everything, to bring sin into the light so it can be repented of and forgiven. This love reaches back to our ancestors and forward to our offspring, “God's mercy to a thousand generations on those who love him and keep his commandments.” (Ex 20:5-6)

Not only are we to forgive our enemies, we are to sacrifice ourselves in loving them. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan is an example of one who risked his life to help his neighbor (Lk 10:29-37). Where there is no love, put love and you will find love. At this stage, we see our suffering as sharing the suffering of others with Jesus to help them open to God's Love. This is what Jesus did his whole life! He became “sin” that we might know God's Love. “It is in giving that we receive,” St. Francis wrote, giving as God has given to us.

### **Jesus' Death and Resurrection --“Mission Faith”:**

I have often asked people, what is it that makes Jesus' dying on the cross so important? He was not healing anyone. All but a faithful few of his disciples scattered and were left with black despair. And yet we celebrate the cross as central to our redemption. Why? How does Jesus' death figure in our quest for healing and intimacy with God? Why, indeed, did death as we know it come at all? God did not make death, the book of Wisdom says: “God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him. Through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his party experience it.” (Wisdom of Solomon, 2:24) It stemmed from God's command to Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. “From the moment you eat of it you are surely doomed to die” (Gn 2:17). Death is our final enemy as Paul says (1 Cor 15:26), the final stage of human existence that Jesus assumed in order to transform it. Satan kept us

in slavery through fear of death (Heb 2:15). Jesus made it the gateway to eternal life. “Death where is your sting,” Paul says, “The sting of death is sin.” “Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Cor 15:55-56) Actually, death is a remedy for sin. God banished humans from Eden, lest they eat of the tree of life and live forever.” (Gn 3:22-23). Death puts an end to sin, but we see it as an end to life. In Jesus it is the restoration of the only true life – eternal life.

Jesus experienced death in all its horror, not just physical death, but the ultimate effect of the sin of humankind, separation from God. His “primal scream” -- “My God, my God why have you abandoned me?”-- is the unspoken scream of every mentally ill person, indeed of all of us. It is the ultimate and deepest shock, the overwhelming experience that renders us helpless, and destroys our relationships with one another. In drinking that cup of death to the end, Jesus revealed something that went even deeper, a Love, God’s Love, that will never end. Jesus also sent forth the Holy Spirit to empower us to love with God’s Love, to face death (as the disciples did after Pentecost) trusting in that life and love that will never end.

Jesus’ death “bears much fruit” (Jn 12:24). This is unique. The Maccabees died because they refused to disobey the law. They showed great courage, but nothing is said about their empowering others. As we unite our dying with Jesus’, we are born anew into a new family, a holy family, with Jesus’s Father as our Father, his mother as embodying the Holy Spirit and adopted in Jesus as God’s children. It is this new family, living from the death/resurrection of Jesus, that is the final source of healing. “Death is at work in us,” Paul said, “but life in you” (2 Cor 4:12). “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church.” (Col 1:24)

This new family reaches all the way back to Adam and Eve and forward to the fulfillment of humanity. Jesus is the “New Adam,” as Paul put it, the one who in subjecting everything to himself restores everything to communion with God (1 Cor 15:27-28). Christ’s resurrection is an event in God, which shares God’s eternal time. It is also a bodily event that transforms our bodies and frees us from the consequences of ancestral sins and unhealed wounds. We have found that deeper healing involves such bearing the wounds of our ancestors with Jesus in order to mediate his healing.

### **Conclusion: Trinity and Healing of Families**

All illness, sin and death came because of sin, and was handed down in families and cultures to the present day. The ruler of this world (this self-centered world) is the evil one. Only God could restore humanity to eternal life, to an expression of God’s own Trinitarian Love. Families are healed only when they are re-grounded in God’s Love, beyond merely human desires and expectations. This love in a sinful world is ultimately expressed in “laying down one’s life” for others. The suffering derived from sin is replaced by the suffering for others as an expression of God’s unconditional love, the gateway to eternal peace and love.

Jesus passed through each of the stages of development that we have presented and opened healing for each stage. As we choose, with Jesus, to bear our cross at each stage of our lives, we are brought into the inner life of the Trinity, the foundation and goal of our healing.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> My first presentation of spiritual development was “Trinitarian Love as Ground of the Church,” in *Theological Studies*, Dec. 1976, pp. 652-679. I later added an initial stage and clarified the grounding in a seminar paper, “Trinity and World Process,” in *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* (CTSA), June, 1978, 211-217. I applied that pattern to healing of the family in “Healing and Family Spiritual/Emotional Systems,” *Journal of Christian Healing*, vol.5 (Spring, 1983), pp.10-23.

<sup>2</sup> See Murray Bowen. *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice* (N.Y.: Jason Aronson. 1978). Ch. 16 "Theory in the Practice of Psychotherapy" (1978), 337-387.

<sup>3</sup> See especially his *Invisible Loyalties* (N.Y.: Harper & Row Medical Dept., 1973). co-authored by Geraldine M. Spark.

<sup>4</sup> See my “Healing and Family Spiritual/Emotional Systems,” cited in footnote 1.

<sup>5</sup> Bert Hellinger, *Rising in Love: A philosophy of Being* (Berchtesgaden, Germany: Hellinger Publ, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> The chart together with scriptural texts clarifying each stage is available on my website: [www.familytreehealing.com/other](http://www.familytreehealing.com/other) resources.

<sup>7</sup> See *The Virgin Mary in the Kingdom of the Divine Will*, by Luisa Piccarreta, Day 4 and Day 5 The need for a test (as with Adam and Eve) and Mary’s response to the test.

<sup>8</sup> John 7:37-39 wrote, “out of his side shall flow fountains of living water. He said this regarding the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was not yet because Jesus had not yet been glorified.” That is, the Holy Spirit would come when Jesus was “glorified,” ie. on the cross.

<sup>9</sup> Jesus told Luisa Piccarreta that from his very conception he conceived in himself every human being who ever existed or ever would exist and continued to intercede for them in each stage of his human development. Jesus was embodying in himself – in his human choices – what Adam and Eve had failed to do. He told Luisa: “**Since the glorious and immortal humanity of innocent Adam was missing, My humanity therefore pleaded on its behalf that it might receive the great gift of My Fiat. That is why it was necessary that My humanity first renew decayed humanity and give to it all the remedies it needed to rise again, and then to die and rise again with the qualities of innocent Adam. By this means, I was able to give back to man what he had lost.**” *The Book of Heaven*, vol.27, (May 12, 1929), cited in Rev. Joseph Leo Iannuzzi, *The Gift of Living in the Divine Will in the Writings of Luisa Piccarreta* (Missionaries of the Holy Trinity, 2013) p; 61.

<sup>10</sup> See Arthur Janov, *Life Before Birth: the hidden script that rules our lives*, (Chicago, NTI upstream, 2011).

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