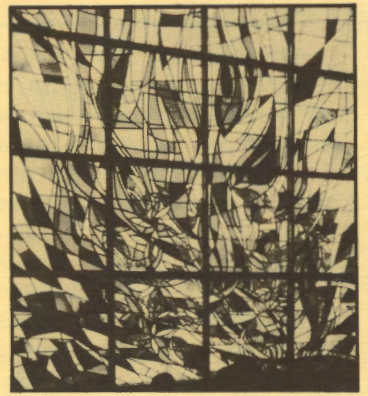


# RELIGION

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## The Role of Faith in Crisis

by

Vincent E. Krische

As I began working on this paper, I had the desire to change the title from "The Role of Faith in Crisis" to "The Role of Crisis in Faith." From this perspective, crisis can be a very creative time for faith to deepen and expand. We are prone to see faith as an answer to a time of crisis rather than viewing the crisis as a calling forth of faith.

If we are true to our Judeo-Christian tradition, we acknowledge that nothing happens without God's hand being able to be discovered therein. To believers, there is no such thing as "accident," for God is with us in everything. Those happenings in life which are beyond our comprehension, or those things which we would not choose to happen if we had that power, can open us to the power of God.

### Crisis as "a turning point"

The Greek word "krisis" means "a turning point." If we take this meaning we interpret crisis as a time when things must change, when something new must enter a person's life. This will certainly be disruptive of normal patterns of living, but relentless change is a constitutive part of being human. This crisis can be just a part of normal growth, as the developmental theorists suggest, or brought on by some traumatic event, such as sickness or death, loss of job, divorce, etc.

The Chinese word for "crisis" actually contains two words: "danger" and "opportunity." This interpretation helps us understand that crisis can be very positive, depending on how we face it.



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*He was the keynote speaker for the Kansas School of Religion Fall Conferences in 1988 on "The Role of Faith in Crisis."*

No matter what brings on the crisis, we understand that every transition begins with endings, the experience of a certain symbolic death.

### Distinction between Faith and Belief

We could distinguish between faith and belief. I would use the word "belief" as an assent of the intellect to revealed truths, which truths are beyond the limits of the human mind to demonstrate or to prove. The origin of these truths is God, who chose to reveal them to a people He calls His own, and gives them the responsibility to share these teachings with others.

Faith is the virtue by which we activate these beliefs and shape our lives by them. Faith means, "I rest my heart, I give my devotion to, I pledge my allegiance." In faith, I set my total self in relationship to God and this gives meaning, direction and power to my life. In this sense, faith is an energy, a positive force that can make a person creative and dynamic. A crisis in life activates faith, calls forth the relationship, and gives one the energy to deal with the crisis. The crisis strengthens the faith, and helps make faith real.

### Identities of Faith

There are, according to James Fowler, three different faith identities. The first is polytheism—a style of faith in which there are many important "centers" in a person's life, but no one of them has the power to unify or draw out one's life. These

“centers” could be status, power, money, personal belongings, etc. There are many directions which attract our attention and scatter our lives. If we were really to get to the bottom line, many of us would be polytheists. There can be many gods receiving our time, attention and energy.

The second faith identity is henotheism, from the Greek “hen” meaning one. This is faith in god, not truly ultimate but an idolatrous god I place on the altar of my heart because it promises to give me meaning and worth, but blocks my way to get to the God beyond the gods. One can be of this identity, and still consider him/herself as a religious and faith person. But the realness of faith is not in the transcendent God, but in some element of His creation.

The third faith identity is radical monotheism—a radical trust in and loyalty to the truly transcendent God who is both truly within and truly beyond. This faith prevents us from giving idolatrous worship to other gods and teaches us properly to evaluate them in our lives.

There are moments of awakening in our lives when we become aware of the transcendent God. Usually it is a crisis—death, illness, catastrophe of some kind. We become aware that our lives are pretty scattered. We are called back to discover what are our true dreams, our calling, our purpose in life. The ultimate questions of meaning and purpose demand attention in the time of crisis. Depending on how we answer those ultimate questions will determine how well we handle the crisis.

## A Time of Overriding Crisis

I believe that we live in a time of an overriding crisis that is affecting all of us and our dealing with the ultimate questions. It is a social crisis, and forms part of the environment in which we move and breathe and have our being.

This crisis could be labeled “spiritual amnesia.” We simply don’t know who we are and what it means to be a human person.

Our Judeo-Christian revelation tells us that to be a human person is to be created out of the stuff of the earth, male and female, to be an icon of God, to be an extension of the inner wisdom of God in time and space. Our origin is in the transcendent beauty of God, our power is in the unfathomable love of God, our trust is in the constant fidelity of God to His promises. We believe that we are

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called to be co-creators with God and to be stewards of God’s creation.

This spiritual amnesia, the cloud of darkness in our soul, which is so present around us, removes us from our origin. We find ourselves—even Jewish and Christian people who have been told who we are, and, for Christians, to whom Jesus Christ has given a special Word reminding us who we are—buying into the values of our society, in that we believe and live as though we are no more than our possessions. We believe that our identity equals our possessions; that our self equals our power, prestige, control, security, the honors we have, the monuments we build.

We are forced into a split life: on the one level we have the incredible powerful Word speaking to us about what it means to be a human person; on the other level we have a false word saying that’s not really important, relevant or necessary, and that in the final analysis, we are no more than the possessions we have managed to accumulate. We are, in this vein, identified by the intensity of the struggle to win our place in society and to be acclaimed.

To deal with this struggle requires of us to determine what we really believe and what is the quality of our life. Can we say that we have allowed the word of God to crash through the barriers of our own fears and insecurities? That we have allowed God’s Word to penetrate our hearts and believe that our existence is a breaking through of the Divine Wisdom? This crisis can enable our faith to see that the Divine Wisdom can be manifested, made powerful, and energized in human life and actions that can draw people from their fragmented, competitive, angry experiences into a life grounded in love, compassion, non-violence and service.

## Crisis and the Faith of Moses

One of the best examples of the power of crisis to enliven faith is the story of Moses, the encounter between Moses and the Word of God, the self-giving of God. This account is very basic and very elementary of all subsequent revelations. Since we are so familiar with the Moses story, we can tend to trivialize and render innocuous this faith experience. Let’s carefully reconstruct the basics of his life.

Remember that Moses was basically a broken man, a man in crisis; he didn’t have much of a future; he was a fugitive and a murderer. He had no reason to believe that his life would ever be anything other than what it was, a hurt in the wilderness. Imagine the crisis. Into his life, God breaks with a message of strength and a call to leadership; the opening of unthought of possibilities. Who would have ever expected a call to leadership from such a shattered life and person? Moses, called to go before the most powerful military dictator the world had known, and tell him to let the people go.

Let’s take a look at the image of God revealed here. God gives a loving kind of maternal response to the anguish and pain of one of Her offspring. This image of God is revealed as offering a living, nourishing, maternal response to one who is oppressed, crushed, beaten down by the pain of one’s own impotence, failure, and inability to go anywhere, to lift oneself up. This loving word of compassion comes to remind this wounded, broken child that he is being addressed by and speaking with the One from whose womb his life had been generated and put forth into the world. This God will now envelop the child and lift him up to the full potential of his power. So, Moses encountered God, the life that lifts him up and somehow or other breaks the barriers, the limits of his own mind and his own self-consciousness. God breaks those limits open to see new possibilities, new hopes, and new promises that Moses had forgotten were there.

Isn’t this revelation familiar to people in crisis? People who live with a human spirit that is locked, beaten down, and confined to the absurdity and limitations, and with a mind and heart that can’t get beyond those boundaries?

People in crisis can feel that there is no openness to future, no openness to new possibilities, no sense of the depth and intensity of their power because they have forgotten it. The darkness can

force them into a state of spiritual amnesia. This then causes people to cave in on themselves and become cynical about life. This is who I am, this is what I do, this is how I survive. One's tyranny and slavery becomes one's identity.

### Crisis and the Living God

**T**he story of Moses is saying to us that the human person has been and can be encountered by the living reality, the living God who has created her/him and that seeks to enter into and become one with our story. It is in the very brokenness, the very darkness of life, the very tyranny and slavery of life that we encounter the loving power and force of God. It is not denying these realities, but rather allowing that brokenness to be the cry of our hearts, and in that experience to know God. We know that the darkness is not the final, the true and the only word about our life. In the crisis one has the opportunity to encounter the living God who invites us to open up to a new relationship.

A more theological or academic way to look at the encounter of Moses and the burning bush and the voice of God is to look at the meaning behind the word, "I am who I am." God describes himself to us as a verb that includes being and becoming. It is a dynamic description of God; it is somehow grounded in the sense of eternal being and becoming, opening promise and possibility. It is the image whereby the human being who lives in chronological time is encountered by the kairos time of God, so timelessness enters into and makes contact with the unfolding history of humanity. And as God enters into and intersects with the chronological, the limited segmented, fragmented time of the human person, then that person is broken open and invited to participate in the eternal timelessness of God.

*Life with God is a life of peace.*



*... crisis is the door that opens to enable a person to become real.*

The Judeo revelation that made the people unique among all other nations was their awareness of salvation history. This belief that God enters into our history and our historical journey is fundamental to faith life. Nothing happens by accident. We are infused and permeated by the eternal presence and possibility of God. We know that the power of that word is entering into the living flesh of each one of us. We are the receptacle that gives flesh and being and presence to the eternal God.

The affect of this experience of Moses and the Israelites is dramatic. After they have "seen" God in the events of their lives, they also see a new revelation of themselves. They gain a new understanding of what it means to be a human person, a new awareness of depth, possibility, potential. As God enters in and reveals Himself through the law and commandments, and as He unfolds the inner wisdom of His own heart, His own truth, into their hearts, they see this new revelation of what it means to be a human being. Even more than that, they are called to live with one another in ways they didn't even realize were possible. And as God enters into and becomes a force in one's life, one discovers a life that is drawn into a harmonious, peaceful and orderly existence. Life with God is a life of peace.

What can and does happen, however, is that through boredom, weariness of being constantly called to live with such high demands, God suddenly becomes a noun, a theology. God suddenly becomes the possession of human minds and human hearts, and is no longer a living, dynamic, creative, transforming and purifying force. The tragic consequence of this is that we enter another crisis, we cave in upon self and forget the God-like power. People fall into the economy of scarcity where we are in competition with one another for what little power, prestige and security there is. We're back at the starting point. And it's again the call to re-discover the power of a living faith: one that is beyond the limits of our finite beings.

### Crisis and Faith as a Challenge to Continuous Growth

**F**aith is a virtue that calls to continuous growth. It seems that life is a call to live on constantly deeper levels. As I see it, one lives on a certain level, finding meaning, a certain amount of success and fulfillment and some satisfaction. But sooner or later, that level of living is exhausted and one longs for more. This is a crisis point. And the purpose of the crisis is to challenge one to go deeper, to seek a fuller meaning, and find a stronger purpose. On this new level one starts again, and things can go well. But when another point of exhaustion is reached the crisis ensues, and the call to more intimate life with God beckons. And this will go on and on, until at last we reach the fullness of our life and are at peace with God and all who love God.

Crisis then is opportunity; crisis is essential to develop a living faith; crisis is indispensable to healthy and meaningful living; crisis is the door that opens to enable a person to become real.



# What's Going On

## KSR Fall Conferences on "Focus on Personhood: Ethical Dimensions of the 90's"

The Kansas School of Religion Conference Committee has completed plans for four conferences on "Focus on Personhood: Ethical Dimensions of the 90's" at the following cities in 1989:

Hutchinson	September 8
Salina	September 22
Topeka	September 23
Parsons	October 6



Keynote speaker will be Dr. Robert Lyman Potter who has his B.S. and M.D. degrees from the University of Kansas and is a Ph.D. candidate in Religion and Psychological Studies at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Dr. Potter will give three addresses at each of the one-day conferences: (1) "The Definition of Person as an Ethical Concept," (2) "Dementia as a Loss of Personhood: What is our Obligation to Non-Persons?" and (3) "The Concept of Person Applied to Ethical Issues of the 90's."

A panel consisting of a nurse, a social worker, and a member of the clergy will respond to the two morning addresses; and following the afternoon address, conferees will choose two of six workshops:

1. Issues at the Beginning of Life Process.
2. Issues at the End of Life Process.
3. Changing Family Behavior and Ethics.
4. Heroic Cost—"When is enough enough?"
5. Rehabilitative Care—"How much?"
6. Who is in charge—Ultimately?

These conferences are sponsored by the Kansas School of Religion, the Washburn University School of Nursing, and locally by the Ministerial Associations of Hutchinson, Salina, and Parsons, and by Interfaith of Topeka.

The cost is \$30 and includes lunch for those who preregister. For further information about these meetings, please contact the Kansas School of Religion, 1300 Oread, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66045. Telephone 913-843-7257.

## Department of Religious Studies Fall Conference on "Religious Understandings of the Individual and Society"

"Religious Understandings of the Individual and Society" will be the theme of the first annual religious studies conference at the University of Kansas, Saturday, October 14, 1989, from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M. The conference is funded by a grant from the Kansas School of Religion and open to all.

Two nationally recognized speakers will be featured as well as presentations by area professors. Professor Catherine Keller (Ph.D., Claremont), Associate Professor of Theology, Drew University, will begin the conference. A writer on ethics and feminist theology, she recently published *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism and Self* (Beacon Press).

Professor Douglas E. Sturm (Ph.D., University of Chicago), Professor of Religious Ethics at Bucknell University, will conclude the day. Dr. Sturm is the author of numerous articles on religion, legal theory, and politics and the recent book *Community and Alienation* (University of Notre Dame Press).

For further information write the Department of Religious Studies, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66045.

## KSR essay contest winners

There were two state winners in the 1989 KSR Essay Contest on "Religion and the Economy." First place went to Scott Truhlar of Ellsworth for his paper on "Capitalism and the Puritan Work Ethic: Intertwined and Inseparable." Second place winner was Douglas Brubaker of Ellinwood for "Clergy and Big Bucks: The Need for Separation."

These awards were presented at the annual KSR banquet at the Adams Alumni Center of the University of Kansas on March 8 when the Reverend Lyle E. Schaller gave the KSR lecture on "A New Generation of Young Adults?"

## Memorial for Dr. Lynn Taylor Established

The Kansas University Endowment Association has established the Lynn F. Taylor Scholarship and Award Fund with contributions sent for this Memorial from friends and supporters of the Kansas School of Religion. Following the desires of the Taylor family, the income from this fund will be awarded annually to a student who has, during the prior academic year, enrolled in and successfully completed a course or courses in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas. The recipient of the award should be a student who has demonstrated high academic ability in the Department of Religious Studies, a strong interest in the field of education, a capacity for leadership and the quality of caring for others as reflected in activities both within and beyond the University community. The scholarship should be awarded on the basis of need only if, in the opinion of the scholarship committee, two otherwise equally qualified candidates can be distinguished on this basis.

Additional contributions to this Memorial Fund are invited and may be sent to the K.U. Endowment Association.

## Correction

The name of the Harry Miller family of Tonganoxie who made contributions to the Moses statue of the Kansas School of Religion should be identified as the Charles E. Miller family. Please note this change in the article in the February, 1989, issue of *Religion Journal* on "Teaching the Bible: A History of Kansas Bible Chair" by Dwight F. Metzler.

## Review of KSR

The Board of Trustees has received the final report of the KSR review of its programs and activities conducted by Professor Phil McKnight of the School of Education of the University of Kansas. There was an excellent response to the questionnaires with 67 being returned out of 139 sent out for a 48% return. The questionnaires were sent to the Board of Trustees, Board of Governors, Burning Bush Society, faculty and staff of the Department of Religious Studies, KSR Conference Committee, random selection of KSR Conference participants, and Kansas Judicatory leaders.

Responses favored the continuation of three issues of the *Religion Journal* and the annual conferences for nurses, social workers, and clergy. There was also clear approval of the annual grant to the Department of Religious Studies for support of its faculty and programs, of contributions to the KSR library fund, and of the provision for scholarships for students in Religious Studies. The annual KSR lecture was also endorsed with the suggestion that efforts be made for a greater impact. Less support resulted for the annual Essay Contest which has now been discontinued by the Board of Trustees because of limited participation throughout the state.

Following a discussion of the review by the Board of Trustees at its May, 1989, meeting, the Board approved the two following resolutions for immediate implementation:

(1) Resolved that because of its unique history and organization, the Kansas School of Religion should maintain a separate entity to manage its assets while promoting and supporting the mission of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Kansas and maintaining a statewide religious mission on behalf of the churches of Kansas, and (2) Be it further resolved that during this transition period the Kansas School of Religion Executive Committee should employ a "transition consultant" to manage the current activities of KSR, engage in research to establish future goals and to assist in the transition of program management in cooperation with the Department of Religious Studies.

The Board of Trustees appreciates the cooperation of all who participated in the KSR review and solicits your continued interest and support.

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