

# A THEOLOGY OF THE MEANING OF LIFE

by J. Edward Barrett

Anyone familiar with the history of Christian thought knows that theology does not so much solve its problems as get tired of them. Every new trend in theology has historical antecedents which have previously been explored and subsequently abandoned. Every old issue in theology was laid to rest with the weary certainty that some future theologian would resurrect it, enthusiastically proclaiming it to be the lost key to all of theology's puzzles.

The question of the meaning of life is one such never-quite-solved problem. Appearing with rhythmic regularity in the literature of theology, from *Ecclesiastes* to *The Courage To Be*, it has for more than fifty years been a central concern of our culture. It has been explored by contemporary psychoanalysis, explained by modern sociology, and given dramatic expression by twentieth-century literature. In existential philosophy, "meaninglessness" is a cornerstone. Protestant theology, from 1914 through the early 1960's, has acknowledged the problem as "decisive."<sup>1</sup>

It is just possible, however, that theology, as it prepares to enter the 1970's, has, predictably, become bored with the problem of meaninglessness and is about to put it out to pasture. This is partly because we understand the problem better after fifty years of theological and humanistic analysis and partly because we are exhausted by the contemplation of a question so immense that most of our answers seem to be but pale, fragmentary, and inconsequential responses.

The purpose of this paper is to determine what is at issue when the question concerning the meaning of life is asked; to define the essential content of an answer which is not pale, fragmentary, or inconsequential; and to suggest how such a "theology of meaning" implies a "theology of discipleship," which will permit us to move beyond the problem of meaninglessness to less awesome but more concrete (dare we say "meaningful"?) problems in the 1970's.

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### WHAT IS THE MEANING OF "WHAT IS THE MEANING OF LIFE?"

*The first point* to grasp concerning the question of the meaning of life is that *it must be taken seriously as a question*. It should, of course, be unnecessary to say this. But the dominant theological voice from the first half of this century spoke a deliberate, Swiss-Germanic "nein" to just this demand. Barth believed that man without revelation is incapable of asking the right questions. Therefore, his natural questions, including the question of meaning, are to be ignored, and the correct questions are to be defined in the light of the theological answers derived from revelation. There can be little doubt that this presupposition gave to Barth's style and content an impressive freedom and authority. Barth proclaimed the problem of meaninglessness to be a pseudo-problem, because God in Christ has overcome it, conquered it, stolen its power.

The difficulty inherent in this position is that there is no criterion for determining whether it is true. No appeal can be made either to the world of objective fact (for example, the behavior of nature) or to the subjective world in which a man experiences himself (for example, his feeling of emptiness). Indeed, these references are among the very ones which raise the problem of meaninglessness. But without some such sort of evidence, grounded in human experience, it is impossible to determine the truth status of Barth's answer. It is, in fact, impossible to distinguish it from his own state of mind. It is impossible to know if the answer he proclaims is the ultimate truth or simply a counsel of optimism arbitrarily founded (perhaps ultimately traceable to an unusually high flow of adrenalin). Barth's theological independence from what he feared was "Egyptian bondage" to existential questions unwittingly renders his answer irrelevant to some of the very human experiences which prompt the question of the meaning of life.

I conclude that arbitrariness short-circuits conviction and renders Barth's theology powerless to help or to persuade. The adequacy of every answer is determined by its sensitivity to the question. The question concerning the meaning of life must be taken seriously as an existential question, and an adequate theological answer will reflect this seriousness by seeking to be persuasively believable, on the basis of empirical fact, logical inference, and reflective self-awareness. For it is out of this kind of data that the question of the meaning of life is composed, and it is to this kind of data that an adequate and relevant theological answer must be spoken. This points to the continuing, and fundamental, importance of a scientifically informed and existentially confirmed metaphysic (or ontology).

*The second point* to understand concerning the question of the meaning of life has to do with the *comprehensive character of the word "life"*—which covers the entire spectrum of human experience, including man's obvious participation in nature, his distinctive contributions to history, his artistic creations, his ethical sensitivities, his scientific achievements, his existential passions, fears, sufferings, hopes, failures, values, yearnings. The question concerning the meaning of life includes all of these in the word "life" and inquires after a theological interpretation of them. A theological answer that ignores any dimension of this spectrum is likely to be to that extent irrelevant to what is meant by "life" when the question of the meaning of life is asked. For this question is not concerned with some particular aspect of life; it is an undertone present in all of life.

I conclude (apprehensively) that the question of the meaning of life is identical with the quest for a theological system: a believable, consistent, and comprehensive interpretation of the experiences that compose human life, their relation to one another, and their ultimate ground and goal. There is a definite correlation between the relative dearth of theological systems in the twentieth century and the problem of meaninglessness.

*The third factor* in understanding the question concerning the meaning of life turns upon *the meaning of "meaning."* An illustration should help clarify the issue. With apologies to Paul Tillich, let us take the manufactured sentence: "Life ceases to be shallow for the man whose roots are nourished in the depths of the ground of being." If you had no familiarity with the theological use of the phrase "ground of being" and did not encounter the sentence in context, it is just possible you would find the sentence quite meaningless, in spite of the fact that you knew the meaning of every word in the sentence. Or, you could possibly have some general understanding of the meaning of the sentence and still not know how the phrase "ground of being" was used. The point to grasp is that when we do not understand how a word or phrase is being used in a sentence, even though we understand the words themselves, then that word or phrase, and perhaps the sentence, is experienced as meaningless.

Now, in an analogous way, when we do not understand how a particular experience of life (let us say suffering) is related to our general understanding of life (let us say confidence in the love of God), even though we understand the experience itself, then that particular experience of life, and perhaps our general understanding of life, is threatened by meaninglessness.

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Whether we are discussing the grammatical relationship of words to one another within a sentence, or the existential relationship of particular human experiences to one another and to life as a whole, *the word "meaning" describes relationships, asking if they are mutually supportive and if they collectively compose a purpose which transcends while uniting the purpose of each component part.* The question of the meaning of life is asking about the relationship of the rich spectrum of experiences which compose life, inquiring to what extent the relationship of these experiences to one another is mutually sustaining, and if the unity of these relationships has an over-all significance. We find life meaningful when the experiences which constitute life are organized in our field of awareness as relating with minimal ambiguity to a pattern of purpose which we experience as rewarding and which we believe conforms to the truth about the human situation. Thus, if I believe that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever, I will want to know how innocent suffering, or wasted resources, or demonic politics, relate to one another and to this over-all purpose. And in the absence of a convincing explanation, establishing a coherent pattern, I am going to experience life, or some aspects of it, as meaningless.

### MAN'S MEANING OR PURPOSE: TO ENJOY AND ENHANCE PATTERNS OF ORDER IN THE WORLD

And now we must ask: Is there an over-all meaning to the sentence, a meaning in which all of the words participate and to which they contribute? Is there a general meaning to life, a meaning in which all of the experiences which compose life share and which together they constitute?

In spite of the protests of existential theology, from Kierkegaard to Bultmann, that a convincing *Weltanschauung* is impossible, I believe that a description of the general meaning of life can be undertaken with confidence and that to decline such an undertaking is an act of theological irresponsibility. Of course, the achievement of a convincing theological interpretation of the full spectrum of human experience—a *summa*—always remains a goal instead of an accomplishment. But such a goal can be proximately realized, and it is proximately realized in every theological essay. Therefore, the question concerning the possibility of ultimate solutions is irrelevant, and the critical question concerns the relative adequacy of every theological undertaking.

The best theological answer to the question concerning the meaning of life will emerge from a careful listening to the question. That is, a

discerning perception of the question should contribute considerably to the development of an effective answer. And if the full complex of human experiences is so rich as always to be beyond an exhaustive interpretation of their relationships, interconnections, and general direction, it does not follow that we are void of insight. But rather than argue for the formal possibility of such a *Weltanschauung*, I will undertake to describe the meaning of life as I understand it.

I wish to suggest that the question concerning the meaning of life is itself a clue to the meaning of life. The animal who asks such a question is evidencing the fact that he is the spearhead of biological evolution on earth, that he is in fact "evolution become conscious of itself."<sup>2</sup> Being conscious of evolving trends, man asks: Whence and whither? To what end? Who am I, and, what is my relation to the not-I? This capacity for "reflective consciousness"<sup>3</sup> makes man the animal who is specially suited for appreciating the relationship of the various experiences which collectively compose and support his life, and who is uniquely equipped for establishing new as well as enhancing old patterns of relationship. Since "meaning" is a term denoting relational order and man is the animal that consciously explores patterns of relationship, it follows that man's appreciation of existing relationships (patterns of order) and his contribution to the development of new relationships constitute the meaning of his life. Man is consciously the meaning-appreciating, meaning-creating animal, and the meaning of his life consists in the appreciation and creation of meaning.

Another way to express this is to say that the purpose of life is to be an appreciative agent of meaning—appreciating existing meanings and establishing new ones, responding to the felt quality of meanings by sensitively expressing them, and creatively broadening the range of the meaningful world by becoming a bearer of meaning to others.

Two illustrations will help to clarify this definition:

(1) If I am shown Independence Hall in Philadelphia, I may quite clearly understand that it was in this building that the American Declaration of Independence was signed. But if it should happen that I have recently read a biography of Jefferson, and if a considerable portion of my energies has recently been spent in exercising my constitutional rights to criticize the government, then I am much more likely to appreciate my visit to the historical sites in Philadelphia, to find them meaningful. Man is fulfilling what we may call the appreciative side of the meaning of his life when he enjoys the quality of relationships which contribute to his being the man he is, living in the world in which he lives.

(2) The second illustration follows from but is a complement to the first. If because of my appreciation of the quality of these relationships I should seek to persuade you to participate with me in my attempt to change our government's policy, then I am in fact struggling to create new relationships—relationships between the quality of meaning which I feel and that which you feel as a meaning-appreciating agent. I am also trying to change the character of the relationships between the quality of meaning which I appreciate and the policy of my government. This struggle by word and deed to establish new relationships or to change old ones, this expanding and enhancing the range of the meaningful world, is the creative side of the meaning of life.

Human life is constituted in the twofold act of appreciating existing meanings and creating new ones. The evolutionary process has equipped man with the intelligence to discover existing patterns of relationship (the quest for truth) and to anticipate imaginatively as well as to create effectively new or enhanced patterns of relationship (the quest for value). The two quests are not categorically exclusive. Man is most characteristically man when undertaking these activities. That is, man fulfils his purpose in natural history when he exercises his potential for enhancing the relationship of structures which constitute reality—an activity which also brings him enjoyment and satisfaction. Man is distinguished from the rest of the animal kingdom by this capacity to enjoy and to enhance related structures of meaning. Cultural history can only be interpreted as the record of and witness to these essentially human enterprises. Indeed, culture *is* the conduct of these enterprises, and by them it is possible to distinguish primitive man, who has not yet come to understand his role in natural history, from civilized man, who has begun to understand his function in the evolutionary advance. Both man's biological uniqueness (reflective consciousness and intelligence) and his historical uniqueness (culture) evidence the extent to which appreciation of existing patterns of relationship and creation of new ones constitute the meaning of being human.

To be a person is to be a conscious, appreciating, and creating nodule of meaning within the network of meanings or patterns of order which are human society, history, nature, ultimate reality. Each person is a unique center within this network, a self-conscious intersection toward which relationships converge and from which they radiate. The meaning of life is fulfilled in the conscious appreciation of these relationships and the conscious development or extension of them—thus enriching personal experience and the character of the whole.

Or, to approach the same concept ontologically: If God is understood

as logos or the constitutive structure of reality, then each man is a subordinate structure perceiving in a fragmentary way the relationship of the structures which compose him, and his relationship to the larger structures (ultimately God) that support him. This perception of the relationship of structures is the experience of meaning, and the appreciation of such relationships, together with the creation of new relationships, is the meaning of human life. To the extent that such relationships expand and become mutually supportive, the quality of appreciation is increased and life is experienced as more meaningful.

Of course, this definition presupposes that it is possible to speak knowingly of God, the logos, the constitutive structure of reality, and even of the whole of reality. And certainly one may wish to question this. Does not man experience meaning in fragments? What right does he have to move beyond these fragments and generalize about the totality of meaning, or the pattern of the whole? Indeed (pressing the question radically), what right does he have to suppose that there is a totality of meaning, or that reality is patterned into a whole?

In seeking an answer, it should first of all be acknowledged that man is able to ask such questions because, in his capacity as "reflective consciousness," he is separate enough from the rest of his world that such questions have a certain plausibility. He is a conscious, subordinate structure, able to distinguish himself from the collective structure. Consciousness implies this estrangement of the conscious agent from that which is not the conscious agent.

But conscious thought—and particularly the language by which thought operates—also implies an intuition of the unity of things. The use of the verb "to be" to describe the actuality of the self, others, and the world (*I am, you are, the world is*) evidences this. It reveals a persistent presupposition: that, whatever our differences, we have in common the event of our *being*, the fact that we *are*. Such a term as "universe," or our use of the word "real" to designate the actuality of entities as diverse as light waves, lions, and liberals, testifies to the same presupposition.

Of course, this observation has only limited validity or power to convince. Words sometimes are used to express ideas which designate no corresponding reality—"unicorn" and "mermaid" being obvious examples. Because our vocabulary presupposes the unity of the world does not prove it united, and to argue that it does is to commit the logical fallacy of "existential import." But I am not arguing that our vocabulary makes the unity of the world necessary. I only wish to maintain that our vocabulary evidences something about our prerational suppo-

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sitions regarding reality. In itself this argument is not conclusive. But the argument need not stand by itself.

Everything we know about the objective world tends to confirm this intuition concerning the structured interrelatedness of the universe. Whether considering the evidence for biological evolution or for the origin of the present cosmos, the subatomic nature of the physical world or the general theory of relativity, the universal law of gravity or the laws of thermodynamics—all these support the intuitive supposition concerning the fundamental unity and interdependence of the diverse entities in the world. The sciences seem to provide increasing evidence that all of reality is interrelated, evidencing patterns of shared influence and common origins or foundations. And if this evidence from natural science is not considered enough, sociological and psychological research, as well as cultural history, lends further corroboration. No man (and today no nation) is an island. Or, to change the traditional use of the metaphor, every man *is* an island, ultimately related to every other island because of their common ground and shared surroundings. Existence is never in a vacuum, but only in dynamic relationships with others, with other things, and ultimately with the all-inclusive other. Another way to say this is that every substructure within reality is related directly or (more often) indirectly to every other substructure, so that together they constitute a collective structure which is different from every part, but in which every part lives and moves and has its being—God.

Individual men do, of course, find meaning in relationship with different subpatterns within the universe. The man who is a scientist may live within a structure of meaning quite different from that known to a housewife in a big-city ghetto—quite different, but not totally different. It would be tedious to point to their common dependence on agriculture, medicine, government, language, etc.—though all of these designate patterns of relationship which they share. The point to grasp is that their common origins in the physical universe, in biological evolution, in cultural history, in political and economic systems, give them a common ground which, despite all individual differences, is never lost. The world is a vast network of substructures which can never be exhausted by any individual (except God, the universal structure), so that the pattern of meaning for one man may indeed be different from the pattern of meaning for another.

Men find meaning in enjoying and expanding what are sometimes very different patterns of relationship within the universe. But when a man creatively enhances a particular pattern of meaning (for example,



when a scientist makes a discovery which expands the range of knowledge, or a politician signs a treaty which expands the range of law and community), he is, in enhancing a substructure of the whole, also enhancing the whole. As a creative part of the universal structure, he contributes to the totality of meaning.

Classical theology spoke of the meaning of human life in terms of enjoying and glorifying God. The whole of the preceding analysis serves only to clarify what it means to enjoy and what it means to glorify him. For the appreciation of meaning is nothing less than the enjoyment of related structures of which God is the constitutive ground, and the creation of meaning is nothing less than the glorification of God by enhancing and enriching the relationship of structures which collectively constitute the divine life. Another way to say this is that man enjoys in his fragmentary way his limited perceptions of meaning, of which God is the creative foundation, and God enjoys in his universal way the total perception of meanings, of which each man is a creative fragment.

Man enjoys and glorifies God when he appreciates and contributes to the growth of the meaningful world. And the "meaningful world" is precisely the actual world of related structures which compose and support human life. Therefore, every dimension of human experience is potential material for the growth of meaning. Consciousness of the anatomy of one's own personality, the forces and feelings operative in other men, the possibilities and limitations of politics, the dynamics and disruptions of history, the empirical facts of natural science, and the underlying ontological structures—all these enhance a man's appreciation of the relationships which make up the actual world, and all deepen his experience of meaning. But man is constituted in such a way that he is not permitted for long to enjoy such relationships without contributing to their enrichment by concrete actions, consciously undertaken. Therefore, the discipline of one's own personality, sympathetic co-operation with the legitimate aspirations of other men, the regulation of politics to broaden the community, collaboration with the constructive dynamics of history, translation of the knowledge gained by natural science into life-enhancing technology, and a pervading responsiveness to the fundamental structure of reality—all these glorify God by augmenting the relationships which collectively compose *his* meaningful world. Thus, each person is a subordinate nucleus of meaning who, in his capacity as conscious-center, may appreciate the divine logos and may contribute to its enrichment.

## MAN'S MEANING FOUND AS SERVANT TO GOD'S KINGDOM

If, as this analysis suggests, human life is fulfilled in the appreciation of existing, and the creation of new, meanings within the actual world, then, particularly with reference to the second or creative dimension of the meaning of life, a theology of meaning logically culminates in a theology of discipleship. That is, to lead a meaningful life and to be a servant of God may be two different ways of designating the same human reality.

In the New Testament's picture of Jesus, we encounter a man whose life exemplifies in word and deed the qualities just described. It is a striking feature of the synoptic gospels that Jesus (much to the consternation of those round about him) actually enjoyed and intentionally created personal relationships with people largely unrelated to or accepted by Judean society—with tax collectors, harlots, and sinners.<sup>4</sup> Jesus, in his capacity as conscious agent, established community (more integrated patterns of human relationships) where before there was only alienation. He was the reconciler, who shared with the hungry, befriended the lonely, healed the sick, and gave hope to those in despair. There intersected in Jesus a network of created relationships so rich in character that those associated with him sensed something of the depth and divine quality of the total complex of ordered relationships in which both Jesus and they were ultimately grounded. Jesus became for these men the "mediator," prompting them into awareness of the presence and reality of the rich supportive patterns of relationship, the divine order, in the depth of their own lives. But he was the mediator only because he was first of all the reconciler, who consciously brought men into the richness of his fellowship, united them with God and with one another, and called upon them to be his disciples and to join in seeking the reconciliation of the world.

But if the meaning of life is realized in the work of reconciliation (that is, enhancing the actual, supportive relationships between man and man and between man and God), it is necessary to acknowledge with utter realism the situation of estrangement which the work of reconciliation presupposes and which makes that work of such critical consequence. This tragic character of human life and history is dramatically clarified in the New Testament. Deserted by his friends, alienated from his people, the victim of despotic politics and priestly intrigue, Jesus was able to walk into the very jaws of death because he could appreciate meanings (in this case his relationship to God and to the history of Israel) in the most meaningless circumstances (meaningless because the relationship of Jesus to the authorities and to the populace of Jerusalem had more the character of a disjunction).

No serious theology can long ignore this tragic disjunctive character of human existence. Actual circumstances historically related, such as the suffering of innocent men at the hands of cruel tyrants, can rightly be described as "meaningless" because their inadequate relationship is such as to be destructive of relationships (and therefore of meanings). They are "structures of destruction,"<sup>5</sup> or what the New Testament called "demons," "principalities," and "powers." Such inadequate relationships cannot be appreciatively enjoyed, do not enhance the meaningful world, and do not glorify God. But they do have significance, for they are the Jerusalem which Jesus entered, and the unreconciled world to which his disciples are called—called to change the actual situation in such a way that genuine relationships can be established and future meanings made possible.

This is the answer to the critically important questions: How can I experience meaning? How can I enjoy and participate in the creation of meaning? When a man asks such questions with existential seriousness, when the historical events around him seem destructive of meaning, he is called upon by God and fulfils the meaning of his life by vigorously entering that situation as an agent of reconciliation—that is, by using the resources of his life to change the character of historical life, transforming the destructive inadequate relationships into genuine, supportive relationships.<sup>6</sup> In this view, even meaninglessness itself becomes meaningful—it is the very stuff out of which new meanings are created. For every encounter with meaninglessness is an opportunity to become a catalytic agent through which new relationships of order are established, a new universe of meaning enjoyed, and God glorified.

If, for example, the relationship of my country to Communist China is such that it is destructive of the integrative or ordered relationships which enrich life, then I may commit myself to changing the attitudes and policies that inhibit the realization of meaning, and to the creation of new relationships that will increase the quality of experienced meaning. Such a task may be incalculably difficult, given my limited time, knowledge, and political power, and given the additional and considerable recalcitrance of the government in China. But such an activity is not meaningless just because it is so largely powerless. Such a concern and commitment becomes an actual fact within the existing world. And if it is true that it is a numerically insignificant fact, it is also true that it is precisely the kind of fact out of which, when the proper *kairos* comes, significant new relationships may be born and the world of meaning extended. Meanwhile, such a concern and commitment functions as a witness to the kind of behavior which broadens the range of

experienced meaning. As an act of witness and discipleship, it is meaningful even if ignored by those in power, overwhelmed by circumstances, and lost to future historians. For, as an existing fact within the structures of reality, it is related to God, supportive of his own concerns, and so meaningful for him.

The struggle, therefore, is important. In biblical history, the decisive character of discipleship is uniformly interpreted in terms of the struggle to bring meaning out of meaninglessness. In the midst of a desert of personal doubt and Canaanite depravity, Abraham struggled for the promises of the Covenant; against the oppressive politics of Egypt and the recalcitrance of his own people, Moses struggled for national freedom and moral fidelity; contrary to the syncretism, selfishness, and sin of their people, the prophets struggled for justice and peace; in opposition to the self-righteousness of the circumcision party, Paul struggled for faithfulness to the way of love; contending with the demons, principalities, and powers, Jesus struggled for the Kingdom. The work of discipleship is consistently understood in terms of struggle, of creative and courageous contention, of fighting the good fight and finishing the race.

The significance of the struggle, however, is not in the struggle itself, but in the struggle for the maximization of meaning within history, which the New Testament describes as the reconciliation of the world, and which it symbolizes in the phrase, "Kingdom of God." For biblical faith, the Kingdom is the final goal toward which a *meaning-full* life moves. It is with reference to this value that all other values are understood and accredited. Plato's classic summation of values as the good, the true, and the beautiful takes on even richer significance when interpreted in these terms. The "true" describes our knowledge of meanings (relationships), the "beautiful" expresses our appreciation of meanings, and the "good" or "just" is the establishment of conditions under which existing meanings may be appreciated and the creation of new meanings encouraged. Of course, the prophetic witness is very clear about the priority of justice over truth and beauty, because the appreciation of truth and beauty on an ever widening scale depends on the successful implementation of justice in society. Nevertheless, justice was made for man, not man for justice, and the prophetic concern for justice, righteousness, mercy, and peace is important only because they describe the circumstances in which the optimal and universal appreciation and creation of meaning may be realized.

Consistent with the prophetic emphasis on justice is the fact that the term "Kingdom" is a *political* symbol. But "Kingdom" is also a *social*

symbol, pointing to the priority of human relationships over every other level of meaning. As Paul Tillich once observed, "There is no depth of life without the depth of the common life."<sup>7</sup> It is in personal relationship with other men who also live and move and have their being in God—and not in sublime isolation or mystical union—that a man realizes or fails to realize the meaning of his life. Personal fulfillment for men and for God only occurs within the structure of relationships we know as community, and total fulfillment requires universal community. Meaning, after all, is realized in relationships of order, and maximum meaning in maximum relationships of order. Therefore, the New Testament hopes for the reconciliation of the whole world.

#### SUMMARY

Man's life is fulfilled in the appreciation of existing meanings and the struggle to create new ones. The New Testament's phrase, "Kingdom of God," symbolizes the maximization of such meaning within the actual world. This phrase "within the actual world" is important, because Jesus taught his disciples to commit themselves to the coming of the Kingdom within history, to work and pray for its realization "on earth." There is no discipleship apart from this struggle to deepen community and thereby to actualize new meanings within history. When such a struggle succeeds, it broadens the range of the meaningful world for man and for God. But such a struggle may fail. When it does, it is a genuine loss. But it is not a total loss. For every such struggle to actualize new relationships "on earth" is a factual event within the structure of reality, an experience grounded in, and so related to and meaningful for God. In him the loss of newly established relationships is real, but also real is the struggle for their achievement.

Each struggle for the Kingdom is a finite expression of the divine will for the reconciliation of the world. As such it cannot but be meaningful in the context of the divine life. Even if it fails to broaden the range of the Kingdom on earth (the meaningful world which both men and God appreciate), it nevertheless still deepens the relationship between the disciple and God. And this is of decisive significance. For if the disciple's concern is both an expression of and supportive of God's own concern (for the reconciliation of the whole world), then, through his concern and commitment, the disciple enjoys a relationship to God, and God appreciates the life of the disciple, in a way which gives final significance to finite life. Then, neither death nor life, nor anything else in all creation, can separate man from the meaning of his life. But a man may fail to commit himself to God's will and so ac-

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tually fail to fulfill the meaning of his life. Fulfilment of the meaning of life is not guaranteed by the mere fact of existence—it is guaranteed in the act of discipleship.

### NOTES

1. Paul Tillich, *The Courage To Be* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1952), p. 142.
2. Attributed to Julian Huxley by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1959), p. 221.
3. John B. Cobb, Jr., *The Structure of Christian Existence* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), pp. 41 ff.
4. Luke 7:33, 34.
5. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), II, 60.
6. There is, of course, the possibility that such a situation will call for us to amend our general understanding of the meaning of life and to develop new patterns of interpretation.
7. Paul Tillich, *The Shaking of the Foundations* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 57.