The Insanity of Jesus’ Passion:
Cruciform Spirituality for the Ultimate Stage of Life

Greg Zuschlag, PhD
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Insane for the Light Retreat: Spirituality for our Wisdom Years
February 26, 2018
“Notes will help him who is in need.” --Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827, age 57)
String Quartet No. 15 (A minor, Op. 132)--1825
III. Molto adagio – Andante:

*Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an der Gottheit, in der Lydischen Tonart*
German: “Holy song of thanksgiving of a convalescent to the Deity”

--“The third movement, marked Molto adagio, is the work’s emotional centerpiece. A slow, hymn-like theme of religious character dominates the proceedings, appearing in different guises throughout, in the end arriving at its definitive, celestial version. The form of this movement is unusual, consisting of five sections and progressing from depictions of the sick composer’s hopes, to his feelings of recovery and returning strength, and finally to his recovery and thankfulness to God.” (Youtube video commentary)

--“Illness cannot only be the source of creativity, but the need to create, the need to have a purpose, the need to finish this quartet, can also be a source of healing.” (Robert Kapilow)
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Thesis: Looking at James Fowler’s model of faith development and the Jewish account of human life in the sacred texts (OT/NT), the Story of Jesus’ Passion beckons us to the Inevitable, Ultimate, and Cruciform Stage of Life--that of “giving our deaths away”--for the sake of the salvation of the world in the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Prologue: The Three Stages of Christian Discipleship

I. Fowler on Faith Development: Toward Universalizing Faith

II. The Passion of Jesus: Jesus’ Suffering and God’s Covenant Justice

III. Three Cruciform Gospel Passages: Expressions of Jesus’ Ultimate Faith

IV. Universalizing-Cruciform Spirituality at the Movies: Of Gods and Men

Epilogue: Martha and John Buy a One-Way Ticket to Pakistan
Prologue:
Three Stages of Christian Discipleship
(St. John of the Cross as adapted by Ron Rolheiser)

1. **Essential Discipleship**: “Struggle to get our lives together
   - Formation-Education Birth to Birth (Starting Family/Vocation)
   - Childhood to Adolescence
   - Early Adulthood (21-40)
   - Springtime/Planting

2. **Mature Discipleship**: “Struggle to give our lives away”
   - Active Generativity-Productivity
   - Family/Vocation to “Empty Nest”/“Retirement”
   - Middle Adulthood (40-60)
   - Summertime - Early Fall/Harvest

3. **Radical Discipleship**: “Struggle to give our deaths away”
   - Passive Generativity-Unproductivity!? Note: lack of recognition here by our society
   - “Retirement Home”: pursue hobbies? travel? grandparents? assisted living?
   - Late Adulthood (60 – “Death/Ceasing to exist/matter in the world”)
   - Late Fall - Winter/Plowing The Field Under/Preparation for Spring
I. Fowler on Faith Development: Toward Universalizing Faith

Definition of Faith: “Ultimate concern” (Tillich): religious or “secular”

Three Varieties of Faith (Fowler following H.R. Niebuhr): explicitly religious or not

polytheism = "lacks any one center of value and power of sufficient transcendence to focus and order one’s life...The practical impact of our consumer society’s dominant myth -- that you should experience everything you desire, own everything you want and relate intimately with whomever you wish--is to make the polytheistic pattern seem normative."

henotheism = “faith in one god...without asserting that (it) is the only god...The henotheistic god is finally an idol: It represents the elevation to central, life-defining value and power of a limited and finite good. It means the attribution of ultimate concern to that which is of less than ultimate worth.

radical monotheism = "implies loyalty to the principle of being and to the source and center of all value and power." "rarely finds consistent and long lasting actualization in persons or communities," and suggests that it serves as a "regulative principle," or "a critical ideal" against which we can "keep our partial faiths from becoming idolatrous."
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Three Stages of Spiritual Development</th>
<th>Seasons</th>
<th>Eight Psycho-Social Life Crises</th>
<th>Four Stages &amp; Transitions in the Life Cycle</th>
<th>Six Stages of Faith</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>John of the Cross (Rolheiser)</td>
<td>Ecl. 3</td>
<td>Erickson</td>
<td>Levinson</td>
<td>Fowler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Infancy</td>
<td>Early Childhood Transition</td>
<td>(0) Primal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporative Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>ESSENTIAL DISCIPLESHIP “getting your life together”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Play Age</td>
<td>Childhood &amp; Adolescence</td>
<td>(1) Intuitive-Projective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-12</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>School Age</td>
<td></td>
<td>Impulsive Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Mythic-Literal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Early Adulthood</td>
<td>Early Adult Transition</td>
<td>Imperial Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-40</td>
<td>MATURE DISCIPLESHIP “giving your life away”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adulthood</td>
<td>Early Adulthood</td>
<td>(3) Synthetic-Conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-45</td>
<td></td>
<td>Summer</td>
<td>Midlife</td>
<td>Mid-Life Transition</td>
<td>Interpersonal Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-60</td>
<td></td>
<td>Early Fall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-65</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Institutional Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-death</td>
<td>RADICAL DISCIPLESHIP “giving your death away”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Old Age</td>
<td>Late Adulthood</td>
<td>(5) Conjunctive Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Late Fall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Inter-Individuative Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Winter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(6) Universalizing Faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>God-Grounded Self</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. Fowler on Faith Development: Toward Universalizing Faith

Stage 3: Synthetic-Conventional: the Interpersonal Self (years 12-25)

- Conformist and tacit (unexamined); external locus of control/authority.
- Adults who equilibrate/remain at this stage suffer from cognitive or emotional deficient/obstacle.
- “Many critics of religion and religious institutions (Dawkins, Hitchins, “new atheists”) assume, mistakenly, that to be religious in an institution necessarily means this stage.”

Stage 4: Individual-Reflective: the Institutional Self (years 26-45)

- “Critical” approach to beliefs; Ricouer’s post-1st Naïveté Stage and “hermeneutic of suspicion.”
- “A relocation of authority within the self.”
- Elements within religious traditions (esp. institutions) aim to mitigate against this transition.
- De-mythologizing can lead to “sense of loss, dislocation, and even guilt.” “I’m losing/lost my faith.”
- 3rd person perspective taking.
- Strengths = capacity for critical reflection on identity (self) and outlook (ideology).
- Weakness = excessive confidence; not sufficiently self-reflective; kind of second narcissism.
I. Fowler on Faith Development: Toward Universalizing Faith

Stage 5: Conjunctive Faith: *The Inter-Individuative Self* (years 44-65)

- Post-critical phase; Ricoeur’s “Second Naïveté.”
- **Rejoining-reconciliation** with that which previously has been separated in Stage 4.
- From dichotomizing logic (“either/or”) of Stage 4 to **dialogical-dialectical** logic (“both/and”).
- Grasps the interrelatedness or **interconnectedness** of things.
- “Seek to accommodate one’s knowledge to the structures of that which is known before imposing one’s own categories upon it.”
- Recognizes that the symbols, doctrines, myths, etc., of their tradition are **incomplete** and partial.
- Open to look **beyond** their own tradition, expecting that truth has disclosed and will **disclose** itself in those traditions in ways that may complement or correct its own.
- Exemplify what mystics call ‘**detachment**’; willingness to **let reality speak** its word, regardless of the impact of that word on the security or self-esteem of the knower.
- Self = more **porous** and semi-permeable; willingness to (partial or greater) **surrender** of one’s life.
- **Ignatian** spirituality: “Instead of my reading, analyzing and extracting the meaning of a Biblical text, in Ignatian contemplative prayer I began to learn how to **let the text read me** and to let it bring my needs and the Spirit’s movements within me to consciousness.”
I. Fowler on Faith Development: Toward Universalizing Faith

Stage 6: Universalizing Faith: *The God-Grounded Self* (year 65 to “the Great Beyond”?!)

- “Beyond grasping”; elusive and almost unattainable on one’s own efforts; “Being grasped by Being Itself.” (Tillichean)
- Beyond paradox and polarities; grounded in a oneness with the power of being.
- Visions and commitments freed for a passionate yet detached spending of the self in love or *kenosis* (self-donation”) devoted to overcoming division, oppression and violence, and in effective anticipatory response to an in breaking commonwealth of love and justice (aka “the Kingdom of God”): true radical monotheism.
- Top three: Gandhi, MLK, Mother Teresa and “others”: Hammarskjöld, Day, Bonhoeffer, Heschel, and Merton.
- The radical completion of a process of de-centration of the self that proceeds throughout the sequence of all prior stages.
- Beyond the need, felt in all previous stages, for the preservation for one’s own life and well-being.
- Disciplined, activist incarnation--a making real and tangible--of the imperatives of absolute love and justice of which Stage 5 has partial apprehensions. The self at Stage 6 engages in spending and being spent for the transformation of present reality in the direction of a transcendent actuality.
- “Typically exhibit qualities that shake our usual criteria of normalcy,” and “in their devotion to universalizing compassion they may offend our parochial perceptions of justice”
- One overcomes this tension “between their rootedness in and loyalties to their segment of the existing order, on the one hand, and the inclusiveness and transformation of their visions toward a new ultimate order, on the other.” (eschatology)
I. Fowler on Faith Development:
Toward Universalizing Faith

Stage 6: Universalizing Faith: The God-Grounded Self (year 65 to “the Great Beyond”)

Problems with Fowler’ Description?

• No interviews with persons at Stage 6 in Stages of Faith; 1/359 in Fowler’s research sample actually reached this stage.
• Fowler’s “weak link” or “botched ending”?
• “Where’s Jesus?” Jesus is discussed but only the vaguest of terms in Folwer treatment; he simply has no Christology or even Jesusology to speak of or even what the Kingdom of God would look like in more practical terms of Stage 6

Solution?:

• Put “the meat on the bones” of Fowler’s Stage 6
• Make the Incarnation (and Passion) the template for Stage 6 = Universalizing/Ultimate Faith = Radical Discipleship
• Two accompanying concepts: (a) kenosis (total self-donation) and (b) eschatology (not but not yet; present-future) contextualized in the cure for human idolatry (polytheism and henotheism) in Jesus’ cruciform spoken vision and embodied enactment of the Kingdom of God (radical monotheism)
• Jesus of Nazareth was not a Christian! He was a pious and poor Palestinian Jew living in subsistence conditions under Roman occupation maintained by corrupt Jewish religious and political elites (i.e. those responsible for his execution)
II. The Passion of Jesus: Jesus’ Suffering and God’s Covenant Justice

The Question of the NT (as carried over from OT):
Q: “Why does Jesus (and consequently us!?) “have” to suffer & “give his death away” (be executed!?)” (Mk. 8: 31)? How is this salvation?”

The NT’s Answer (as hinted at in the OT):
A: “To defuse the reality of Sin in order to free/liberate us so that we may authentically image (re-present/make present) the God of Jesus in the world” (Gen. 1:27) → New Creation. Cross → New Creation

2 Things that Condition the Human Condition (theologically understood):
(1) Pain ← Finitude (Creation)
(2) Suffering ← Sin = Pain Results from Sin (Sin)
II. The Passion of Jesus:
Jesus’ Suffering and God’s Covenant Justice

Question: “What is Sin (as revealed in the stories/experiences of Israel and Jesus)?”

Answer: As the people of Israel/Jesus “tell” it; paradox/“mystery of iniquity”:

- culpability = responsible = something we do
- captivity = victim = something done to us
II. II. The Passion of Jesus: Jesus’ Suffering and God’s Covenant Justice

Question: “What is Sin (as revealed in the stories/experiences of Israel and Jesus)?”

Answer 1A: Sin = theological problem with anthropological consequences

- 10 Commandments: violation of 1-3 [theological] lead to violations of 4-10 [anthropological]
- Not a moral failure but a vocational failure that justifies immorality (“Light to the Nations”)

Answer 1B: the Originating Sin of Israel = idolatry (infidelity to covenant/relationship)
III. Jesus’ Passion/Suffering: Jesus’ Suffering and God’s Justice

Q: “What is Idolatry and why is it so bad/dangerous?” “Does anybody get hurt?” “God offended”?

- the rule by and through Adamic Logic = “eating” the “fruits” for oneself
- correspondence b/w our actions & results: “one deserves what one gets” (either good or bad)
  and the “theology of retribution” (rewards/punishment)
- displacing/replacing God’s being the guarantor w/our own selves
- making self or something else (wealth/power) “God” = object of devotion (center of value)
Q: “What is Idolatry and why is it so bad/dangerous?”

- **Adamic Logic** = self-justification = striving to be the author of one’s own “being right”
- drive to self-legitimation → legitimization of control, competition, manipulation, oppression, or in short hand, domination (playing God) = INJUSTICE
- **EMPIRE** = the logical conclusion/ultimate expression of Adamic Logic = SATANIC
- Which people were “under the boot” of all the Empires below?!?!
III. Jesus’ Passion/Suffering: Jesus’ Suffering and God’s Covenant Justice

Question:
How does Jesus’ Suffer/Passion put an end to the dominion of sin-idolatry-logic of Empire?

Answer:
• In his Cruciform Life-Death! Jesus’ Crucifixion permanently reverses and replaces the Adamic Logic-Empire of Rome with the Logic of God-“Empire”/Kingdom of God
• Replaces the “law” of retribution with that the “Law” of forgiveness and mercy;
• Removes the oxygen from the environment and extinguishes the fire
• Does for Israel what she couldn’t do for herself and what God has always done: fidelity to/“keep” the covenant = justice/justification.
• Represents and reconciles Israel/humanity to Yahweh/God and Yahweh/God to Israel/humanity.
• He is the “the Mercy Seat” (Gk. hilasterion); the meeting place of God and humanity where Yom Kippur (Rite of Atonement, blood sprinkling) is celebrated.
II. Jesus’ Passion/Suffering:
Paul on Jesus’ as our Salvation from Idolatry-Empire

“Christ died for our sins [read: Adamic logic/idolatry]...in accordance with the scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3)

“For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might embody the righteousness [Gk. dikaiosyne, read: covenant justice] of God [for and in the New Creation].” (2 Cor. 5: 21)

“But now, quite apart from the law (though the law and prophets bore witness to it), God’s covenant justice had been displayed (in Jesus’ Crucifixion). God’s covenant justice comes into operation through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah, for the benefit of all who have faith.” (Rom 3:21-22)

“So, too, it is written, ‘The first man, Adam, became a living being,’ the last Adam [became] a life-giving Breath.” (1 Cor. 15:45)

“And when this which is corruptible clothes itself with incorruptibility...then the word that is written shall come about:

Death is swallowed up in victory.
Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Cor. 15:54-55)
III. Four Cruciform Gospel Passages: Expressions of Jesus’ Ultimate Faith

Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it. What could one give in exchange for his life” (Mark 8: 37-37)

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?” (Matthew 16:25-26)

Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?” (Lk 9:23-25)

“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me.” (John 12:25-26)
He came home. Again [the] crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat. When his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

The scribes who had come from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “By the prince of demons he drives out demons.” Summoning them, he began to speak to them in parables, “How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand; that is the end of him. But no one can enter a strong man’s house to plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can plunder his house…

His mother and his brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him. A crowd seated around him told him, “Your mother and your brothers [and your sisters] are outside asking for you.” But he said to them in reply, “Who are my mother and [my] brothers?” And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. [For] whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.”

Mark 3:20 -27, 31-35
III. Four Cruciform Gospel Passages: Expressions of Jesus’ Ultimate Faith

“Watch out for yourselves. They will hand you over to the courts. You will be beaten in synagogues. You will be arraigned before governors and kings because of me, as a witness before them. But the gospel must first be preached to all nations.

When they lead you away and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say. But say whatever will be given to you at that hour. For it will not be you who are speaking but the Holy Breath. Brother will hand over brother to death, and the father his child; children will rise up against parents and have them put to death.

You will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.”

Mark 13: 9-13
III. Four Cruciform Biblical Passage:
Expressions of Jesus’ Ultimate Faith

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs.”

He then said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend my sheep.”

He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Peter was distressed that he had said to him a third time, “Do you love me?” and he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” [Jesus] said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

“Amen, amen, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to dress yourself and go where you wanted; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” He said this signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when he had said this, he said to him, “Follow me.”

John 21:15-19
IV: Universalizing-Cruciform Spirituality at the Movies: *Of Gods and Men*

- Community of French Trappist monks at Monastery of L’Atlas in Tibhirine, Algeria
- 7 of 9 kidnapped and assassinated (ages 45-83) in 1996 by Islamic guerrilla group in Civil War
- Told by both the Algerian government and Trappist in France to leave the country
- *Des hommes et des dieux* Xavier Beauvois in 2010; winner of Grand Prix 2010 Cannes Film Festival.
Christophe (45 years old): Dying here...here and now...Does it serve a purpose? I don't know. I feel like I'm going mad.

Christian (59 years old): It's true that staying here is as mad as becoming a monk. Remember. You already gave your life. You gave it by following Christ. When you decided to leave everything. Your life, your family, your country. The family you could have raised.

Christophe: I don't know if it's true any more. I pray. And I hear nothing. I don't get it. Why be martyrs? For God? To be heroes? To prove we're the best?

Christian: We're martyrs out of love, out of fidelity. If death overtakes us, despite ourselves, because up to the end, we'll try to avoid it, our mission here is to be brothers to all. remember that love is eternal hope. Love endures everything.
Luc: “We are in a high-risk situation, but we persist in our faith and our confidence in God. It is through poverty, failure and death that we advance toward Him...Caring for the poor and the sick, awaiting for the day or the time to close my eyes. My dear friend, pray for me, may my exit from this world be done in the peace and joy of Jesus.”

Luc: “To leave is to die. I’m staying [to live].”

Luc: I'm not scared of terrorists, even less of the army. And I'm not scared of death. I'm a free man.
IV: Universalizing-Cruciform Spirituality at the Movies: Of Gods and Men

Christian: “Once they were gone, all we had left to do was live. And the first thing we did was - two hours later - we celebrated the Christmas vigil and mass. It's what we had to do. It's what we did. And we sang the mass. We welcomed that child who was born for us absolutely helpless and already so threatened.

Afterwards, we found salvation in undertaking our daily tasks: The kitchen, the garden, the prayers, the bells. Day after day, we had to resist the violence. And day after day, I think each of us discovered that to which Jesus Christ beckons us: It's to be born.

Our identities as men go from one birth to another. And from birth to birth, we'll each end up bringing to the world the child of God that we are. The incarnation, for us, is to allow the filial reality of Jesus to embody itself in our humanity. The mystery of incarnation remains what we are going to live. In this way, what we've already lived here takes root as well as what we're going to live in the future.”
IV: Universalizing-Cruciform Spirituality at the Movies: Of Gods and Men

Christian’s Letter: “Should it ever befall me, and it could happen today, to fall victim to the terrorism which seems to now want to engulf all the foreigners living here, I would like my community, my church and my family to remember that my life was **GIVEN** to God and to this country. May they **accept** that the Unique Master of all life could not be a stranger to this brutal departure. May they be able to associate this death to so many other violent ones, consigned to the apathy of anonymity. I’ve lived long enough to know that I am complicit in the evil that, alas, seems to prevail over the world and even of the one that would strike me blindly. I **could never desire such a death**. In fact, I don’t see how I could ever rejoice in this people I love being indistinctly accused of my murder. I know the contempt the people of this country may have indiscriminately been surrounded by. And I know which caricatures of Islam a certain Islamism encourages. This country and Islam, for me, are something else. They are a body and a soul. My death will of course quickly vindicate those who hastily called me **naive** or idealistic, but they must know that I will finally be **freed** of my most burning curiosity and will be able, God willing, to immerse my gaze into the Father’s in order to contemplate with him his children of Islam **as he sees them**. In this **THANK YOU…And may we meet again**, happy thieves in paradise, if it pleases God, the Father of us both. **AMEN! INCH’ALLAH!”**
Epilogue:
Martha and John Buy a One-Way Ticket to Pakistan

75 year old financially secure white couple with grandchildren

Martha to her priest: “What we want to do is to sell our house and, after buying two one-way airline tickets to Pakistan, give the rest of money to the food bank (because Jesus said to sell everything and give the money to the poor). We feel that God is calling us to spend the rest of our lives as missionaries to Islam in Pakistan. We picked Pakistan because there is so much division today between Christians and Muslims and there is a need for more understanding between us. Our plan is to go there with no money and to live simply with the poor there, and die there. We presented this plan to our children and they were beyond belief, stunned and horrified. They think we are insane and demanded we talk to you.”

Martha response to priest’s numerous objections: “You’re right. We are naïve and maybe we are misguided. We don’t know anything about Pakistan and Islam...But, again, that is point. We are going there as sheep. We’re not going there to preach or to convert anyone. We just want to live among the people there and try to understand and love them. Maybe we will get killed, but we hope not. We’re not going there to try to save the world; it’s more ourselves and our kids and grandkids that we are trying to save!”

Family’s reaction ten years after their deaths: “We had extraordinary parents! They did this incredible faith thing when they retired! What an incredible witness they gave us! What an incredible memory we have of them!” And, if they could phrase this in more religious terms, they might phrase it like this: “What a freeing and life-giving spirit they left us! They gave us their deaths as a gift!”
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