

# A THEOLOGICAL WORLDS INVENTORY: DISCOVERING ONE'S SELF AND CONGREGATION

## I. INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF A THEOLOGICAL WORLD

Because we alone of all creatures can ask "Why?", we are unique. But because our answers are often unclear, we never know with certainty who we are or what we are to do. This is what makes life a struggle for meaning. Whether we recognize it or not, then, we are functional theologians, beginning months before our birth.

Rather than reflecting a perspective decided in advance, most often our answers are working assumptions carved out unconsciously through the process of living. Thus the "World" that results as home from their configuration is often unknown to the self. There are as many Worlds as there are persons. Yet these individual Worlds overlap, forming communities--latent and manifest. Those with whom we share a World are those whom we can understand almost intuitively, able even to finish their sentences for them. There are other persons, however, with whom we live "Worlds apart." These are not only the ones we have difficulty understanding, but with whom it is difficult to find a point of contact. Our research has identified five such Worlds, serving as a typology of pure possibilities.

A World results from the interaction between two poles. The first is one's obsessio, that lived question, need, ache, or dilemma which has its teeth into us at the deepest level. Other concerns are variations on that basic theme, standing in line behind its importance. The second pole is one's epiphania, that which through one or more events, moments, and/or persons brings sufficient illumination, satisfaction, or healing to provide a lived answer worth wagering one's life upon. One's epiphania is what touches promisingly one's obsession either as fact or as hope.

The dynamic establishing one's World, then, is this ongoing interaction of obsessio and epiphania. One's disposition is determined by whether this dynamic is seen more from the perspective of one's obsession or the epiphania is the more weighted pole. Whichever, each knows itself only in relation to the other.

Christianity does not create yet another World. Rather, those who affirm Jesus of Nazareth as epiphania for their World do so because of the healing pattern of meaning resulting from its unique engagement with one's concrete obsessio. Thus there are as many Christian Worlds as there are Christians. But they also converge in communities, resulting in five Christian variations on the themes of the universal theological Worlds.

One's theological World, then, tends to be unconscious, unknown, and/or unrecognized. Therefore theological growth begins first with discerning the World in which one is living. This Theological World Inventory is designed to assist in that task. As a vehicle for articulating one's theology self-consciously, to can lead one to explore what it means to live more faithfully within one's World, help sense if one's World is stifling and in need of abandonment for another one, and help one enter into dialogue with members of other theological Worlds.

There are five parts to this Inventory: I. Introduction; II. Inventory; III. Self-Rating Description; IV. Self-Scoring Sheet; V. Evaluation of Each World. Instructions will be given in each part.

## II. THEOLOGICAL WORLDS INVENTORY

### Instructions

For each of the following questions, choose the answer which fits you best--put a "3" next to that answer. For the same question, choose the answer that is second best for you--put a "2" next to that answer. Then choose the answer that fits third best--put a "1" next to that answer. Respond honestly to as many as you can. There are no right or wrong answers. An answer is correct if it reflects your own feelings. It is wrong if it reflects either what you think you should prefer, or what you guess may lead to a particular outcome for the Inventory. In answering, let your mind roam quickly over your life experiences. Remember your own struggles, as early as you can. Let your answer characterize the "feel" of life for you over the "long haul." If a question, or its options, makes no sense, omit it.

### 1. My uneasiness increases when I feel:

- a. out of control
- b. tempted
- c. disconnected
- d. exhausted
- e. empty, rootless

### 2. Life for me is a:

- a. mysterious pilgrimage
- b. basic right
- c. courageous act
- d. new gift
- e. quest for self-fulfillment

### 3. My spiritual life is best characterized as:

- a. requesting forgiveness with empty hands
- b. meditating on ideals for my life
- c. praying for others
- d. contemplating, centering, uniting with
- e. ascetic, strength for the dark night

### 4. A scripture passage with which I can identify is:

- a. "We can rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance."
- b. "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son."
- c. "Thou hast made us but a little lower than the angels."
- d. "The wolf shall dwell with the lamb . . . , and a little child shall lead them."
- e. "I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

### 5. I tend to view death as:

- a. a reality to be faced steadfastly
- b. deserved and rightful
- c. a foe to be resisted
- d. opening to another world
- e. part of life's rhythm

**6. The human condition is most characterized by:**

- a. alienation
- b. pain
- c. personal guilt
- d. injustice
- e. invisibility

**7. I am renewed when I experience:**

- a. awe, wonder
- b. exoneration, justice
- c. fullness, self-worth
- d. humility, forgiveness
- e. compassion, integrity

**8. When things are not going well, I sometimes feel:**

- a. condemned
- b. powerless
- c. isolated
- d. shutout
- e. victimized

**9. Who is Jesus?:**

- a. suffering companion
- b. disclosure of that which is not recognized
- c. a definitive human word about who God is
- d. God's definitive word about who we are
- e. foretaste of what is promised to be

**10. When I experience limitations, I tend to:**

- a. feel overwhelmed, passive
- b. become arrogant, self-serving
- c. act judgmentally, sometime violently
- d. feel impotent, hollow
- e. feel exiled, separated, rejected

**11. To improve things, my efforts should focus on changing:**

- a. structures
- b. attitudes
- c. beliefs
- d. relationships
- e. perspectives about the whole

**12. That which I find painfully real in life is:**

- a. conflict
- b. disappointment
- c. shallowness
- d. isolation
- e. judgment

13. "Center stage" for making sense out of my existence is:

- a. the cosmos
- b. the self
- c. the demonic
- d. history
- e. life itself

14. What is most likely to disrupt life?:

- a. seduction
- b. institutions
- c. weariness
- d. homelessness
- e. self-doubt

15. I tend to focus on:

- a. elsewhere
- b. past
- c. future
- d. expansive present
- e. each day as it comes

16. I have been haunted by a sense of:

- a. emptiness, worthlessness
- b. longing
- c. being at fault
- d. being threadbare
- e. anger

17. Life is a joy when I feel:

- a. vindicated
- b. loved
- c. at rest
- d. harmony/unity
- e. cleansed

18. An image for "home" is:

- a. tomorrow
- b. spring housecleaning
- c. a day off
- d. a room of my own
- e. the ocean

19. In my life I have struggled most with feeling:

- a. unimportant, worthless trivial, undeveloped
- b. guilty, sinful, incompetent, wrong
- c. separated, homeless, adrift, lonely
- d. used, hopeless, fragile, futility
- e. competition, injustice, inequality, exploitation

**20. What tends to give you hope?:**

- a. changes in this world that will make it better
- b. support that encourages me to become who I am
- c. experiences that hint of the meaning of the whole
- d. trust in God's graciousness
- e. Divine companionship to see it through together

**21. I can best contribute to the Reign of God by:**

- a. fighting for the oppressed
- b. being obedient to God's will
- c. standing with the rejected
- d. maximizing the potentialities in me and others
- e. striving for harmony between nature and humans

**22. When I am not at my best, I can feel:**

- a. trapped
- b. wandering
- c. driven
- d. wrong
- e. unfocused

**23. The rhythm that best describes conversion for me is:**

- a. from guilt to pardon
- b. from suffering to integrity
- c. from alienation to homecoming
- d. from nothingness to self-identity
- e. from oppression to liberation

**24. I invest much time in efforts to:**

- a. discover myself
- b. forgive myself
- c. realize myself
- d. give of myself
- e. be true to myself

**25. The words best describing the human condition are:**

- a. wanderer, orphan, stranger
- b. victim, wounded, undone
- c. self-doubt, impotence, ache
- d. duplicity, selfishness, forbidden fruit
- e. enslaved, oppressed, violence

**26. Freedom means:**

- a. no hunger or thirst for anyone
- b. going home
- c. a chance to start over
- d. to outlast
- e. to lose self-doubt in becoming who I am

**27. How does reconciliation with God occur?:**

- a. By entering the world, God conquers the forces opposing us.
- b. Christ pays the price for our sin.
- c. In following Jesus, we come to a closer relationship with God.
- d. There are moments in which the veil is lifted, and we belong.
- e. God identifies with us as companion through it all.

**28. Which pair of words best describes the dynamic of living?:**

- a. emptiness/fulfillment
- b. suffering/endurance
- c. separation/reunion
- d. conflict/vindication
- e. condemnation/forgiveness

**29. In reflecting on my past, I remember times of feeling:**

- a. invisible
- b. tempted
- c. engulfed
- d. powerless
- e. lost

**30. Evangelism is effective if someone:**

- a. is awakened to try
- b. encounters the plight of the oppressed
- c. finds the courage to persevere
- d. senses the priority of being over doing
- e. is brought to belief

**31. God is the One who:**

- a. brings into deeper harmony
- b. takes sides
- c. lures forth possibilities
- d. atones for us
- e. experiences our needs with us

**32. Why do good?:**

- a. to make amends for my actions
- b. in response to the kindness and encouragement I have received
- c. power and energy overflowing from deep within
- d. empathy with others
- e. to fight injustice

**33. I am afraid lest in the end:**

- a. I might give up.
- b. There won't be anything more.
- c. Things will not have been made better.
- d. I will be unliked/unwanted.
- e. I will be found wrong.

**34. I identify with:**

- a. Israel's forty years braving the desert
- b. Sara who was barren
- c. Adam and Eve who became homesick for Eden
- d. Peter who betrayed
- e. Moses who ran away from taking the hard stands

**35. A noble purpose for my life would be to:**

- a. evoke harmony
- b. obey God
- c. fight the good fight
- d. persevere with integrity
- e. respect each person as sacred

**36. Jesus is best understood as:**

- a. pioneer, prophet
- b. threshold, model
- c. companion, sympathizer
- d. illuminator, evoker
- e. savior, Lord

**37. The problem with so many of us is that we don't:**

- a. risk
- b. last
- c. care
- d. know
- e. confess

**38. Who is the Christ?:**

- a. redeemer
- b. Messiah
- c. revealer
- d. suffering Servant
- e. teacher/example

**39. One needs to focus:**

- a. the long run
- b. depth
- c. breadth
- d. motivation
- e. goal

**40. As I understand suffering:**

- a. It can become an instrument in personal discover.
- b. It is wrong, to be fought.
- c. God's ways are not our ways.
- d. It is part of life.
- e. It can be a testing or penance.

**54. I can identify with the Psalmist who said:**

- a. "As a hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for thee, O God."
- b. "Parent of the parentless and protector of widows, you lead out the prisoners to freedom."
- c. "In the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms pass by."
- d. "Too heavy for us are our offenses, but you wipe them away."
- e. "You have made us little less than a god; with glory and honor you have crowned us."

**55. Sin is:**

- a. a condition that defines us even before we act
- b. misdirected good
- c. part of life's struggles
- d. closing one's eyes to the mystery
- e. compromising too soon

**56. The ideal Christian is a:**

- a. martyr
- b. saint
- c. witness
- d. visionary
- e. Spiritual mentor

**57. My experience of sin is:**

- a. unrealized potential
- b. separation
- c. indifference
- d. perversity
- e. weakening

**58. The Gospel means:**

- a. remaining faithful to the end
- b. denying myself for others
- c. giving myself for a cause
- d. learning to love myself
- e. losing myself in God

**59. It is fine to:**

- a. enjoy
- b. try
- c. begin again
- d. soar
- e. win

**60. A worthy end for my life:**

- a. to be reunited with all of life
- b. to change the way things are
- c. to endure, with integrity
- d. to become a whole person
- e. to look good

**61. Christian experience centers in:**

- a. "mystic" oneness
- b. focused growth
- c. strength to persevere
- d. common cause
- e. new birth

**62. It is important for persons to:**

- a. get in touch with their feelings
- b. keep on keeping on
- c. confess their shortcomings
- d. risk the unknown
- e. get involved

**63. A group of words that characterizes Christ's work is:**

- a. vision, victory, completion
- b. justification, reprieve, salvation
- c. survival, sojourner, companion
- d. unity, homecoming, oneness
- e. model, wholeness, freedom to be

### **III. A THEOLOGICAL WORLDS DESCRIPTION AND SELF-RATING**

#### **Instructions:**

Before scoring the Inventory you have just taken, read the descriptions of the five Theological Worlds below. Then put the number "1" next to the World that best fits your perspective, a "2" next to the one that fits second best, and so on, through all five descriptions. This will give you an opportunity to select a World, and give an order of preference for the other Worlds. A comparison of your choices with your scores as determined in Section IV will help indicate your degree of theological self-awareness.

\_\_\_\_\_ **WORLD 1: SEPARATION AND REUNION.** For inhabitants of this World, there is often a sense of abandonment. Within this huge cosmos, we feel isolated, small, lonely--a speck in a vast and staggering space. At times we seem to be aliens, or orphans. Life tends to be a quest to understand the mystery of this Whole. Our longing is to find our way home, as it were. We yearn wistfully for a harmony to all things, while being haunted by the sad thought that there may be nothing behind it all.

Resolution as the promise of homecoming can begin through experiencing the fact of our existence as itself a gift. In sensing this mystery of being, one can be touched with awe. Such sensitivity often comes in sacramental moments in which we are grasped in oneness with the Ground of our being. It is as if a veil is lifted, if only for a moment, and we know that we truly do belong. Such moments serve as center point for the turning, wheel, the unchanging in the changing, the eternal in the flux.

The cycle of nature reflects, almost liturgically, the cycle of life itself: birth, death, rebirth. Experiences of this ongoing rhythm are foretastes of a hoped-for cosmic harmony, that final reunion of everything that is separated. Even on this side, touches of paradise can be sensed around us. It is when we do not understand this, or forget, that we get in the way. But we are nonetheless bitten by eternity, so that neither this life nor this earth can ever really feel like home. The meaning of our craving is to return from whence we came, losing ourselves in God. Day by day authenticity is in becoming transparent to that God, so living that we point beyond ourselves to the Power of Being in which we are all grounded.

\_\_\_\_\_ **WORLD 2: CONFLICT AND VINDICATION.** In this World, history and its various institutions are tainted with self-interest. Conflict seems to be at the heart of life, even of nature, with many persons deprived of the means needed for living. Wherever one turns, the scene is a drama of winners and losers. Death is the final enemy, symbolizing the hostility which resists the crucial goal of humanizing this world. The foe is widespread, for even the cosmos is beset by entropy, so that such hemorrhaging seems to give to each part a sense of being violated. Thus threatened by the possibility of chaos, persons are tempted to grasp for power, escalating into the threat of nuclear destruction. Nations seem willing to "bring it all down" rather than lose. At one level or another, then, one keeps being pushed into being a "warrior." Our reaction to often one of anger, sometimes even of rage. Reform is called for, even rebellion. Yet even though one is determined to change the world, such efforts sometimes feel like a never-ending defeat.

Hope for resolution is rooted in the vision of a new heaven and a new earth, to be realized as liberation within history. In Shakespeare's words, "All's well that ends well." Otherwise history is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Since death in all

forms is God's foe, resurrection then provides promise, not only to the individual but to history itself. In behalf of that goal, God takes sides, being committed to the poor, the captive, the blind, and the oppressed--and so must we. God calls us to be co-creators in this completion of creation. History will be vindicated by its completion, flowing back to give meaning to each part as means to that end. "Thy Kingdom come on earth, as it already is in heaven." One way to work toward that vision is live as if the end is already here. Such hope in the God of the future makes us never satisfied with what is. This is why the prophet believes in a hope worth dying for.

\_\_\_\_\_ **WORLD 3: EMPTINESS AND FULFILLMENT.** Those who inhabit this World are concerned with the self, for the dilemma that has taken hold of them is self-estrangement. One is uneasy that if people really knew me, they wouldn't like me. It isn't so much that I'm bad; it's as if there may not be much there. If my mask were to slip, it would be all over. But perhaps that wouldn't change things much after all, since often no one seems to care. The problem for many of us in this World is that often we are made to feel invisible, impotent, unheard, or insignificant. We are afterthoughts, like outcasts, as it were. And inside there is this emptiness, a void, an ache that resides in one's midsection--the fear of being nobody, which in turn hinders action for fear of being rejected. So I try to be who others want me to be, until I don't know who I am. And yet still I don't belong. My life seems like a deception, as I become increasingly alienated even from myself. The result is a paralysis, an aimlessness, a floundering--trapped by myself within myself. My reward is a strange comfort in inertia--where it is too late for action, too soon for regrets.

Resolution begins by being awakened to one's possibilities, usually by the support and promise of a caring friend or group. In being accepted, one is lured toward wholeness and fulfillment. For the Christian, such meaning emerges not only through the nurture of a Christian community, but through the One who in scripture models life as giving and receiving love. In being loved for who I am, I can be and become my true self. Knowing from within that real selfhood means to love and be loved, I am empowered to realize my potential. Such faith involves so believing in myself that I dare feel again, unable to love others if I do not love myself. The delicious mystery of living is growth, expansiveness, fulfillment--the dynamic of redeemed life. It entails a cycle that nature models for us. Death is part of the life process, just as re-birth is part of the death process. Throughout, the focus is self-discovery, self-growth, self-risk. Therein God is not distant, but experienced as present in a world that becomes friendly in its orderliness and hospitable in its potentiality.

\_\_\_\_\_ **WORLD 4: CONDEMNATION AND FORGIVENESS.** This world is characterized by the struggle with temptation and sin. Within each of us is a tendency toward arrogance, to play "God" by idolizing who we are and what we possess. While we prefer to see our questionable behavior as rooted in ignorance, more often than not we deliberately choose what is wrong, often because it is "forbidden fruit." In the quiet hours, it is hard to quiet a sense of guilt, evoked often by fear of judgment. We can feel like fugitives. This condition has to do not simply with what we do, but with an inner disposition. In trying to change, we experience an impotence to be otherwise, as if we are diseased. It is as though there is a deep need within me to justify my life, to convince myself and others that I am worthy of living. Thus life becomes an unending chore to be done. Yet I can never do enough, and so this drive flirts heavily with self-deception--in regarding myself as being far better than I am. But the truth is that the good I want to do, I don't do; and what I shouldn't want to do is precisely what I end up doing. So I am caught with even my efforts at selflessness being selfishly motivated.

Since I cannot get out of my own way, resolution becomes possible only through God's intervention, centering in the gift of forgiveness. Repentance, leading to conversion, exhibits faith as trust that we have received reprieve, even though in no way do we deserve it. In spite of our unacceptability, God adopts us, not simply as children, but as heirs of life eternal. This is why the word "grace" is so important, for the Gospel is the miracle of the empty hands. The Christian's life is one of paradox--in which God forgives the unforgivable, loves the unlovable, and accepts the unacceptable. Our call is to respond in faithful obedience to this proclamation. Emphasis is not on self-realization but on self-sacrifice. Good works are not done in order to receive, but are spontaneous and joyous responses to being already justified by God's graciousness. Thus life becomes the ongoing pendulum. between repentance and forgiveness, characterized by thankful humility.

\_\_\_\_\_ **WORLD 5: SUFFERING AND ENDURANCE.** The dilemma which focuses life for citizens of this World is life itself, the way things are. There is a heaviness to daily living, so that it seems that whatever can go wrong will. And whatever was troublesome yesterday will surely happen again, and again. while the characters and settings change, the plot remains basically the same--as variations on the theme of "victim." Whether the examples are a poor person who knows deprivation from without, or a successful one who is being eaten by cancer from within, there is the same sense of being engulfed, controlled, wronged, as if a refugee. Suffering is the one constant, the sign of living near the edge. Unable to exist without being scarred, life often feels like a predator. So one is tempted not to feel anymore, to trade in. trying for a cynical fatigue. Worn down in one's courageous fortitude, distrust is often the best defense against being done in. This is a hard world, one not readily chosen, for sadness edges even the joys.

Although one cannot really change the way things are, one does have a choice as how to live it. Resolution, ironically, can come through suffering, as a refining fire, as it were. Travail, rightly faced, can bring healing, in which integrity is birthed. Integrity is a determined willingness to outlast, to persevere, no matter what. Spirit is that strange power which strengthens one to press on, even when one can think of no better reason than just keeping on. For the Christian, such faithfulness, no matter what the consequences, is rooted in the belief that we are not in it alone. Because the companion God is suffering with us, we can endure to the end. On Golgotha, God screams in agony with us, drinking deeply of all that we too go through; therefore nothing can separate us from such a God. Redeemed life has little to do with grand designs or miraculous reversals. It is the integrity born of tenacity on the daily road, respecting the small and the commonplace. A knowing glance and a sharing hand are the manna which feed. What gives dignity to life is the quality of never quitting, so facing without deception whatever happens that it becomes a "moral victory." What matters is not the quantity of life but the quality of living. Thus life is to be drunk to the dregs, for one only goes around once. This can be done if one takes "one day at a time."

#### IV. SELF-SCORING THE THEOLOGICAL WORLDS INVENTORY

Transfer your responses to each question onto this page. Note that the letters a, b, c, d, e are **not** in alphabetical order. For some questions the letters appear more than once. Then total each column. The highest number indicates the Theological World which most fits you; second highest indicates the second best, etc. Compare the results with your "Self-Rating."

- |                                   |                                   |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. C__ ; A__ ; E__ ; B__ ; D__ ;  | 48. A__ ; E__ ; C__ ; B__ ; D__ ; |
| 2. A__ ; B__ ; E__ ; D__ ; C__ ;  | 49. E__ ; D__ ; B__ ; C__ ; A__ ; |
| 3. D__ ; C__ ; B__ ; A__ ; E__ ;  | 50. D__ ; C__ ; B__ ; E__ ; A__ ; |
| 4. E__ ; D__ ; C__ ; B__ ; A__ ;  | 51. B__ ; A__ ; D__ ; E__ ; C__ ; |
| 5. D__ ; C__ ; E__ ; B__ ; A__ ;  | 52. C__ ; D__ ; A__ ; E__ ; B__ ; |
| 6. A__ ; D__ ; E__ ; C__ ; B__ ;  | 53. C__ ; E__ ; A__ ; D__ ; B__ ; |
| 7. A__ ; B__ ; C__ ; D__ ; E__ ;  | 54. A__ ; B__ ; E__ ; D__ ; C__ ; |
| 8. C__ ; B__ ; D__ ; A__ ; E__ ;  | 55. D__ ; E__ ; B__ ; A__ ; C__ ; |
| 9. B__ ; E__ ; C__ ; D__ ; A__ ;  | 56. E__ ; D__ ; C__ ; B__ ; A__ ; |
| 10. E__ ; C__ ; D__ ; B__ ; A__ ; | 57. B__ ; C__ ; A__ ; D__ ; E__ ; |
| 11. E__ ; A__ ; D__ ; C__ ; B__ ; | 58. E__ ; C__ ; D__ ; B__ ; A__ ; |
| 12. D__ ; A__ ; C__ ; E__ ; B__ ; | 59. D__ ; E__ ; A__ ; C__ ; B__ ; |
| 13. A__ ; D__ ; B__ ; C__ ; E__ ; | 60. A__ ; B__ ; D__ ; E__ ; C__ ; |
| 14. D__ ; B__ ; E__ ; A__ ; C__ ; | 61. A__ ; D__ ; B__ ; E__ ; C__ ; |
| 15. A__ ; C__ ; D__ ; B__ ; E__ ; | 62. D__ ; E__ ; A__ ; C__ ; B__ ; |
| 16. B__ ; E__ ; A__ ; C__ ; D__ ; | 63. D__ ; A__ ; E__ ; B__ ; C__ ; |
| 17. D__ ; A__ ; B__ ; E__ ; C__ ; |                                   |
| 18. E__ ; A__ ; D__ ; B__ ; C__ ; |                                   |
| 19. C__ ; E__ ; A__ ; B__ ; D__ ; |                                   |
| 20. C__ ; A__ ; B__ ; D__ ; E__ ; |                                   |
| 21. E__ ; A__ ; D__ ; B__ ; C__ ; |                                   |
| 22. B__ ; C__ ; E__ ; D__ ; A__ ; |                                   |
| 23. C__ ; E__ ; D__ ; A__ ; B__ ; |                                   |
| 24. A__ ; D__ ; C__ ; B__ ; E__ ; |                                   |
| 25. A__ ; E__ ; C__ ; D__ ; B__ ; |                                   |
| 26. B__ ; A__ ; E__ ; C__ ; D__ ; |                                   |
| 27. D__ ; A__ ; C__ ; B__ ; E__ ; |                                   |
| 28. C__ ; D__ ; A__ ; E__ ; B__ ; |                                   |
| 29. E__ ; D__ ; A__ ; B__ ; C__ ; |                                   |
| 30. D__ ; B__ ; A__ ; E__ ; C__ ; |                                   |
| 31. A__ ; B__ ; C__ ; D__ ; E__ ; |                                   |
| 32. C__ ; E__ ; B__ ; A__ ; D__ ; |                                   |
| 33. B__ ; C__ ; D__ ; E__ ; A__ ; |                                   |
| 34. C__ ; E__ ; B__ ; D__ ; A__ ; |                                   |
| 35. A__ ; C__ ; E__ ; B__ ; D__ ; |                                   |
| 36. D__ ; A__ ; B__ ; E__ ; C__ ; |                                   |
| 37. D__ ; C__ ; A__ ; E__ ; B__ ; |                                   |
| 38. C__ ; B__ ; E__ ; A__ ; D__ ; |                                   |
| 39. B__ ; E__ ; C__ ; D__ ; A__ ; |                                   |
| 40. C__ ; B__ ; A__ ; E__ ; D__ ; |                                   |
| 41. B__ ; A__ ; D__ ; C__ ; E__ ; |                                   |
| 42. A__ ; B__ ; C__ ; D__ ; E__ ; |                                   |
| 43. A__ ; D__ ; B__ ; C__ ; E__ ; |                                   |
| 44. C__ ; B__ ; E__ ; A__ ; D__ ; |                                   |
| 45. C__ ; B__ ; E__ ; A__ ; D__ ; |                                   |
| 46. D__ ; C__ ; A__ ; E__ ; B__ ; |                                   |
| 47. E__ ; B__ ; D__ ; A__ ; C__ ; |                                   |

TOTAL \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
 WORLD 1    2    3    4    5

- WORLD 1:** Separation and Reunion  
**WORLD 2:** Conflict and Vindication  
**WORLD 3:** Emptiness and Fulfillment  
**WORLD 4:** Condemnation and Forgiveness  
**WORLD 5:** Suffering and Endurance

## V. THEOLOGICAL WORLDS: AN EVALUATION

Each Theological World can be a valid arena in which to live, move, and have one's being. No one world, as such, is better than another, nor more true. Nor can these worlds be arranged so as to view some as elementary, others as more mature. The first task enabled by this Inventory was to identify the world in which you already live. The result may be a feeling of satisfaction, for your self-identity may be as you would want. Thus you are ready to understand that World more coherently, furnish it more fully, articulate and share it more fluently, and live it more faithfully. On the other hand, you might be receiving the description of your self-identity with negative feelings. This might mean that you are living an inherited world rather than residing in your own home. Or you may be living your world at its weak edges. Or in seeing your world rendered self-conscious, you may begin to experience it suffocating or inhibiting, inviting the honesty of crisis.

Whichever your reaction, the next task is to explore the alternative Worlds. This may be done for several reasons. It can enrich your own World by incorporating coherently dimensions of the others. It may well test its viability as the beginning of your own conversion. It can help you understand better other persons, and why you and they interact as you do. It can help to provide a profile for a concrete congregation, giving clues to its inner dynamics. Or it may provide the base for restructuring your congregation. What follows is an invitation to begin such a dialogue, indicating a few of the strengths and weaknesses possible within each World.

### **WORLD I. SEPARATION AND REUNION.**

**Strength:** Persons inhabiting this world are attracted by wholeness and harmony, valuing the inclusiveness of all. The cosmos and nature share this organic and mysterious totality. There is a quiet and often patient acceptance of human foibles by placing things within this larger perspective. There is a tendency to be sacramental, whether in the formal sense or through delight in participating in the rhythms of nature. Whichever, meaning is celebrated in the simple gift of existing. While life is often experienced in terms of polarities or dualities, ultimately these are unreal. Unity is rooted in God, in whom we live and move and have our being. Because God, as all in all, grounds and holds all things in being, it is possible to transcend the separation of subject and object in contemplation and the mystic experience. This may make one sympathetic to Eastern thought in particular, and the unity of all religions in general. The basic posture in this world is to stand before life as mystery, invited to live as reverent guest. The Reign of God means the unifying of all things in God, experienced now in foretaste, as moments of transparency. In such timeless moments, one is touched by the still point of the turning wheel. Ethics emerge from this organic vision, ecologically sensitive that "in as much as you do it to the least of these you do it to Me."

**Weakness:** Mystic experience can undercut the passion for action. Becoming resigned to the rhythms of separation and reunion, one can overlook destructive problems by seeing them as relatively insignificant from the perspective of Eternity. Socio/economic/political dimensions of life can be treated as if they are not fully real. Since harmony is intuited as cyclic rather than linear, history can take on an uneasy status, or reduced to inevitable pattern. Furthermore, the propensity to see things symbolically, can undercut the concreteness of life with transparency, sacrificing the uniqueness of each thing. Individuals in this world tend to feel alone, and as a neglected minority in modern society can be encouraged to adopt an individualistic posture toward life and others.

## **WORLD II. CONFLICT AND VINDICATION.**

**Strength:** Persons who reside in this World tend to be committed to issues of justice and freedom. They are often willing to risk personal security and gain in order to join God in the fight for vindication of what is right. This leads many to protest against the individualism and privatization characterizing current life in the USA. They appreciate the physical ingredients of common day existence, which accounts in part for their anger when the necessities of life are denied to anyone. There is a firm awareness of the corporate nature of life, and thus of the degree to which evil is systemic in nature. These people tend to have a finely honed social conscience, and are committed to the cost of discipleship.

**Weakness:** Often such persons have a hard time enjoying life, drawn to "doing" far more than to "being." Not only are they often driven people, but there is a tendency to regard things more as means than ends. They live more for the future than the present. As a result, there can be a shallow and non-spiritual activism, on the one hand or, on the other, a sacrifice of relationships in behalf of results. Ironically, passion for one's particular cause does not always bring with it a sensitivity to other oppressions. Anger against death can lead to an avoidance of death. There can be a cleavage between humans and nature, bringing an insensitivity that sacrifices the ecological whole to a rectification of economic impoverishment. Further, the emphasis on corporate and systemic injustice can be made so central that sin as residing deeply in the self may be neglected. Likewise, concern for people can lead to a neglect of the person. Self-righteousness can also be a temptation, leading one to simplify issues by dividing groups into "good" and "bad." This can result in "crusades," where the means for victory can contradict the values entertained as goals. Finally, this emphasis on goals can lead to utopianism, both in program and in personal calling, leading to burnout and/or capitulation.

## **WORLD III. EMPTINESS AND FULFILLMENT:**

**Strength:** There is a keen sensitivity in this World to how socialization can scar and marginalize the person. The individual tends to be lost in any structure, resulting in the self being alienated from itself. Inhabitants of this world tend to have a healthy regard for eros: for vitality, for feelings, for deep sharing for a lyric love of living. Dualism is opposed, insisting, for example, on integrating right and left brain thinking, and regarding mind and body as a whole. This world is populated with persons whose eyes are honed to see possibilities, becoming awakened to one's environment as positive and hopeful. "Becoming" is the key term, with growth regarded as the natural state of things. The precious moments are often characterized by a lyric child-likeness, fascinated with the new and imaginative.

**Weakness:** In the passion for fulfillment, there can be a tendency to neglect or even exclude persons who are not part of one's support. There can be excessive pride in one's stage of "maturity," needing the "less enlightened" with whom to compare oneself. Because citizens of this world are often from more privileged classes, there is a tendency to overlook the negative impact of systems and the need to use power in changing dehumanizing systems. Seeing life in terms of potential, there can be a tendency to identify "winners" with personal effort, "losers" with failing to try enough. Finally, the optimism often characterizing this world can lead to a discounting of one's shadow side, blind to one's own motivations for advantage even when denying all interest in power.

## **WORLD IV. CONDEMNATION AND FORGIVENESS**

**Strength:** Residents of this World have the courage to look at human duplicity without illusion. They see a powerful case for God in the destructive spectacle of humans playing "god" in the very act of denying God. Evidence of the "fall" is this universal human pretentiousness.

What needs to be heard is the good news that God's grace is free and available to those who repent of their arrogance and ask for it. While conversion can be once and for all, there continues to be a need for confession and forgiveness, over and over. Christian life is characterized by humility, in knowing that one is sustained by grace. The response called for is one of faithful obedience, rooted in a strong distinction between good and evil and in a committed discipleship of self-denial.

**Weakness:** There can be a tendency for the individual in this world to be guilt-ridden. Thus one may be tempted to put guilt-trips on others. Either way, poor self-images can result. Stress on sin can be so strong that it blurs whatever motives, capacities, and degrees of goodness may be present, undercutting morality in society. In portraying the new birth in terms of a heavy contrast between "before" and "after," one's inevitable shortcomings can be driven inward, creating a secret life of deception, sometimes from oneself, but certainly from others. Relatedly, the distinction between believer and non-believer can be so graphically drawn that rather than confessing one's shortcomings, one may be tempted to project them onto others, in acts of righteous superiority. This can occur not only in personal living, but in establishing political, economic, and national dualisms which too easily identifies one's own position with God's. Such idolatry can encourage use of force to keep the "unrighteous" from prevailing. Emphasis upon response can render justification by faith, ironically, into a new form of works-righteousness, known as the "Protestant work-ethic," in which one is driven to prove one's worth. There can be a tendency to surround the offer of God's free and unmerited grace with so many conditions that it is no longer free.

#### **WORLD V. SUFFERING AND ENDURANCE**

**Strength:** Residents of this World have a keen discernment of the way things are, and what it means to live as the leftovers of others. This sensitivity can bring a deep empathy for others. There is a tendency to be tenacious, strong, and shrewd, committed to living with a special brand of "homey" integrity. Deep loyalty and dependability for its own sake can become second nature, with a capacity to outlast with long-suffering. These are the ones who remain for the long-haul. They are often surprisingly open to share what they have, being more concerned for the quality of the little than the quantity of the much.

**Weakness:** While these are the salt of the earth, the salt can lose its savor--by becoming strung out, overextended, or burned out. Thus around the edges can lurk the shadows of depression or immobilization, even a tinge of masochism. For inhabitants of this world, closure and resolution are difficult to effect. Also apathy toward change can become a defense mechanism. There can be a tendency to squander "everything" in an irrational moment, either of respite, or gambling on a miraculous reversal. Because this World rests on life as unchanging, remaining basically what it was, is, and always will be, a resident can be undone if a reversal does occur. In finding oneself in the "up position," one can be tempted to become judgmental, even intolerant, against those with whom one had formerly identified so deeply

[NOTE: This inventory, which you are free to use, was developed by W. Paul Jones, based on the material in his book *Theological Worlds: Understanding the Alternative Rhythms of Christian Belief* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989)]