

Dancing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land

The dynamics of “calling” in the light of Viktor Frankl's *Existenzanalyse* with particular reference to Henry G. Appenzeller's mission to Korea

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Abstract

Korea has forever been changed by the “calling” of at least one individual, Henry Appenzeller, widely regarded as the ‘Apostle to Korea.’ Paramount to his mission to Korea is the “calling” on his life for the ministry and eventually Korea, which causes him to sacrifice everything for a life in a foreign country radically different from his own. The question posed is what dynamics are at work spiritually but moreover psychologically to make a person leave a safe environment for a place so radically different and foreign and eventually sacrifice everything he was, had, and will be for a new environment? Viktor Frankl's theories open up some insights into the mind and psyche of the individual, where the “calling” is described as a “pull” instead of a drive or push to meaning and purpose. This “pull” to purpose demands a choice that will unleash energy to endure fulfillment and transcendence or lead to a “pull-away” or ontological frustration. In this paper, the dynamics of “calling” are explored in the light of Viktor Frankl's *Existenzanalyse* with particular reference to the mission of Henry Appenzeller to Korea.

Key words²: Gospel songs, Korea, Dancing and worship, ministry and calling

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Introduction

They were dancing! Dancing? Indeed, dancing to Psalm 137. No, not a sad, melancholic well-choreographed work of art, but a silly boogie-boogie happy twisting mishmash of body movements to Boney M's Rastafarian pumped-up version of "By the Rivers of Babylon." I was shocked. I would later learn that in the Rastafarian faith, the term "Babylon" is used for any governmental system which is either oppressive or unjust. Therefore, their rendition of "By the Rivers of Babylon" refers to living in a repressive society like the Israelites in Babylonian captivity, longing for freedom. Psalm 137 is a hymn expressing the yearnings of the Jewish people in exile following the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BC. "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion... They carried us away in captivity, requiring of us a song... How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

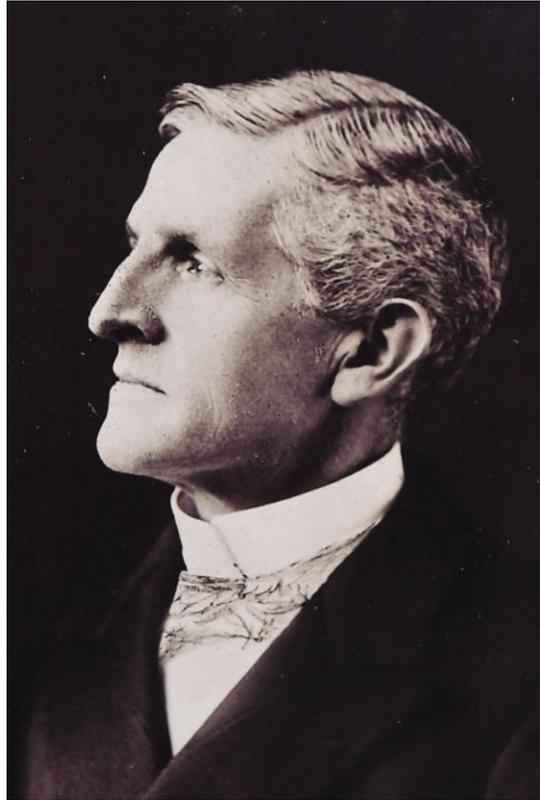


Figure 1. Henry G. Appenzeller

It's a sad song expressing the sad longings of the people of God in a foreign land. And yet, in the 70s, people danced to the rhythmic music created by Brent Dowe and Trevor McNaughton of the Jamaican reggae group The Melodians. Indeed, not following the mode and sentiment of the psalmist, the 1970 melodic creation of this psalm got much thinking and wondering – is it possible to sing God's song in a foreign land and dance to it? In this regard, dancing expresses life and fulfillment – a happy dance amid unfavorable conditions.

Considering Henry Appenzeller's mission to Korea, the paradox and metaphor of a happy dance to a sad song came to mind. In his case, it was not forced exile but a willing calling. However, the cultural, social, and religious conditions were grossly and radically different from his homeland and what he was used to. Indeed, a foreign land with foreign food, customs, beliefs, language, and much more. To sing God's song in these conditions requires courage and resilience. To have the impact Appenzeller had within the context of the radically different circumstances, customs, and obstacles is to dance God's song in a new land. The question posed here concerns the deeper psychological, spiritual, and cognitive forces at work in a person such as Appenzeller, his

family, and his entourage for entering a world so radically different from what they were used to. This question applies to Henry Appenzeller and to “people of calling,” which can include, in a broader context, people from every sphere of life, but in a more concise context, people of faith. What causes a person to give up a successful career, prospects for the future, and much more to pursue a life radically different from what they were used to in a foreign culture where the “calling” demands personal sacrifices beyond imagination, even to the point of death?

To find an answer to this question, one might want to explore the psychological dynamics present driving such quest, mission, and vision. On the surface, it may be conceded that it is ‘God’s calling’ that prompts and drives missionaries such as Appenzeller. On a deeper level, the existential values of the individual of a need for purpose surface and intertwines with the sense and conviction of a higher calling. For this exploration, the life, theories, and work of the Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, and Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl will form the psychoanalytical backdrop. Frankl founded logotherapy, a form of *existential analysis* called the “Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy.” Viktor Frankl can be regarded as a “dancer” in the metaphor of Psalm 137, as his theories were eventually tested in the real-life laboratories of Auschwitz and during the holocaust. Frankl wrote in his book *Man’s Search for Meaning*: *“I had wanted simply to convey to the reader by concrete example that life holds a potential meaning under any conditions, even the most miserable ones. And I thought my book might gain a hearing if the point was demonstrated in a situation as extreme as a concentration camp. Therefore, I felt responsible for writing down what I had gone through, for I thought it might be helpful to people prone to despair.”*³ Henry Appenzeller’s mission to Korea will form the central focus point.

In the first part, Henry Appenzeller’s mission to Korea will be summarized with specific reference to his “calling” and the stark contrast in worlds – that of America in the late 19th century and Korea during the same time. In the second part, “calling” will be analyzed within the Frankian theory of “*Existenzanalyse*.” The final part of this paper will then apply and test the principles of “*Existenzanalyse*” to the life and work of Henry Appenzeller.

Invitation to the dance: A radical calling

He was described by his biographer William Taylor Griffis as “Bold as a lion, tender as a woman, aflame with zeal for the Master.” (Griffis: 1912) Henry G. Appenzeller, his

³ <http://www.rjgeib.com/thoughts/frankl/frankl.html>

wife Ella, and Presbyterian pioneer Horace Underwood set foot on the western shore of Korea on April 5, 1885. Korea would never be the same, and so Henry Appenzeller. Born on February 6, 1858, in Souderton, Pennsylvania, Henry Gerhard Appenzeller was brought up and spiritually formed in the German Reformed faith and came to a “conversion” experience on October 6, 1876, during a set of special evangelistic services hosted by the Presbyterian Church. This experience profoundly influenced his spiritual formation and was celebrated by him as his second birthday every year. He later felt attracted to class meetings of the Methodist Church which he eventually joined as a full member in 1879. After he joined the First Methodist Episcopal (now First United Methodist) Church of Lancaster, his deep calling to the ministry and, in particular, to foreign missions became apparent. According to Griffis⁴ Appenzeller wrote in his diary: “The ambition of my life is to spend it entirely in the service of the Lord.” This ambition and calling became a reality when, after long deliberation, the Board of Foreign Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church decided in late 1884 to open a new field in Korea and sent Henry G. Appenzeller and his bride, Ella to a country widely perceived and described by his biographer as backward, barbaric and hostile to the Christian gospel. Further evidence of Appenzeller’s deep sense of calling can be found in his reply to his classmate, Robert Watts’ appeal to him to take work in the Philadelphia Conference: “I have given myself to Korea and a few years more or less does not so much matter. I am more needed here than at home. I shall probably go to heaven from the Hermit Kingdom. It is no less near there than in America.”⁵ This deep conviction of calling against all odds, even in the face of despair and death, marked his mission from the beginning until the tragic end at 44 when his life ended in drowning at sea.

As with the Israelites challenged to sing God’s song in a strange land (Psalm 137), Appenzeller and his family found themselves in a radically ‘strange’ land where they were required to work tirelessly to save souls and bring the light to a dark world. The new world entered by the Appenzellers on Easter Sunday, 1885, had been described in the preface of Griffis’ biography of the Appenzellers as: “The coming of a live, typical, American Christian in 1885, into the mysterious secrecy of an inhospitable hermit kingdom, the abode of cruelty, oppression, mental darkness, ignorance, and disease, was like an invincible sunbeam.” Hostility against Christians prevailed, and with China and Japan at odds over Korea, Seoul was a place of riots, battles, and political instability. Life was radically different from what they were used to, as described by Appenzeller in a letter dated late September 1885. He mentions that women had a “miserable existence practically imprisoned for life,” and he was appalled by the filth and stench of their homes.

⁴ Griffis, 81

⁵ Griffis, 258

About Korean men, he opinionated that they're lazy, hate work, and despise those who labor. The climate proved too severe, and proper medical care was non-existent. Regarding religion, the country has been described as "...a Sahara of paganism..."⁶ City life in Seoul is described as "...this capital seemed little better than a mushroom patch, an odd collection of thatched huts, a filthy hole, with the majority of the people living in what would be in the West considered abject poverty?"⁷ Indeed a 'strange' land.

Life in Korea for missionaries and their families was, at best of times, complex and challenging. A co-worker of Horace Underwood, Dr. John Heron confessed in a letter to the Board of Missionaries that: "Were it not for the hope of winning Corea for Christ, I would not live here a day,"⁸ Not only were the external struggles taking its toll, but also internal quarrels and strife as reported by George C Foulk, US Navy officer in Korea: "There have been times when they did not speak to each other, women and men alike. All their growls they bring here to settle."⁹ And yet, they all had the bold vision and passion to convert a nation and to win people for Christ. With a deep passion for people, a vision of God, and relentless courage, the Appenzeller and their co-workers pioneered a radically different and strange country. Unlike the Israelites of Psalm 137, they did it prompted and sent by a 'calling' from God; like the Israelites, they were captured by this 'calling' and dared not derail or escape it.

"Calling" is a term used frequently by missionaries, clergy, and those who enter the ministry in one form or another. Not only is "calling" central to the lives of modern missionaries, but it's implied in that of the biblical figures such as Abraham, Moses, the prophets, kings, and in particular, the disciples. Jesus is also regarded as the one sent by God: John 3:17 – "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."¹⁰ To be sent implies "to be called." Jesus calls the disciples, making it not only a temporary dynamic but a life dynamic. His calling forms the basis of the calling of the disciples and, by implication, that of all missionaries: John 20:21 "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so, send I you." The term "missions" thus presupposes "calling." This term is also central to the life of Henry Appenzeller and his wife. Is "calling" then a mere metaphysical or spiritual experience not understood or acknowledged by modern psychology? Is there some explanation for this seemingly powerful phenomenon of "calling"?

⁶ Griffis: 16

⁷ Ibid: 37

⁸ Ibid: 37

⁹ Letter: August 18, 1885

¹⁰ New International Version

Called by God, captured for God, and held captive by this calling: is there any sense to make of it psychologically?

Dancing the Lord's Song: Frankl, Appenzeller and the Concept of Existenzanalyse

The hypothesis argued in this paper is that “calling” is an inner movement or “pull” toward meaning and transcendence. It's an inward and deeply spiritual need for existential fulfillment and a need for purpose that echoes an outward, and in religious terms, an outward impulse or call to transcendence. To explore the psychological “pull”¹¹ towards transcendence that's apparent in “calling,” it is necessary to understand some basic precepts of Frankl's *Existenzanalyse*. For Frankl, the human person is viewed as a spirit (*noos*) with a mind and body – psyche and soma. Frankl wishes to avoid religious connotations to refer to the spirit as *noos* (adj. *noetic*). By this definition, the human's *uniqueness* is emphasized. For Frankl, the division between the spirit and psychophysical being is absolute, where the former possesses free will and is the seat of human existence. The latter is the center of somatic and psychological facticity.¹² In his dimensional ontology, Frankl concludes that the human spirit represents those characteristics not shared by animals. It is significant that Frankl, in his model, refers to *dimensional ontology* with its functional aspects as *noodynamics* and acknowledges the ‘spiritual’ as the human core or an inner spiritual core of existence. The spiritual core is also seen as a source of health, strength, and eventually transcendence in its ability to choose an attitude towards illness and circumstances.¹³

It is also essential to know that Frankl takes this concept of the inner spiritual core further by stating that part of the human spirit is unconscious and that an analogous relationship exists between the spiritual unconscious and what he calls the instinctual unconscious (his term for the Freudian model of the psyche). According to Frankl, the spiritual unconscious comprises dynamic energy or *noodynamics* created by the difference between what a person is and what he is capable of becoming¹⁴ or his potential of existential transcendence. As Freud associates the instinctual unconscious with sexual energy or libido, Frankl associates the spiritual unconscious with *religio*, or

¹¹ Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, op. cit., 60. Unconscious religiosity is viewed by Frankl as a “pull” from noetic dimension rather than a “drive” such as hunger or sex.

¹² Frankl, V. E. (2000). *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*. New York: Perseus Books, 32-33.

¹³ Viktor E. Frankl. *The Doctor and the Soul*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1955, 1980, 1986), 289-290; Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, op. cit., 73.

¹⁴ Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, op. cit., 63-64.

unconscious religiosity,¹⁵ further defined as a “latent relation to transcendence.”¹⁶ Of great significance to the concept of an outer “calling” as experienced, for example, by Appenzeller and countless missionaries, preachers, and Christians who enter some mission field, is Frankl’s view that this unconscious religiosity is not a *drive* or *push* as with Freud’s instinctual unconscious, but a “*pull*” from a noetic (spiritual) dimension to a place where a “transpersonal awareness can perceive the potentials of the human”¹⁷ being. This transcendent unconscious then gives rise to the experience of conscience and implies the existence of a transpersonal agent. As the person responds to the extent of his will to respond through free will to the pull of *religio*, the unconscious becomes increasingly apparent and conscious¹⁸. According to Frankl, the transcendent aspect of the spiritual unconscious demands responsible action.¹⁹ By responding positively to this “pull,” the human being enters the will to meaning or purpose. By not responding to the “pull,” an “existential vacuum” will lead to conformism (do what others do) or totalitarianism (do what others tell you to do).²⁰ Manifestations of this lack of will to meaning include boredom, apathy, and neurosis. Frankl often quotes Nietzsche: “He who has a why to live for can bear with almost any how.”²¹ This “pull” is gradually manifested in the *to-day* rather than in the *one-day* meaning in the sense that the result of the calling will not be apparent but is revealed in the *to-day* or daily meaningful events leading up to the *one-day*.

It is vital to know that, although the principles of Frankl’s existential analysis could be applied to the religious experience of “calling,” Frankl never implied an exclusively religious meaning to the concepts of *religio* or *spirituality*. As Sarkany Peter points out: “It is not farfetched to say that contrary to the antitheism of psychoanalysis, logotherapy and existential analysis favors a treatment of methodological atheism.”²²

It is also important to note that Frankl’s view of religion contrasts with Freud, who sees religion as a form of group neuroses. He possesses a more balanced view of

¹⁵ Freud, S. (1949, 1969). *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis* (James Strachey, Trans.). New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 6-7; Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 54-55.

¹⁶ Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 68

¹⁷ Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 60; Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, *op. cit.*, 77-78.

¹⁸ Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 43-44, 47.

¹⁹ Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, *op. cit.*, 89.

²⁰ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 83.

²¹ Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, *op. cit.*, 63-64.

²² Sarkany P, *Religious Integrity in a World of Plurality*, *op. cit.*, 167

religion, seeing it as potentially contributing to and detracting from mental health. For Frankl, an innate part of human nature is the “will to meaning,” a dynamic that can find its satisfaction in a person’s pursuit of transcendent goals and with which religion is, therefore, in harmony. Indeed, Frankl states that religion is “man’s search for ultimate meaning.”²³ He eventually states that religion is “man’s search for ultimate meaning, and it is something that spontaneously wells up from inside a person and cannot be imposed, preached or ordered.”²⁴ For him, religion is a valid means of expressing self-transcendence towards “the other” and, indeed, almost a psychological necessity. For Jung and Freud religion is an internal product of the psyche itself, but for Frankl, it is a transcendent phenomenon that points each person to the meaning they are being called to choose to fulfill freely.

Dancing Until Daybreak: Calling and Existential Fulfillment

Applying this to the phenomenon of “calling” as indicated and illustrated by the life and work of Henry G. Appenzeller, it can be concluded that he acted gracefully but also passionately upon the inner “*pull*” in his life, that it provided him with enough thrust and energy to endure and fulfill a task that gave meaning and transcendence to his life. This “*pull*” leads to existential fulfillment, as seen in the three categorical values that form a foundational part of Frankl’s *Existenzanalyse*.

Frankl’s three categorical values or meaning triad through which meaning in life may be discovered are the *creative value*, *experiential value*, and *attitudinal value*. For Frankl, creative value encompasses all acts that give something to life that would not otherwise exist. It adds value to life in whatever form, be it good deeds, missions, or work.

The creative value is the individual’s contribution to life: what he gives to life. Frankl expands on this by stating that the most critical question in life is not what life is due to the individual but what life asks and even demands of him.

In addition to the creative value, he reckons the experiential value, which includes all experiences of truth and beauty discovered in the world and all loving encounters with other human beings, is equally important. The experiential value may be actualized through nature, art, dance, music, literature, and relationships of love and acceptance.

²³ Jefford, 2007, 4

²⁴ Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 14

Once again, simply put, this is what the universe gives to the individual or what he gains from it.

The third value is coined as man's attitudinal value and is considered by Frankl to be superior to both the creative and experiential values. "The attitudinal value is actualized through the stance taken toward unavoidable suffering. The attitudinal value is actualized if one chooses bravery over cowardice, mercy over revenge, or justice over appeasement. A meaningful life is, therefore, a life in which these values are actualized to the greatest possible degree."²⁵

In addition to the value triad, Frankl makes three *phenomenological assumptions*: Freedom of the will, the will to meaning, and meaning in life. Freedom of the will refers to the freedom to choose one's response to the conditions of life, not freedom from conditions in life. The will for meaning equals the desire to understand the purpose or calling of one's life, and it's a primary human motivation in the Franklian philosophy. For him, it is even more essential than the desire for pleasure and the avoidance of pain. He points out that the human person will sacrifice pleasure or choose to undergo pain if it has a transcendent meaning for the sake of another or a cause in which one believes. Finally, meaning in life is believed to be an "objective demand characteristic of the environment." To quote Frankl: "Everyone has his specific vocation or mission to carry out a concrete assignment which demands fulfillment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated. Thus, everyone's task is as unique as his specific implementation opportunity."²⁶ It is not the task of the human person to invent meaning, but to discover the meaning that is already present."²⁷

Dancing to the Inner Song of Life: Application to Missions in General and Appenzeller in Particular

In conclusion, we shall review and apply Frankl's *Existenzanalyse* to the concept of "calling" and surviving within the "calling." Frankl's view that a human has a spiritual core, who finds meaning and transcendence through his response to the pull of *religio*, is significant. The inner spiritual unconscious, with its dynamic energy (*noon dynamics*)

²⁵ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 70; Frankl, *The Feeling of Meaninglessness*, *op. cit.*, 118; Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 111, 112-115, 141-142.

²⁶ Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 62.

²⁷ Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 62.

created by the difference between what a person is and what he is capable of becoming, is viewed as not a *drive* but a *pull* toward transcendence.

Appenzeller experiences his mission to Korea as a calling. He is willing to sacrifice his life for this calling and is described as “aflame with zeal for the Master.” Crossing the ocean from the known to the unknown was not an inner drive but, in Frankian terms, an inner pull. Inner drive suggests inner tension and existential frustration. It also suggests the aspect of lack of choice or freedom to choose. In Freudian terms, one is driven by, for example, the hunger for sex and gratification. This is not the case in the “*pull*” from a noetic dimension. “*Pulled*” by God, the inner calling is awakened, and the spiritual unconscious becomes conscious. With the freedom to choose one’s response, another phenomenological assumption of Frankl’s Existenzanalyse, one can actualize this calling and find meaning in life. It is important to note that existential fulfillment is not abstract but concrete. Frankl explains that one should not search for an abstract meaning of life. “It is not the human who asks the meaning of life, but, rather, a life that asks something of the person. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated.”²⁸

This is very applicable to the mission of Henry Appenzeller. God pulled him, awakened in his most profound inner being, so he chose to heed that calling, even if it demanded death. This inner calling or “*pull*” accentuates the strength, power, and energy of a Godly calling. Appenzeller heard the call of God (“*life*” in Frankian terms), answered positively to that, and sacrificed what might have been a successful career somewhere else to this inner pull. He somehow understood the uniqueness of God’s calling and the need to live in it. In that discovery, he found meaning and fulfillment. In Frankian terms, he seems to have discovered what life demands from him and was willing to invest all his *creative value* into this calling. He also understood something of the *experiential value* of life by taking from this calling the positive energy supplied by his work in Korea. Not all were suffering and hardship. Appenzeller and his family enjoyed the beauty of the country, the change brought about by their ministry, and the inner satisfaction of being in the unique core of God’s will for them at that time. Add to this the *attitudinal value* where they have chosen to stay in Korea and, with positive minds, change the country for the gospel and to the glory of God.

²⁸ Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, *op. cit.*, 47.

Conclusion

They were dancing! Dancing to Psalm 137! Not a slow dance, but a wild dance! Dancing the Lord's song in a strange land? Indeed. That is the language of a handful of people who entered a land strange, foreign, and far on Easter Sunday, 1885, and transformed it beyond all imagination. In their inner being, they heard the song of God, pulling them to the foreign shores of the East. This burning passion in their hearts became a blazing vision and eventually a relentless and tireless action. It was not a mere intellectual exercise, but a *religio*, Godly in nature, transcending their beings and instigating energy for living out their Godly purpose. Despite unimaginable hardships in the strange land, they were bold as lions, fulfilling their Godly purpose, dancing His song in a strange land. That seems to be the song millions have danced to through the centuries – a dance to life even in death.

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