

A Christian-founded center puts at top of its flier on this subject this quote from a naturalistic biblical writing, Eccl.: "For everything there is a season...a time to be born and a time to die." A subdominant view that, with renascent Stoicism in the USA--on this subject the media personality being Betty Kübler-Ross--has become, even for many pastoral counselors, dominant. In contrast to nature-cycle acceptance aimed at Stoic "death with dignity" is the Bible's overall orientation of death as commitment: "Into your hands I commit...." "Acceptance" centers in the self, specifically in the supreme Stoic virtue egkrateia [self-possession, self-control, in the current phrase "taking responsibility for your own existence," self-containment, and --a high component in most of the recent psychotherapies, and a translation very close to the original in feel as well as morpheme-sememe--"ego-strength"]. "Acceptance" appeals because it plays into the hands of Western individualism [cp. individualistic forms of Hinduism, TM e.g.]; at a level profounder, and more amenable to the biblical worldview, it becomes third-stage "attitudinal" [after the loss of the "creative" and the "appreciative" stages] in Frankl's logotherapy. "Acceptance" is ambivalent--both a hindrance and help to getting to the other and the Other. But whereas "acceptance" is essentially egocentric, "commitment" is essentially heterocentric and therefore the primary humanizing-divinizing action of the biblical model: RELATIONSHIP FORMED/DEFORMED/REFORMED, MADE/BROKEN/MENDED--three scenes, like three Klieglights of Christian doctrine playing upon every life-experience. Under the first Klieglight (creation) death is "natural," under the second (fall) "sinful" ["the last enemy," certainly not to be accepted!], under the third (redemption) "transcended" in atonement-resurrection-Lordship-Eschaton [shalom convergence of justice and joy]. In Stoic dying, "dignity" derives from the fact that things are under soul-control; in Christian, from the fact that things have gotten out of control deliberately, by Spirit-control through commitment. The verbal distinction is glib, but the mindset difference is profound.

Death and dying are of course permanently "out" for our humanity no matter how "in" they may be in cocktail-teatime conversation. Everybody but everybody into religion teaching has at least once taught a "D & D" course, and some have even specialized in the new-wave, near-ghoulish-cult enthusiasm (part of the Vietnam and "death of God" fallouts, I think). Bob Neale, who became religion's media personality in D&D, recently responded, when I asked whether he's still into this, "No! For me, death is dead!"

Solid theological thinking is more apt to follow than precede a new wave (consciousness fad). We're beginning to get some theological critiquing of D&D, and this thinksheet is part of it. Try also Roy Branson's "Another Look at Elizabeth Kübler-Ross" (THE CHRISTIAN CENTURY, 7 May 75--today!).

Finally, here's a movement started by a terminally ill person: "MAKE TODAY COUNT":

MAKE TODAY COUNT

(Helpful Attitudes for Terminally Ill Persons and Their Families)

by Orville E. Kelly

1. TALK about the illness. If it is cancer, call it cancer. Don't try to make life normal again by trying to hide what is wrong.
2. ACCEPT death as a part of life. It is.
3. CONSIDER each day as another day of life, a gift from God, to be enjoyed as fully as possible, rather than another day closer to death.
4. REALIZE that life is never going to be perfect. It wasn't before and it won't be now.
5. PRAY; don't be ashamed or afraid. It isn't a sign of weakness... it is your strength.
6. LEARN to live with your illness instead of considering yourself dying from it. We are all dying in some manner.
7. PUT your friends and relatives at ease yourself. If you don't want pity, don't ask for it.
8. MAKE all practical arrangements for funerals, wills, etc. and make certain your family understands them.
9. SET new goals; realize your limitations. Sometimes the simple things of life become the most enjoyable.
10. DISCUSS problems with your family as they occur. Include the children, if possible. After all, your problem is not an individual one.