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## A Meditation on Hell

1. I come into God's presence and offer myself to Him.

2. Then, I compose myself in my real world. I consider how I live surrounded by violence and anger, in a deteriorating environment steeped in self-deception, untruth, and error, and under genuine threat of nuclear holocaust. I have to make my way through all this.

3. And now I ask of God what I yearn for: I ask God to let me feel the bone-deep sense of loss and pain that a person suffers who has lost love forever, so if I ever face a test, I will cling to God's love tenaciously.

*Then I consider Hell.*

1. First, I remember that Jesus told His disciples about the Last Judgment. The King of Glory will say to some, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed," and to others, "Go away from me, with your curse upon you" (Matt. 25).

2. Then I think about what Hell means. First, alienation. We have inside ourselves an orientation toward others, and toward the Other, God. In Hell, we are orientated towards only ourself. Second, loneliness. I miss others, but I cannot say who those others are. Third, frustration. My whole self is meant to be an "alleluia" spoken in praise and thanksgiving; in Hell, I can only snarl, frustrated of being my true self. Fourth, absurdity. God wrote into myself those values—loyalty, fidelity, truth telling, honesty, service to others—that, being kept, would make me happy; but during my

life, I chose other values that I demanded would make me happy—perhaps the values of pleasure, having power over others, feeling totally secure, spending money, and so on. Now, I know that the values I chose are absurd, without root in my own true self. I live absurd—now forever and ever.

3. Then I wonder what it would be like as a place. What are the sounds and sights of a place where people live totally for themselves? What does the atmosphere feel like, where everyone lives lonely, selfish, and frustrated?

4. For a while, I imagine myself in that condition. What kind of bitter anger would I feel at myself? Would I regret doing the things that got me here? Could I ever forgive myself?

*Finally, I turn to Jesus Christ and say something like this:*

Lord Jesus Christ, You have kept me from death after death, from the final loneliness. You have not let any creature send me down into death and into the pit. Oh, Lord, You have saved me and cherished me, even when I was mindless of You, maybe even when I really did not care about You. I can hardly believe such love; I can not understand it. Please, Lord, let me fear more than anything else that I might lose You and Your love. Let me name that loss Hell. You, Lord, keep me out of there. Amen.

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## Praying about My Own Death

- As always, I come into God's presence, offer Him my whole self, and compose my sinful self in this sin-filled world.
- Then I ask God that thinking about my own coming death might deepen my understanding of sin and move me further and further away from it.
- First, using my fantasy, I imagine that I lie dying in a hospital. How am I connected? Am I clearheaded or filled with drugs? Have I left things in order, or scattered and unfinished? How old am I, and who of my friends and family are around?
- Then, I ask myself: What would I like to have done between now and that event? What will I be glad to have done or left undone? What attitudes or actions would make me fear on that bed? What will seem valuable to me lying there? What will appear in all its true slightness and foolishness?
- After considering that, I make the Triple Colloquy.
- I could do this other ways (do I expect to die in an accident? an atomic explosion?), or go on to other ways.
- For instance, I could imagine that I am Lazarus, waiting for Jesus who does not come, and lying stiff on the cold stone with all my frozen fears—and then feeling His voice fill me with warm life. Would Lazarus ever have feared death again? Would he have seen his life world and its values and concerns as he had before? What would it have taken to really trouble him then?
- Or again, I could count the number of ways I might very well die on the most ordinary of days. How does that change the way I think of "ordinary days" and my everyday world?
- Or, finally, I could write my own obituary or an article reporting my own death. How does that make me feel? What would I want to blot out of what I did? What would I wish with all my heart I could include? Then, I will consider whether there are some things I ought to put my mind to. ❖

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## The Mirror in the Field

I imagine that I walk through a springtime field, riotous with wild flowers. As I top a rising hill, I come on a long mirror, standing in its pier. I see that the mirror faces the full sun. I walk around the mirror and note that it is a little old. It has lost pieces of its silvering. It is chipped in one place. I am surprised to find the mirror here and wonder what it means.

I walk around the front. I note that the mirror is liquid with light. It throws off so much light that I would go blind were I to look at it directly. Then I realize that the light is the sun's light. The sun pours its light down onto the mirror, holding nothing back of its power and brilliance. The mirror accepts the sun's light, as much as fits and as much as it can take. It does not let its little and large flaws matter; they are insignificant compared to the light the mirror accepts. Then the mirror throws back to the sun all the light that melts in its heart. It holds no light back. It throws all its light from its heart.

I am surprised by that. Wondering, I turn my face to the sun. I raise my face, and turn my hands outward. Now I am receiving the sun's light. I take as much as fits, as much as

I can take. And I return its light to the sun, shifting in exquisite measure the balance of the universe. I would like to fling back to the sun all the light the sun pours into me, from my heart. I ignore the flaws in me that hinder it. I give all I can. I rest with the sun on my face.

Then I slowly realize how like all this is to God and me. God is the sun. I am the mirror. God pours out into me many, many gifts, all of them a partaking in God's own Self. I take into my self all the gifts that fit. I take in as much as I am able, refusing to let my flaws and sins and limitations dim this loving exchange. I am on fire with God's gift of love. I accept His love. I return to Him all the love I can. I rest in this exchange of sunlight and love. I am content.

Then quietly I allow the fantasy to end. I say to God my Creator and Lord all the things that come from my heart. ❖