

A Structural Analysis of
the Sermon on the Mount



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A Structural Analysis of the Sermon on the Mount

Andreij Kodjak

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To my sons

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Author's Point of View and Method

The Sermon on the Mount addresses the closing decades of the twentieth century perhaps more pointedly and pertinently than any other epoch in history and at the same time responds to the essence of contemporary intellectual and spiritual quests with a profundity unmatched by any other text. I regard it as the most timely and relevant message for our culture and the entire body of contemporary ideas and concerns.

The relevance of the Sermon on the Mount to modern thinking may explain and perhaps excuse the following attempt to analyze it, undertaken, not by a professional theologian and not even by a devoted Christian, but by a student of Russian literature with some experience in structural analysis and interest in modern semiotics. The relevance of the Sermon on the Mount to our epoch seems to me unquestionable, of concern not only to the professional theologian or pious Christian but also, like this reader, to the uncommitted, and perhaps skeptical average person.

Every reader approaches a text within the context of his or her epoch and from a viewpoint conditioned by cultural and historical factors as well as personal experience. The reader's viewpoint is one of the essential components within any written communicative act and therefore must be defined, especially when the communication comes from a distant era and, like the Sermon on the Mount, deals with the most significant aspects of human existence. The reader's viewpoint might represent an elaborate system, or it can be rather intuitive, not systematized, and, therefore, difficult to summarize. My viewpoint is of the latter sort; it is not based on scholarly examination of reliable data, neither of my own, nor of any authorities in the social or

behavioral sciences, psychology, or philosophy. I have no definite source, theory or ideology to point to as a base of my world perception except the general tradition of Christian culture and the historical events that my generation has witnessed. Therefore, the following outline of my world view has no other value or purpose than to facilitate an understanding of my reading of the Sermon on the Mount, to facilitate comprehension of my examination of this text, and to clarify some of the possible implications of my conclusions.

1. Life and Death Within Human Existence

In a sense the contemplation of our era, or, more specifically, the decades of nuclear armament with the prelude of the unparalleled slaughter of two world wars, Stalinism, and Nazism, is exceptionally stimulating and rewarding. The fundamental forces inherent in human existence, that is, the anxiety of death and the resultant struggle for survival, are foregrounded by the nuclear arms race with such candor and clarity that no one can remain unaware of them.

The quotidian existence of the nations engaged in the nuclear arms race hardly resembles life, permeated as it is by death-imbued and death-dealing aspirations and efforts. The jargon of the world's leaders, as well as their decisions and actions, is almost entirely based on the assumption that the only way to survive is to achieve and maintain nuclear parity with the adversary — parity in the ability to annihilate vast portions of humanity, if not the entire human race, in short, to murder on an unprecedented scale. Thus, national survival is presumably secured by the capacity to inflict death under the assumption that the more we can kill, the more alive we are. Under this assumption the very content of a nation's existence amounts to its mastery of the ability to inflict death, that is, death itself. To this end the economic, legislative, political, as well as scientific, educational, and intellectual efforts of the leading nations are shaped by their governments. These nations focus their intellectual and physical might on the eradication of human existence. They allow their existence to be controlled, directed, and dominated by the fear of destruction and death, on the one hand, and, on the other, by their efforts to inflict the fear of annihilation

on their opponents. We may ask how much life is left in such an existence. How much does this existence differ from death?

When we speak about so-called human existence, we obviously do not mean biological existence exclusively but rather the complex conglomerate of psychological, intellectual, spiritual, and physical experiences that human beings are aware of and identify themselves with. Since the content of these experiences is unique for each person, it comprises an individual's existence. Thus, we may equate the content of human existence with existence itself. When the content is geared toward life in general, the existence is permeated with life, but when this content consists of aspirations to death, no matter whose, the very existence is permeated with death.

It would seem that the content of human existence determines its relation to life. Thus the affinity of human existence for life can be discerned by its content, by the degree of its aspiration to life in general, no matter whose, while the infiltration of human existence by death can be observed in the preoccupation with the struggle for survival, with the aspiration to the opponent's contraction or destruction, in other words, by the intensity of the anxiety of death.

It is difficult to assume that a sane person could enjoy the world while being preoccupied with ways and means of destroying any part of it. A person engaged in destruction for his or her advantage and security seems alienated from the joy of life or, actually from life itself. I regard such an existence as a sinister paradox, for while being aimed toward security by means of destruction, this type of existence destroys life within the person and turns into a joyless prelude to death or simply death.

The existence of a human being under the shadow of a nuclear war offers even the average person a magnificent opportunity to discover that the allegedly momentary phenomenon of death is always with us and is able to dominate the existence of an individual or of an entire society. Death can overtake human existence and extend itself in time prior to the termination of biological existence. The extension of death in time is not a sinister figure of speech but the most tangible reality in some contemporary nations whose basic human faculties are suppressed by the anxiety of death and by their all-consuming efforts toward destruction. Their *Weltanschauung*, their enjoyment of the universe and other human beings, their development of their gifts and

creativity for their own sake, their drive to assist those who have less or nothing simply for the joy of sharing, their talent for understanding and compassion, their ability to communicate with other people and nations – all these treasures of life erode in the national death effort. Ironically, this effort, while meant to protect life, is counterproductive, for it annihilates the object of this protection, the life within human existence, by destroying both the human essence of the society and by depriving its existence of the essential characteristics of life: the enjoyment of the universe. The nations engaged in the production of nuclear death instruments are in danger of turning into collectives of humanoids. In short, the nuclear catastrophe might already have occurred when the nuclear arms race began. Thus, the nuclear age demonstrates that existing does not necessarily mean to live, that the commonly accepted antithesis of life and death is actually insufficient, for into this fundamental opposition a third component – human existence – must be introduced. It can be identified, not figuratively, but concretely and factually with either of the basic extremes – life or death – depending on the content of this very existence. The biological existence of human individuals alone does not signify life. Human beings in a society hypnotized by the anxiety of death may eventually become maniacs, from whose biological existence the essence of life is eliminated. All that may remain in human consciousness and, therefore, in human existence is death in various forms. Thus, annihilation of the nations engaged in a nuclear war would be grotesquely superfluous, since in a certain sense their lives were already effectively terminated decades before. For the most part what has remained since the beginning of the nuclear arms race is their death-permeated biological existence.

The ontological nature of death with its peripheral manifestations of murder and violence, preparation and contemplation of murder as well as the cause of these manifestations – the anxiety of death – begins to affect human existence when this existence begins to depend on the infliction of death in any of its forms. In this context the widely accepted notion of a just war or a just murder is totally meaningless. No matter how tragic and dangerous a situation, violent reaction, even if seemingly justifiable, imposes death on the perpetrator. The more prolonged and all-inclusive this reaction is, the more death-permeated the existence of the self-defending person or nation becomes. Whether

it is just or not is irrelevant. There is no just war, just violence, or just murder because it is ridiculous to justify self-identification with the forces of death or renounce life within the individual's own existence.

All wars, as well as all aggression and acts of violence in human history, were always justified, at least from the point of view of one party. Such self-justification is virtually unavoidable as long as self-preservation by inflicting death is regarded as just. With this attitude any war and any murder will in the final account be justified by the winner, who has the last word. Ironically in the nuclear age there might be no one left to pronounce in retrospect the insane justification of war.

Similarly meaningless are the frequent references to the number and the status of the victims of a war. In regard to the subordination of human existence to death, it is irrelevant whether hundreds or millions were killed during the war or whether these victims were dressed in military or civilian clothes. It is the persons or the nations inflicting death who are the first victims, for they have permeated their own existence with death.

In the context of an existence which can be death- or life-permeated, traditional moral issues are virtually irrelevant. It does not matter any more how much security, stability, justice, or progress a certain kind of behavior secures for society but rather how close the person's existence is to life or to death, in other words, whether the person involved is alive or dead, though still existing. Consequently, it is rather meaningless to proclaim nuclear war or the very possession of nuclear weapons immoral, for regardless of its morality or immorality, it is lethal to the possessor. Such possession transcends the notion of human ethics, for it equates the existence of the possessor with death.

The clash of life and death within human existence, so ominous in our age of nuclear arsenals, underlies the Sermon on the Mount and makes this text unsurpassably pertinent to the dilemma of modern society and its leadership as well as to contemporary individuals. On the other hand, there is no doubt that precisely in our epoch the message of the Sermon on the Mount becomes more accessible to the average reader thanks to the dominion of death, its threat and its terror, transforming the existence of individuals and of whole nations into something remote from life.

Our nuclear, death-permeated age, however, does not present anything new in the history of the human race but merely epitomizes with exceptional clarity what was always present, perhaps less conspicuously, throughout human history. The anxiety of death with the resulting struggle for survival can be regarded as the invariant in human existence. Human beings have always fought national and civil wars, and have always had personal clashes. Human beings have always resisted death and have strived, not only for its postponement, but for its total eradication and for personal or collective immortality within the passing world, thus for a surrogate immortality. We can regard the entire development of civilization as a continuous struggle for pseudo-immortality on a grandiose scale, for continuity through its monuments, institutions, and ideas. This notion is not new by any means. In our own epoch such authors as Norman O. Brown and Ernest Becker have touched upon it.*

The struggle for surrogate immortality unconsciously carried on by individuals and nations suggests that a person's empirical existence always seemed uncertain. The force of death, even perceived purely mechanically as the momentary termination of existence, was always strongly felt and abhorred. Humanity, as a whole, never knew what life and death really meant. What human beings were aware of and frightened by was the glaring dichotomy between these two incomprehensible antipodes in human experience. In order to escape this horrifying dichotomy, human beings have always preoccupied themselves with lasting and, if possible, everlasting things, and have tried to identify themselves with these allegedly deathless objects, institutions, and concepts. In virtually all human achievements from personal glory, superiority, and wealth to national might, security, and growth, the drive for self-immortalization can be easily traced. This drive might explain the multitude of evidently insane efforts and sacrifices. The marvelous monumental edifices erected as tokens of the immortality of a nation's ruler quite soon are regarded as his actual immortality. It also metonymically includes his subjects who share this surrogate immortality according to their proximity to the ruler and his court.

* Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death, The Psychological Meaning of History*, Wesleyan University Press, 1959; Ernest Becker, *The Denial of Death*, The Free Press, 1973.

Likewise, the seeming unperishability of gold is shared by its owners, according to the scale of ownership, and thus people irrationally aspire to or accumulate great wealth.

The anxiety of death and aspiration for surrogate immortality go hand in hand. When the latter is felt acutely the former becomes more apparent. Anything that may remind people of death is abhorred, for they do not want to be reminded of their finitude and desire absolute security. The consciousness and intensity of this desire, of course, varies but it is probably shared by everyone to one degree or another. Our most basic, and therefore customary, reactions testify to this effect.

The anxiety of death underlies the sensations of pain and pleasure. The distinction made between this pair of opposites can probably be explained in terms of security and threat. Anything that might assure the safety of human existence appears to be attractive while anything endangering our existence appears repulsive. Physical, as well as psychological, security and self-assertion appear to generate the sensation of pleasure while insecurity, danger, and contraction are unconsciously perceived as death-related threats and therefore seem painful.

The very everpresence of the two extremes, of pleasure and pain, in human responses to most experiences seems enigmatic unless we postulate that the sensation of pleasure is generated by or associated with the assertion of our existence while the sensation of pain is generated by a threat to that existence. Thus, the smell of flowers is regarded as pleasant, while the smell of a decaying body is perceived as unpleasant. We also respond differently to, let us say, two obviously false allegations about ourselves – one laudable and, therefore, pleasant; the other degrading and, therefore, painful.

It does not take much perspicuity to detect an inherent human obsession with bigness, which is preferred to smallness in size or number. In this universal code of evaluation, unless proven otherwise, a larger territory, a taller building or human body is regarded as desirable. A shape, appearance, or action admired by the majority, as well as anything appreciated by the minority, possessing a large quantity of some generally accepted token of immortality, such as money or power, is considered beautiful, fashionable, and is generally followed and imitated.

The human obsession with size and growth may be traced to the anxiety of death and the aspiration for immortality. The arch-model

for this axiological system is, I believe, the growing infant, on the one hand, and the disintegrating corpse, on the other. Anything that resembles old age or a dead body appears threatening and repulsive, just as anything that expands like a growing infant appears reassuring and attractive. Contraction is avoided while expansion is preferred; passivity is not favored, but activity, dynamism, and speed are hailed; silence and quiet are unsought, while the noise and power of sound are preferred. To reverse this fundamental human axiology, we would have to prove that the larger size or quantity reduces health, safety, or efficiency.

The same model can be seen in individual actions and lifestyles. Human self-assertive drives, mostly irrational, can be comprehended in view of the permanent anxiety of the peril of death. In particular, self-assertion and self-expansion, which are exaggerated, overdone, and, therefore, senseless can be viewed as symptoms of human aspiration for something greater than the act itself. It is impossible to rationalize overabundance, overprotection, overkilling, overeating, or overdoing anything; the real reason for all these excesses is different from that alleged. It is senseless to consume an amount of food that cannot be digested, to accumulate an amount of gold that is unspendable, to achieve such a degree of popularity and glory that it is spread among unknown and anonymous masses, and, therefore, cannot be enjoyed, or to pile up a nuclear arsenal that endangers all biological existence on the planet, including one's own. The origin of all these excesses is the compulsion to protect ourselves from the power of death, and to achieve deathlessness, or surrogate immortality.

Generally, anything large attracts people as if it were security, a source of life, and, therefore, a source of pleasure. This may explain the human compulsion toward self-identification with anyone of exceptional strength, success, power, or wealth. This compulsion, as persistent as the force of gravity, pulls people away from losers toward winners, away from those who are weak to those who are strong and powerful or to those who possess some token of surrogate immortality in the form of economic, political, or professional power and authority.

The same postulate may shed some light on such an irrational phenomenon as human cruelty. Why is it that inflicting pain or simply observing it in another may generate pleasure, while the same sensation experienced by the observer would be painful? The reason for cruelty

is so deeply rooted that we hardly notice it and accept it as something natural. In every game one player must win, and one must lose; one is pleased and the other disappointed. The winner cannot enjoy victory without witnessing the defeat and, therefore, the pain of the opponent. The security of the winner is emphasized by the insecurity of the loser, and this contrast is respectively enjoyable or painful. Only early childhood, which is not yet affected by the awareness of human mortality and the struggle for survival, knows games without winners and losers, games enjoyable for themselves, for the very experience of the game. Adult games usually contain both the humiliation of the loser and the self-assertion of the winner. The model of the adult game can easily be found in adult existence, in some instances entirely geared toward competing, winning, defeating, enjoying another's defeat and, therefore, cultivating some degree of cruelty in ourselves.

The self-assertiveness of cruelty explains the equally strange reluctance of human beings to exhibit compassion. While cruelty emphasizes our emotional distance from defeat and, therefore, from destruction and death, compassion identifies with the pain experienced by another human being and, therefore, places the compassionate person under the peril of death. This might be the reason why compassion is actually an undervalued phenomenon in a predominantly competitive society. Compassion appears to prevent self-extension, self-assertion, and self-inflation, for it identifies us with the pain of the insecurity of another human being. While in reality compassion broadens our perception of the world through our identification with the experience of another human being, it appears undesirable in a competitive situation, for it threatens to bring the compassionate person closer to the pain of insecurity and, therefore, contraction and death.

To the above list of perhaps simplistic observations and naive explanations, I would like to add an equally naive observation concerning lies. Clearly lies and distortions are meant to serve the interests of the liar. More pertinent for this discussion is the human inclination to accept and to participate in some outright lies and distortions as long as they provide some feeling of security or superiority and usually both. It is astounding to observe how some persons with otherwise superior minds, leading professional authorities superbly trained to gather and examine scientific data, are in some cases highly susceptible to pleasing lies or flattery and in accepting them exhibit a stunning

degree of stupidity. Shockingly they renounce their intellects and their analytical skills for comforting illusions. Similarly astounding is the willingness to accept any slander or false allegation, provided the target of these lies is the competitor or the opponent. While facing a pair of lies, one advantageous to ourselves and the other harmful to the opponent, many of us unconsciously suppress our critical minds, while when facing analogous lies of reverse functions, that is, harmful to ourselves and advantageous to the adversary, the entire force of our intellect is swiftly mobilized for eradication of the lie and defense of the assumed truth.

Bigotry, flattery, slander, and demagoguery are based on this irrational trend. In all these cases the deceiver must not be overconcerned with the persuasiveness of the distortions or false allegations, for, no matter how ridiculous, they will be welcome, provided they offer the illusion of security. All kinds of propaganda are based on this principle and are surprisingly successful. Human beings are willing to renounce their common sense and in some cases even their brilliant minds in order to escape their anxiety of death and to boost their sense of superiority and security. Thus, the anxiety of death and the urge for security can turn individuals as well as entire nations into brainless bigots, proud and self-righteous fools. Human history and individual lives are full of such examples. Obviously, human beings pursue not so much truth, as security.

Assuming that the essence of all lies and distortions is directly related to the human anxiety of death and the unconscious seeking of a surrogate immortality, we can appreciate the gigantically destructive effect on human existence of deception, one of the broadest avenues for the infiltration of our existence by death. I personally cannot think of any more deadly feature of human existence than deception, except death itself, which, when regarded as the ultimate reality and the outcome of human existence, is the source of all lies and itself the greatest lie. When human existence is presumably secured by lies and deceptions, it becomes permeated with death. Thus, lying equals self-destruction on a personal, as well as a national, level.

The inherent human aspiration for immortality in the empirical world is likewise expressed in control over the death of other human beings. While death appears to be arbitrary and beyond the ability of human beings to schedule, those who direct, plan, and initiate death

may experience the illusion of conquering it. The illusion of such control might be achieved in murdering a human being. Behind all human death-inflicting acts may be the aspiration for personal domination over death, that is, personal deathlessness, or surrogate immortality. The explanation for the irrationality of evil may be found exactly here.

The first biblical record of murder (Gen. 4:3–16) represents not so much Cain's jealousy of Abel, but rather Cain's despair over being rejected by God, the source of life and immortality. This despair might have motivated Cain to undertake independently his struggle for immortality and to establish his control over death by inflicting it on his brother. Thus, we may assume that the first murder in the Bible originated from the anxiety of human finitude. In our age of nuclear weapons, the very possibility of effecting millions of death with one single command might be unconsciously reassuring to a leader whose own death is horrifyingly close, while the very possession of enormous stockpiles of nuclear weapons might provide an entire nation with an unconscious but real illusion of immortality. Thus, Cain's fratricide, ancient pyramids and modern nuclear arsenals may serve the same irrational aspiration for surrogate immortality.

Anyone can assemble an endless list of examples illustrating the preference for self-assuring deceptions, as well as for growth in all domains of human existence, including, ironically, religious organizations.* All that it takes is to view human nature in estrangement, to adopt the vision of a child, free of all customary compromises and adjustments to the status quo and ready to ask embarrassing and painful questions. To my mind our axiology deriving from our inherent resistance to death, on the one hand, and, on the other, the false but persistent aspiration to pseudo-immortality is most clearly demonstrated by competitive societies or situations. The nuclear arms race is perhaps the zenith of this axiology, for the insanity of the human obsession with size, deception, and control over death, has led in this case to obvious absurdity. The sacrifices to achieve superiority in nuclear capability are unprecedented, and, as a result, death dominates the existence of societies engaged in this competition. The nuclear arms

* Similar illustrations can be found in Alan Harrington's *The Immortalists*, Celestial Arts, 1977.

race is actually the clearest model of universal resistance to death and the human urge for an alternative to mortality, an alternative attainable within the perishable world, that is, surrogate immortality. The nuclear arms race is also a clear example of the obsession with size in that the nuclear powers firmly believe that their opponent is seeking self-expansion. Therefore, each of the superpowers assumes with certainty that its own annihilation constitutes the opponent's highest aspiration. Thus, fear of the opponent's growth, presumably generating the other's contraction or annihilation, entails competition which demands total national devotion to the nuclear death project. The result is the permeation of human existence by death, which paradoxically turns the very resistance to death into an absurdity: the obsession with security and surrogate immortality generates enormous nuclear arsenals, gigantic stockpiles of death, the primary source of disintegration and decay.

Such a situation would be unthinkable if so-called human nature had not manifested for ages all the forces that are at work in our time. On a smaller scale the struggle for survival was always present and in this respect the contemporary world does not offer anything significantly new. There is nothing novel in killing, no matter on what scale. The antinomy of death and life, or mortality and immortality, was always with the human race, and while generating endless confrontations, this antinomy did not result in anything except the sinister equation of human existence with death. The question that the historical experience of humanity raises is not so much how to resist death but rather how to equate and identify human existence with life and in this way to triumph over the anxiety and the might of death, that is, over the all-permeating notion of human mortality.

In our nuclear age the question is not so much one of national disarmament or the elimination of nuclear weaponry, but rather the elimination of the anxiety of death and with it the struggle for survival and security. As long as human beings unconsciously strive for surrogate immortality in pleasure, power, and popularity, we cannot expect peace among individuals or nations. As long as size remains the aspiration of the average person, national borders will be stained by blood. As long as human beings respect personal pride, love of success, and victory, their leaders will pursue the same ideals, and the arsenals of the leading nations will grow. But most importantly, as long as humanity harbors anxiety of biological death and resists it through

self-protection, self-assertion, self-expansion, smugness, pride, deception, and murder, the existence of human beings will remain permeated by death and bear little resemblance to life.

Unfortunately human society in modern times ignores and perhaps suppresses certain trends in human existence which counter the patterns of self-extension. These trends can be summarized by sharing, which can be regarded as the testimony to human inherent immunity or emancipation from the anxiety of death. Sharing is giving something valuable, and giving is, at least on the surface of things, losing, or diminishing our share of the commodity. Thus, sharing does not participate in the cult of size and in the striving for self-assertion and self-inflation, for sharing in its full meaning stands for selfless giving without any material, social, or psychological compensation which would turn sharing into trading. In our practical world sharing equals self-contraction.

In terms of the anxiety of death and the urge for security, sharing is totally incomprehensible. It contradicts the basic human aim of asserting our own pseudo-immortality, individual or collective, and, therefore, cannot be understood within the context of practical human resistance to ultimate destruction and death, that is, human mortality. On the contrary, the human capacity to share, in other words, to contract the individual's own assertion of existence, can be comprehended only with the perhaps unconscious certainty of immortality and the resulting fearlessness of biological death. A selfless person who shares without any reward transgresses the boundaries of death-permeated existence and at least for the moment experiences joy.

The joy of sharing presents an additional contradiction. On the one hand, it is supposed that acquisition, the accumulation of various commodities like wealth, fame, and power, generates a sensation of pleasure and happiness, while on the other, ironically, sharing the same commodities, that is, the unrewarded contracting of the amount of our possessions, generates joy. Moreover, unshared happiness is virtually joyless and rather sinister in its essence. The pursuit of personal happiness appears to be a death-permeated, individual project, while sharing generates joy, for in this instance the sharing person experiences life.

The facts of self-contraction in sharing are little recognized in contemporary society, not because they do not exist, but because

general attention is not focused on them. The human capacity for sharing and other acts of this nature are, by and large, ignored simply because sharing is the antipode of the commonly advocated self-inflation, is not oriented toward bigness and therefore does not fall into the generally accepted system of values. However, the human capacity to share is one of the most revealing phenomena in human nature, for it testifies to humanity's deep awareness of its inherent immortality, which, being simply the reality of life, does not need to be ascertained in everlasting objects and personal expansion.

The very fact that genuine sharing, without any practical benefit, is usually ignored in contemporary society and that a truly sharing person is not rewarded by the approval of society indicates that sharing cannot be regarded as a cultural phenomenon. On the contrary, sharing and selfless giving might become dangerous, for such behavior might be viewed as irresponsible, and should a large amount of wealth be involved, the person might be legally pronounced incompetent. Thus, sharing, in general, is acultural or perhaps anticultural in its essence.

Sharing and its joy, as well as compassion, demonstrate the potential to permeate human existence with life instead of subordinating our existence to death by various self-inflating projects. Thus, while human existence can be equated with death, as shown above, it can also be equated with life and so can testify in the real sense to human immortality.

The answer to the question raised by historical experience, that is, how can we liberate ourselves from the anxiety of death, must be sought in the religious and spiritual domains. An early Christian document, *The Teaching of the Lord to the Gentiles, through the Twelve Apostles*, commonly called *The Didache*, formulates in the very first sentence the possibility for empirical human existence to be dominated either by life or by death, to be identified either with immortality or mortality: "There are two Ways: a Way of Life and a Way of Death, and the difference between these two Ways is great."* The two attributive phrases, "of Life" and "of Death", identify the notion "the Way," or human existence, with either Life or Death. The following description of the "Way of Life" contains some direct quotations from the Sermon on the Mount, while the description of

* See *Early Christian Writings*, Penguin Books, 1976, p. 227.

the "Way of Death" enumerates actions conditioned by the obsession with bigness, with self-assertion in pleasure and aggression, as well as with competition and the struggle for survival in the broad sense of this term.

While in *The Didache* the two antipodes acting within human existence are clarified from the very outset, in the Sermon on the Mount the threefold system of Life, Way, and Death, or life, empirical existence, and death, is rather connoted and demands a careful analytical reading of the entire text in order to arrive at the understanding that the authors of *The Didache* obviously possessed. Such a reading of the Sermon on the Mount and its examination with the analytical tools of structuralism are the aim of this study.

2. Human Existence and the Major Interpretations of the Sermon

At the present time structuralism is not yet well known to the general public. Therefore, while the structural method was extensively applied in analyzing the Sermon on the Mount, in the exposition of this analysis structural terminology is reduced to the minimum, and the few technical terms will be briefly explained at the end of this chapter. At this point, however, we should examine the prevailing interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount in light of the theory of communication in its most basic terms.

The multitude of interpretations of the Sermon on the Mount might appear to an outsider surprising indeed. The text has been accessible long enough for scholarly scrutiny to provide more clarity and uniformity of understanding. The present situation, however, as described by leading scholars,* is quite the contrary. Modern theology regards the Sermon on the Mount in many ways which can be summarized briefly and schematically, as follows:

* See Harvey K. McArthur, *Understanding the Sermon on the Mount*, Harper & Row, 1960, pp. 106–127; his survey includes twelve interpretations. Also helpful is the annotated bibliography and survey of interpretations compiled by Warren S. Kissinger, *The Sermon on the Mount, a History of Interpretation and Bibliography*, The Scarecrow Press, N. J., 1975, pp. 1–5.