

The Anguish in the Garden

Jason L. Bryant

- I. Becoming the Christ
 - A. The decision on the part of Jesus of Nazareth
 - 1. A life of devotion
 - 2. A life of acceptance
 - B. The beginning of the ministry
 - 1. Teaching death without fear
 - 2. Jesus' anguish in the face of death
- II. The death of Jesus of Nazareth
 - A. Jesus speaks openly about his death
 - 1. Jesus tells of his future
 - 2. The introduction of the Son of Man
 - 3. Christhood
 - B. Jesus is reluctant to see the possibility of choice
 - 1. Self-sacrifice and the being of Christ
 - 2. Christ as life eternal
- III. In the garden
 - A. The anguish of Jesus of Nazareth
 - 1. The realization of a choice
 - 2. The pain of true freedom
 - B. Jesus faces non-being
 - 1. The need for realization by others
 - 2. The duality in the prayer
 - 3. A sense of the eternal
 - C. The crucifixion
 - 1. Full acceptance of death
 - 2. The mortality of Jesus and the immortality of the Christ
 - 3. The being of Christ

The Anguish in the Garden

“My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass me by, but let Your will and not mine be done.” *Jesus, praying in the Garden of Gethsemane*

Jesus prays these words to God as he realizes his death is to come very soon. St. Luke’s account tells that in the face of great anguish Jesus prayed even more fervently and that in the midst of this praying his sweat was, “like *drops of blood* falling to the ground” (St. Luke 22:44).

In the following, the issue will be addressed of why he would have ever had to say these words, why he would have experienced such agonizing mental and physical suffering. We will see how he addressed to his followers the issue of his death. We will look at his personal reactions to his suffering and death. The individualities of Jesus of Nazareth and the Christ will be dealt with, also the finitude of the former alongside the infinitude of the latter.

Jesus of Nazareth took on the task of becoming the Christ when he decided to be baptized by John the Baptist (Oxford 356). He took on the agenda and responsibilities that had been foretold for hundreds of years by the prophets in the Hebrew Bible. He assumed a life that would be lived in total devotion to God and it would show through his teachings and his actions towards all those he encountered. He was devoted to giving all of himself for the benefit of others, which is what he was ultimately called on to do. Jesus knew that his life would be in danger for he was a thorn in the side of the scribes and the Pharisees, the teachers and interpreters of the Law who would want things to stay the same. At the same time, his message of radical change and inner devotion as opposed to outer actions would be a contrast to the worship and life style of the day. The hatred

and threats would continue to grow against him until even one of his own followers would deceive him by handing him over to the very people who would want most the opportunity to do away with him.

Early in his ministry, Jesus tries to give his followers a sense of peace in the face of death. He tells them to not fear those who might kill the body but cannot kill the soul. At the same time, he wants them to develop a stronger sense of holiness in their lives, as he says to fear God who can destroy both the body and the soul. He wants them to align the eternal part of their existence with the Eternal Sacred. This way of living will empower them so they will not have to fear death but will remain strong, assured of the eternity that exists in their living. It is interesting that when John the Baptist is beheaded Jesus' reaction upon hearing the news is not one of strength in the face of death, but a need to be alone in a lonely place. It would seem as though he anticipates his own death in light of the fate of John the Baptist. His coming sacrifice becomes all too timely – Jesus experiences what seems to be anguish in the face of his choice to undertake Christhood. It is Sartre who said that, “Anguish is precisely my consciousness of being my own future, in the mode of not-being (Sartre 120). It would seem that Jesus has been faced with the reality his own self coming to an end. Jesus has seen the outcome of his living that will most certainly be death, one way or the other. Jesus has to face that his death, which is most authentically his own, will neither be at the hands of old age or disease, nor laid upon the hands of those who oppose him. It is more than that his death will just “be”. However, he has made the choice to take on becoming Christ and now must face any challenges and/or consequences that may come in the wake of this decision. This is, of course, dependent on where his commitments lie. Does he value

more the acceptance of God's will for him to become the Christ? Or is a safe life, free from persecution, more important to Jesus of Nazareth? Again, we see anguish in his choosing to remain with the task of becoming the Christ - all the while being free to make the choice to turn his back on being the Christ.

When Jesus begins to talk to his followers about his death, it follows a realization on the part of one his followers, Peter, who proclaims Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus tells them not to let anyone know that he is the Messiah, most assuredly because he has not yet fully become it and can only *be* it in the mode of *being* it. Jesus tells his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem, suffer, and be put to death - later to be raised to life. He presents it to them as though there is no choice for him. For the Christ there is no choice, but for Jesus of Nazareth there is still the choice to give up the project. When speaking to them this first time (St. Matthew 16:21-28), he speaks about himself in the first person:

“I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. I will be put to death, but three days later I will be raised to life.” *St. Matthew 16:21*

He speaks about death, as it will happen to him personally. During this same conversation he begins speaking on the coming of the Son of Man in Glory and that some of those present will not taste death before witnessing this. From this point on, whenever Jesus is talking about his death, he always refers to himself in the third person as the Son of Man. Never again does he say “I”, but always the “Son of Man.” This could be seen as a way of his dealing with his death by separating himself from the actual event. It could be seen as saying that it is not actually happening to me but to this other person whom we will call the Son of Man. Yet, this could also be seen to show that he has fully handed his life over to God and that whatever happens now happens only to the temporal

being and not the eternal Christ. If Jesus sees Christhood as his “Dasein”, as Heidegger indicates, and accepts Christ as his authentic being then he has no reason to refer to himself any longer as “I” for there is no temporal “I”. There is only the eternal Christ which *he is becoming*, and which he wants others to become as well. In Christ there is no death because Christ is always becoming what it will be and at the same time it always is what it is in its self - it is always being. One never has to fear death if one has begun to “be” as Christ. There is no *ontological determination* or moment when the possibility of impossibility come together for an individual. Heidegger states:

“Yet how is this entity to be apprehended in its Being before it has reached its end? After all, I am still underway with my Dasein. It is still something that is not yet at an end. When it has reached the end, it precisely no longer is. Prior to this end, it never authentically is what it can be; and if it is the latter, then it no longer is.” (Heidegger 10)

Christhood, then, is seen as continually becoming what it will always be. Therefore, all who are part of it will always participate in it until it has finished becoming. Yet, since Christhood always is, there will be no finish.

Jesus still admits no possible choice on his part, in regards to his death, always seeing it as the only thing that can happen. He also insists that for his disciples to be true followers they must pick up their own crosses daily (St. John) sacrifice their selves and follow him. He sees self-sacrifice as the ultimate service to God, the purest form of commitment. Jesus is trying to tell them they must not hold on to their temporal lives but that they must let go of them to avoid a spiritual death. Here Jesus seems to be speaking on the issue of “being”. He wants his followers to do more than just be their flesh and blood selves, those temporal beings for whom history comes to a close upon the moment of their death. Jesus wants them to take on the challenge of becoming the Christ

themselves, saviors of each other. He wants them to live a life that is for eternity, not bound up *in time*, but for them to become part of a life that is outside of accountable time.

It is in the Garden of Gethsemane that we see true anguish on the part of Jesus of Nazareth. All his prior decisions, actions - everything that he has occurred up to this point now stands dangerously on a precipice in the face of two choices: One, choose not to go on with Christhood, resume life fully as Jesus of Nazareth and live as such until death, or Two, proceed with the project, dying as Jesus of Nazareth and living fully and eternally as the Christ. Jesus asked several of his disciples to go with him into the garden. He said to them, "The sorrow in my heart is so great that it almost crushes me. Stay here and keep watch with me." He needed to be in their presence as well as in God's. Why would Jesus, *God in the flesh*, need others to be with him as he prayed to God? Why would he even need to pray other than to teach others to have an open relationship with God? It seems this is where we see a disrobement of the person of Jesus of Nazareth from the being of Christ. St. Matthew writes:

"He went a little farther on, threw himself face downward on the ground and prayed, 'My Father, if it is possible, take this cup of suffering from me! Yet not what I want, but what you want.'" *St. Matthew 26:39*

He prays these words three separate times. Three times he openly admits he does not want to suffer, that he does not want to die. It seems his grief in the garden is his realization that he really has a choice. As Jesus of Nazareth he has the choice to end the whole thing. He can rethink his decision to be the Christ and walk away from the entire situation. Therein lies his anguish. It must have torn into all that he was for his body to react to his fervent praying by his sweat becoming *like blood*. It is quite possible that he suffered more in the garden in the face of his possibly choosing to terminate the project

than any punishment he endured immediately before his death. His realization is that as Jesus of Nazareth he is free to make the choice that would turn the entire project over for another person to pick up at another time in the future. It can only be imagined how much pain Jesus must have truly been experiencing being faced not only with possibility of having a choice but also the desire to make the choice and ultimately to appropriate the freedom to make the choice. Jesus was not in any way experiencing fear but pure anguish in the face of his situation. Sartre says, “A situation provokes fear if there is a possibility of my life being changed from without...,” he goes on to say of anguish, “...my being provokes anguish to the extent that I distrust myself and my own reactions in that situation”(Sartre 116-117). Sartre moreover invokes Kierkegaard who distinguishes the two by saying that, “... anguish is distinguished from fear in that fear is fear of beings-in-the-world whereas anguish is anguish before myself”(Sartre 116). Quite possibly Jesus of Nazareth had begun to “distrust himself.” When faced with the freedom to continue choosing Christhood, he realized that nothing outside of himself could keep him from finishing the project of Christ, for any attack from outside of himself would have occurred in the process of becoming Christ, but that only he himself could very easily stop the entire process as it existed for himself. Merely by saying “enough!” the person of Jesus of Nazareth who had chosen to begin for himself the Christhood would return to being solely Jesus of Nazareth and there would be for him no more anguish over this possibility.

In running ahead to his future, Jesus had faced his becoming a non-being. Should the decision be made in favor of the project of becoming the Christ, then history for Jesus of Nazareth will certainly end in death. Perhaps this is why he wanted people to

be with him as he prayed. He did not need their immediate presence, he did go to pray alone, but he needed to know they were there. Jesus needed them to know he was there. The reality of his death had become so real to him that comfort would come from knowing that others were conscious of his being. This also may be why he was so extremely upset by their continually falling asleep while he was praying. Surely Jesus would remember all of the traveling they had done and how tired they must be, but his need to be the object of others consciousness far outweighed any desire for their personal refreshment. However, it is also seen that the Christ is present in the praying, for each time there is a “let the cup pass me by,” there is also a “your will, not mine be done.” Even in the presence of immense anguish over the decision that is to be made by that aspect of himself which is Jesus of Nazareth, there is still complete submission to the will of God in the wake of his becoming Christ. It seems that the strength that comes from the Christ empowered Jesus of Nazareth to do what must be done.

This sense of what is eternal must have been the turning point for Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth would have been caught up in what Heidegger called “clock-time.” But the Christ, while fulfilled *in time*, exists outside of time, far removed from everydayness even when in its very presence. In one sense, it could be said that Jesus of Nazareth died in the Garden of Gethsemane. The moment Jesus turned away from making any choice based on his temporality as opposed to the eternality of Christ then his life, in one sense ended. He could not be accused of Sartre’s “bad-faith” for he was no longer living as Jesus of Nazareth to have to make choices based on that person. He is making his decisions focused only on the pathway of Christhood. Becoming the Christ means taking decisions committed to God’s will, and not to the will of Jesus of

Nazareth. In this sense, Jesus projects upon his birth and his destiny a new meaning, that of becoming Christ. In this way, Jesus seeks to retrieve his authentic being as the Christ.

When faced with death on the cross, Jesus still shows the determination of his willingness to become the Christ. Before he is crucified he is offered wine mixed with a substance believed to be myrrh. This concoction would have deadened some of his pain and eased his suffering greatly, however, he refused it. As Heidegger indicates, the truth of human existence is disclosed in the anticipation of death. (Heidegger 13) For the humanity of Jesus to be fully conquered by Christ, death must be realized, accepted and now at this point for Jesus, experienced. About the death of Jesus, St. John writes:

“Jesus knew that by now everything had been completed; and in order to make the scripture come true, he said, ‘I am thirsty.’ ...Jesus drank the wine and said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (St. John 19:29-30)

At this moment Jesus of Nazareth is dead and the project of Christhood is complete, it is finished. While Jesus is no more, the Christ, as it is to fully be, exists for all to witness and follow, to accept for themselves, it has been made visible for all to see in the person that was Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus overcame himself *in time* and accomplished eternity. While the life of Jesus of Nazareth could never escape its mortality whether he made the choice of becoming Christ or not, the being that is the Christ was brought into full existence through Jesus and now exists outside the boundaries of time. When Jesus spoke as Christ, Christ was present in the speaking. It is predominantly in speaking that man’s being-in-the-world takes place (Heidegger 8). Christ still speaks to people calling them to accept the project for themselves. The logos of Christ is an exhortation to the true self of each individual. It speaks to each person calling them to be more than they would be on their own for

themselves. It confronts them with the same anguish that was faced by Jesus of Nazareth. Anguish in the face of every decision to do what is called for as the Christ rather than what each would do as desired by their temporality. Anguish that faces them with eternity as the *transcendens* for their All and Everything. This acceptance of the project of becoming a Christian means not some mild acquaintance and acceptance of that which was done in the past by a man faced with becoming more than his temporal self. It is the very same decision to be made by each person who would have it for themselves. To face all situations with the words “your will, not mine.” It is to accept the role of a disciple, a follower, and be damn well ready to follow the Christ into wherever it leads and to accept the tears of blood in the face of every decision as ones very own. It is here we find authentic being. It is to relinquish temporal desires of physical life in the face of death for those of a spiritual eternity. “Your will, not mine.” Christ existing authentically in the being of one who has given up the self for something more. It is living for eternity in the face of each heartbeat of temporality. It is the knowing of what one desires for the self and denying it for the sake of God. This being stands in the face of death and laughs knowing that it has lived for eternity and, other than the temporal body, death has no hold. This life does not run in vain from the death that is always in front of it, but lives having acknowledged death. Would that death be escapable, who would truly live?

Jason L. Bryant is a double major in Religion and Philosophy at Ferrum College.

Bibliography

- Cumming, Robert D. (Ed.) (1965). *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Good News Bible*. (1978). New York: American Bible Society.
- Heidegger, Martin. (1924). *The Concept of Time*. (William McNeill, trans.) Oxford & Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Kierkegaard, Søren. (1843). *Fear and Trembling*. (Alastair Hannay, trans.). Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Knox, John, Ed. (1951). *The Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 7). New York & Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.
- Metzger, Bruce M. & Michael D. Coogan (Eds.) (1993). *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- The Unvarnished New Testament*. (1991) (Andy Gaus, trans.). Grand Rapids: Phanes Press.