

Enduring Significance in My Faith

I have been exposed to three faith images that relate to death: (1) reincarnation, (2) immortality of the soul, and (3) resurrection of the body. Neither of the first two is biblical, and both claim a factual prolongation of existence beyond the death certificate. Neither one grabs me. The third, as it functions for me, has nothing to do with prolonging existence. Rather, it portrays daily life in ways that give it a 'by God' dignity and purpose and thus what has been called 'enduring significance'.

Resurrection of the Body

When I think of 'resurrection of the body', something like this goes on in my brain. I picture my fact story as unfolding across the page from birth to death. Above the fact story is a faith story with its images and affirmations. 'Resurrection of the body' is, to me, lifting up my fact story and imagining it in terms of the faith story. When I use the resurrection of the body image I am in no way thinking about the disposition of my corpse after the medical school is through with it. To me, 'resurrection of the body' is faith language, not factual.

Sometimes I picture the faith story as a drama – the drama of the whole scheme of things; the drama of whatever the whole of life is all about. My daily life as 'body', what I am doing right now and what I do every day, is constantly being "resurrected" into that drama. In my faith picture, this thing I am writing plays a 'by God' role in that drama even if no one ever reads it and I forget it.

In a parallel way, I sometimes picture the faith story as a symphony. On the back row is a musician who makes only one sound in the two-hour concert. He hits a 6" triangle with a small metal rod once. But he puts his whole heart into that one action because he knows he has made a contribution to the whole. Every bodily action is 'resurrected' into that symphony.

Another image that sometimes comes forward in my brain was found in J. D. Salinger's stories about the Glass family. The Glass family 'saw' beyond their fact stories into faith as through a glass dimly.

Franny, who was frantically seeking dignity and purpose for her life, called her brother, Zoey, to talk with him about it. Zoey related to Franny what their deceased brother, Seymour, had told him. Zoey was working in a TV show. The camera never saw his shoes, but the director ordered Zoey to keep his shoes polished. To Zoey, obeying the director was not only purposeless, it demeaned his dignity; but he needed the job.

Seymour told Zoey not to shine his shoes for the director but to shine them for the Fat Lady. Picture the Fat Lady smiling with appreciation for your shoes. The director had no power to take away Zoey's 'by the Fat Lady' unconditional dignity and purpose. When Franny heard the story, she shouted, "It's Jesus. The Fat Lady is Jesus." Sometimes I picture my 'body', that is, what I am and do, as 'resurrected' up to the Fat Lady.

A faith image that first grabbed me as a youth is of the Lord saying, "Well done good and faithful servant." I picture Jesus as a kindly Boss. As I undertake the things I do, I think of doing them for the Boss. This Boss does not fire me even when I screw up. He bestows an unconditional dignity and purpose when he says, "Well done good and faithful servant."

This image parallels the dictum of Viktor Frankl, who survived the Nazi death camp. Frankl said that, in the camp, he learned that the meaning of life, i.e., its dignity and purpose, lies not in some grand philosophy but in attending to the concrete tasks that life lays before us day by day. Both the image and the dictum influence my behavior.

One final image that is sometimes operative for me. It has to do with being remembered which, I suppose, is one way of ascribing dignity and purpose to one's life. I am remembered in certain year books and memorial books. The faith image is of a book in which I am unconditionally remembered. What my body does is resurrected by being recorded in the book, and all the recorders say "Right on, Crum" when they do so.

I believe these faith images make a difference in the way I function. Faith in a 'by God' dignity and purpose frees me from trying to achieve dignity and purpose by collecting accomplishments and affirmations. Accomplishments and affirmations are nice, but they are not necessary.

I also think that these faith images permeate what I do with an imperative to do it well even if nobody cares, with a feeling that what I do matters regardless of results, with the freedom of living my life for one God rather than for many people pulling me in many directions. I don't know how much difference these faith images make in behavior, but they make some.

What I have been talking about may be something of what Jesus meant when he said that we must become as children to enter the kingdom of heaven, i.e. the realm of faith, the realm of imagination. A child's realm of imagination can be more real than the facts of adults. Recall Dr. Suess' *And to Think It Happened on Mulberry Street*.

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