

THE SINGULAR MISSION

The bear went over the mountain
The bear went over the mountain
The bear went over the mountain
...On top of old Smokey all covered with snow
I lost my true love by courtin' too slow
Now courtin's a pleasure but partin' is grief
...When upon that mountain there I took her life
When upon that mountain stabbed her with my knife
Hang down your head...
In the town of Springhill Nova Scotia
Often the earth will tremble and groan
When the earth is restless miners die
Bone and blood is the price of coal
Bone and blood is the price of coal
The bear went over the mountain
The bear went over the mountain
The bear went over the mountain to see what he could see.

I've always been fascinated by mountains. Outside of Phoenix where I grew up, there's a mountain called The Superstition Mountain which juts up out of the desert. We used to drive by those mountains and I'd recall the legend about the lost Dutchman's mine being in those mountains and how many men had gone up there looking for that mine. It had been an incredibly rich vein, but the Dutchman disappeared and the secret of the mine with him. It was said that those who went looking likewise never returned.

And I've always been fascinated by mountain climbers. It is not mountain climbing that interests me. I'm a devout coward when it comes to that, you understand - but mountain climbers fascinate me. I suppose it is because of the danger, even more, it is fascinating people that risk life and limb the way they do, without having a good reason or having something that they are going to accomplish. It is true that the view is fine up there, but these days you can get a view with a helicopter. Finally, they just say, "I climb mountains because they're there"....that's the way care is. It's just there, not something you ought to have. It's just there. You show up with care.

Now I find it helpful to imagine that the mountain of care has four levels to it. Imagine yourself climbing the mountain of care. That's not a bad metaphor, since this trek is all about the singular mission, and it seems mountain climbers have but one thing they're about, namely, to get on top of the mountain. Well, the first step is to establish your base camp, because that is where you launch from. That's the trek of original gratitude, without which there is no mission. And then the first stage of the climb is not steep, but you cover a lot of terrain. You begin to be identified with that mountain, and begin to be a part of it. You get your being tied up in it, and that is the trek of compassion. The third stage is when it begins to get rough. You begin to meet the craggy parts and the chasms and your resolve begins to be tested. You know that if you lose your concentration, it takes just one slip and you're off into an abyss or else you turn back in failure. The last stage is the final ascent. It's heading up to the peak and that's the trek of Transparent Power.

Now on that third aspect of the climb, you can expect to be challenged by four natural formations on that mountain of care that intensify your mission, that intensify the thrust that your life is about. You run into a glacier called Global Guardianship, being a wide expanse that you must cross. And you encounter a chasm of Ancestral Obligation, which has no bottom. You come to a crevasse, that of Futuric Responsibility. And then there's the sheer face of cliff that you must climb which is that of Invented History. These four constitute the trek of singular mission.

The consciousness of the Mountain of Care is just surprising where it shows up in the consciousness of our society. New Orleans has a pro football team, the New Orleans Saints, and they have a new quarterback, who was sensational his first time out. They were interviewing him one night and I was in the car listening on the radio. He was saying, "I was having an awful time sleeping the night before the San Francisco game, worrying about how I was going to do." And he said, "All of a sudden, it came to my mind that 800,000,000 Chinese didn't give a damn whether I won that football game tomorrow or not." And thousands of us were sitting there listening in the car. It's that kind of consciousness. It's just there. It relates the word "problems," throwing you over against the totality.

Now you understand I've been caring for those Chinese a long time; ever since I was a tyke, my momma would say to me, "Now you clean your plate and think of all those starving children in China." I was eight years old and I did it. I mean, I cleaned my plate. . .I got fat on behalf of all those children in China. Now you may question the effectiveness of my strategies and tactics, but the state of being was just there. There's no morality in this. I was guarding the globe at eight years old when I was cleaning the plate.

Now look at it for a bit. There was a sense of relatedness. There was a sense that I was related to those starving children, and that's significant, since in my grid China was on the other side from me. If you dug a hole all the way through the earth where you came out was China. And also the sense that I make a difference. If I clean my plate, somehow it will make a difference. And also a sense that what was a concern over there was my concern. Somehow our destinies were linked. And finally, it entered into my consciousness, for the first time, I guess, that I am concerned about the suffering of humanity. Later on, I dropped that little bit of meal symbolism, because as I grew older I began to see that a whole tactical system and global operational designs needed to go with that symbolism. Nevertheless, my budding consciousness was caught up for the first time in the state of being called global guardianship.

Interiorly it feels like you're being stretched to the breaking point. It feels like your consciousness is being forced to include more than you've ever dared include before. You know the saying that just captured the country: "I can't believe I ate the whole thing." Inside of two weeks it seems like that was just in the consciousness of every human being on the continent. And I believe the reason is that it gave expression to this kind of nausea and dizziness that you have when you realize that you have the whole thing on your hands. The whole globe is a piece and to pick up any part of it is to pick up the entirety of it.

There's a kind of a resentful irritation in the midst of it, too. It's irritating to discover you've eaten the whole thing. The complexity of life these days comes as just deep irritation. You're working on one thing and your wife wants you to do something else, the phone rings with a new problem, you remember a meeting you've forgotten, you experience time just slipping away, and finally, you just say, "No!"

Leave me alone." "I can't handle any more date." "I can't make a decision about that today." "I can't build one more context today!" And you feel very sleepy. That's the state of being I'm talking about. And you get a kind of daring in it, too. Can I get my being around the globe? Can I get my being around it? Can I really live my life based on it all being my business? That there's nothing on the face of the glob" that's none of my business. It's all my business.

This comes to you in weird ways. One of my colleagues was telling me about her cadre having a picnic in one of the parks in Chicago. After they'd finished, they headed to their cars and put their sack lunches in the trash cans. They looked back at the park and noticed that there were already two bums going through their empty garbage bags, seeing if they could find some scraps to eat. And one of the women said, "What a shame that we didn't bring two more lunches." And one of the other ones said, "Well, how many sandwiches would you have to bring, you know, to really do it. . .And how many days a week would you have to bring them? And why just lunches for the bum? What about the kids in this neighborhood who don't have shoes? What about the school system here? Why just this neighborhood? There's a lot of people in this town who have the same problems. Why just Chicago? What about New York? What about Calcutta? What about Tokyo, Hong Kong?"

And what dawns on you is there's no limit to my responsibility. There literally is no limit. It's just there, totally, entirely, it's all one ball of wax and any attempt to divide it up fails. It comes to you in a weird fashion, the decision to honor the global. The other day one of the new interns in our house said, "Why do we always have to have that weird music when we have solitary office?" She was referring to Indian and Oriental music. And at first I just started to give her an explanation, and then all of a sudden it occurred to me, "Wait a minute. The honor of the globe is at stake." So I said to her, "Did it ever occur to you that for most people that music is not weird?" When you are the guardian of the globe, you find all kinds of situations demanding your attention.

It changes you to cross this glacier. It leaves you with a sense that you are the authority. I mean that literally you are the authority. You practically decide what it is that 800,000,000 Chinese are going to care about and there's no two ways about it. I've decided for example that what 800,000,000 Chinese care about is the reconstruction of the local church, . . . and 500,000,000 Indians. . . and so forth and so on. That's the kind of decisions we make all the time. Who says that's what's needed? I say so.

I don't know when it began to dawn on you, as it dawned on me that it's not a matter of simply renewing this local church or that local church or some other local church, but that what you had on your hands was the whole thing - every local Church has to be transformed. Then when that happens to you, one of the facts of life is that you're at the beck and call of the whole globe. You can only stay where you stay because that's where the globe needs you, not because you happened to show up in Phoenix or Seattle. You're at the beck and call of the globe and at the same time, you're in charge. You go where you have to go. And as I look around, that's where authority is today. People who have decided to guard the globe are calling the shots, creating the trends. Don't you look to the guy who's decided to get the information, who's decided to take a human stance. And that's the man who has passion. That's what it takes to cross the glacier - that's what crossing the glacier is.

Then there's a chasm you come to. It's a bottomless chasm. It's Ancestral Obligation. I guess it was because I had a kidney disease called nephritis which kept me in bed for a year that I was sort of fascinated with the kidney machine when they were first invented. I was in Seattle at the time and they had one of the first ones at the University of Washington. You know that they hook the person onto it, and it changes their whole blood, filling up with new blood. Since it takes a while to do that, there's a limit to how many people can use the machine to go on living. And they had a team of doctors and so forth. . . I guess there were a couple of clergymen and a professor or something and they decided who could go on the kidney machine out of all the people who applied.

Well, some of us who had decided to educate people informally, invented this game called the kidney machine game. We would have a group sit around and pretend they all had kidney disease. We had applied to be on the machine, and in this case the board of doctors had allowed us to decide who was going to be on the machine. It was a great exercise in consensus making, as you can imagine, and people would get involved in it, and get their being in it. A lot of things would come out that people wanted to consider in that decision. They'd ask themselves who had wisdom or what was the wisdom of that group that needed to get preserved in the future. They'd consider who had made a significant contribution with their life. Or the other side was who's got a great life to live yet.

And in the midst of this kind of stew it always happened that one or two or more would say, "Well, don't consider my name for being on the machine because I wouldn't want the responsibility. If I was one of the ones on the machine, I'd feel responsible to live on behalf of all the ones that didn't make it." And it only took a little push of their consciousness to see that this is no game, that's just your situation. You and I stand on a pile of bodies of those that expended themselves so that I could be what I am. You and I stand on behalf of all the dead ones. And the decision's the same. What am I gonna do with the life I've got, knowing I stand on a pile of dead bodies that gave themselves that I might stand on the spot where I stand.

That's Ancestral Obligation. It's the sense that many hopes are riding on you. It's the sense that the human experiment is at stake. Have you ever thought about that? Humanity was just one of nature's experiments to see if the state of life could be pushed higher. And what if it was still an experiment? What if it could fail, and some new tack would have to be taken? What if you and I had that kind of situation on our hands?

Can you remember the first time you saw the movies of the concentration camps in Germany? I was in a freshman college course when I saw that. We all went down to the auditorium that day and they started showing the movie, no context whatsoever, and all of a sudden you saw wheelbarrows coming up to these deep pits and bodies being dumped in, just wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow. . . just skeletons with a layer of skin over them, nothing else. And something inside of me just screamed, "Never again, never again!" And that's when I began to wake up to the saying, "Those who forget the past are doomed to relive it again." That's when I began to get a glimmer of what that was pointing to.

Something like this begins to form within you: you begin to see yourself as the long-awaited one. You begin to grasp your existence, your life as one that has been expected and waited for. You begin to sense that you are the rightful heir to all the wisdom. I used to be just paralyzed before the intellectual giants of history, but not anymore.

I dialogue with them, because I am heir to their wisdom. When you begin to think, "I'm the culmination of the whole journey of self-consciousness. . . If only I'd been born fifty years ago. . . No! My consciousness is greater by my including the awareness of fifty years ago.

I've begun to notice a certain pattern in the way people talk about the historical significance of their lives. Often, they say something like this: "My contribution to history is that I raised x number of fine children to give to the world," the day it began to dawn on me that my parents probably had said that about me, and their parents said that about them and their parents said that about them. . . "My God, there's just a whole stream of people, waiting for one of us to decide to live his life. And something happened to me there: I decided that my life was going to stand on its own; it was going to be the one expected. Therefore my children were not going to be the justification for my existence. I was going to live my life, knowing that all the people were counting on it to be a contribution to history. You have been delegated by the silent masses, the great crowd of those who have had their day. You sense yourself representing the interests of all the ones who aren't around - I mean the ancestors.

Then there's the crevasse; the only passage upward is a cleft in the rocks, like a chimney you have to shimmy up. It gets wider toward the top, so it gets a little trickier as it goes. That's Futuristic Responsibility for me. And that first came into my consciousness when I was a senior in college. I was headed for being a research chemist. That was my occasional choice; and it wasn't a new decision. I had been taking every science course I could find ever since about the eighth grade; I was interested in science, I could do science, and I was good at it. etc., etc., etc. And I was always going to be a research chemist, and I had several stories about the importance of that - I was in college shortly after Sputnik went up, and I mean science was, that was, significant.

Then along about my senior year several things began to happen all at once. The girl I was dating pretty heavily was a year behind me in school and so that relationship was in jeopardy. And I had to decide what I was going to do after I graduated. So I put out a lot of things to graduate schools, which enabled me to put it off for awhile. Then, the worst part was that my senior year I finally got a chance to do some research. And it was awful - you went in this laboratory for eight hours a day. I mean it might be fine for other people, but for me it was just awful. All I could see was all day long in the laboratory tomorrow and the next day and into the sunset, and I wanted no part of it. I didn't dare tell anybody that, because that was going to be my occupation. The other thing that happened - seemed insignificant at the time - somebody gave me a copy of the Last Temptation of Christ, by one Nikos Kazantzakis.

And between all the swirling things that went on there, it dawned on me that I could not decide that next year, save I decided my whole life's occupation. And I could not decide my whole occupation save I was anticipating the whole future. All those little things began to line up so that to make any decision at all was to assume responsibility for the whole future. Any decision, yes or no, or anything, had that kind of import to it. I began to discover the business about not deciding is deciding. You know, you don't have a static situation; you're always on a boat going down the river, and you either paddle upstream or you paddle downstream. If you don't paddle, you go downstream. I mean you don't have a static situation; you're either giving yourself to the trends or you're standing over against them. You're either affirming the trends or you're daring to bend them. And not to decide is to go along, or to throw your being behind the trends that are in. It's that kind of a sense - I don't know - I experienced it like giving birth, as I guess I can experience that. It was laborious, I know that. And it was long; it was nine months long; struggling to try to give form to a decision that would honor what I knew was already there in the situation.

In this crevasse that you're crawling up, it dawns on you that the future does not exist - you're inventing the future. There was a time when I thought I knew what it was to be a male. Now I discover I create maleness, in relation to my wife, in relation to the house I'm in, in relation to my son, I invent maleness by deciding who I am and being it. And it's different all the time; I never seem to get a handle on it. I create what it means to be a Lutheran; I create what it means to be the Church; and American, you name it, whatever, I create it. I don't have to; I do. Just by being, I do it. I'm an example, an exemplar. I cry with Kazantzakis, "I cut the channel through which the descendants flow and follow."

You know, there is a strange kind of imprinting; most people's intuitions and responses are programmed out of the imagery of the past, but in this crevasse, you're imprinted with a world that is not yet in being. Your imprinting is a dream, a vision, if you will. And what you experience is that you are not at home. You're strange, unusual, peculiar. But it also comes to you that you're at home with not

being at home in this world, which for me is another way of talking about being in the other world in the midst of this world. I belong to the future. I'm at home with the future, which is coming. And to the extent that I embody it in my own being, it's here now, though it is still to come. And I'm at home with not being at home. Finally, there is the state of Invented History. Have you ever suddenly asked yourself, "Why in the world did I get myself into this? Now, I'd rather not meet strange people - that's just the way I'm wired up and especially if they're in situations of distress. And so one day I was driving along wondering why it was that I decided to be a volunteer hospital chaplain. I was on my way to a hospital where I was the chaplain of the day. I don't know how I get into those things. And so I was rehearsing to myself the several reasons why I ought not be a volunteer hospital chaplain (I've never been good at small talk, etc.) I arrived, and they gave me some cards with the names and location of the people on whom to call.

One of the cards was a terminal cancer patient. So I went in and struck up some kind of conversation with him; I forget about what. And I began to get more and more uncomfortable with the situation, and so I said to him, thinking this would be my exit, "Hell, is there anything I can do for you?" And he looked right at me and said, "If they had a black pill here that 'd finish me off, I'd take it." I was dumb-founded. I looked around for the nurse - in vain - and you know how in Fiddler on the Roof, one moment he was in the situation and all of a sudden he was off looking at it from a distance. That's what happened. All of a sudden, I realized I didn't have anything to say to that man! And I was clear that something radical needed to be done there. I know many people who could have handled the situation, glossed it over and moved on. And they'd have made the man feel a little bit better about his condition, But I knew that something more radical was needed. And I also knew that I didn't have the foggiest, what I was going to do. Most of all, I knew it was my hands. But that is not yet what tints agape is. The Love which is singular mission happened to me when I discerned that this was not only my failure - but a failure that is repeated again and again in every man's life. The fact is that you and I and all men are doomed. And the doom is that I had no language to talk to him with which would give him a possibility of deciding that he could live his life as a terminal cancer patient. I had no art, no symbol, I had no story that was the doom that was just there in that room. And I wanted to run, and yet there was no possibility except just being the doom, . . . to claim the spirit struggle of our life as my own. To turn it into spirit, to create the language, to create the symbol, to create the story, the myth. There's no way to do that, except to be the doom.

And that is like scaling a cliff wall, for me. It's nailing in a peg to stand on, and then nailing in another, and like a spider or a fly crawling up over nothing creating, creating, creating, creating. And there's an agonizing drivenness to it. There's no reason to do it; most people don't want to do it. And I don't want to do it. And yet there's an indicative within you that says history must go on. Life must go on, the show must go on. And that sounds like an imperative, it's not. It's just there; it's going to go on.

And that's what you give yourself to, and in the midst of that you experience yourself as a mutation. I never liked that word because it sounds like you'd have big hunks of something coming out of your arms and back or something weird. But the truth is, you do not look weird to the world. Mysteriously, in creating new language and symbols, you become a mutation in consciousness, a new thing in history. You become, like it or not, a singular expression of what, strangely, you experience the psalmist talking about, when he related to the passionate care in your being. And just maybe the mountain begins to be for you what it was for the Psalmist: A Refuge. Can you imagine that, crawling up that wall, clinging to it, for dear life and knowing that to be refuge? "Thou hast rebuked the nations and overwhelmed the boundaries. Thou hast blotted out their name for all time. The strongholds of the enemy are thrown down forevermore. Thou hast laid their cities in ruin. All memory of them is lost. The Lord thunders; he sits enthroned forever. He has set up his throne and his judgment seat. He it is who will judge the world with justice and try the cause of the peoples fairly. So may the Lord be a tower of strength for the oppressed. A tower of strength in time of need for those who acknowledge Thy Name may trust in Thee. For Thou, Lord, cost not forsake those who seek Thee. Sing psalms to the Lord who dwelleth in Zion. Proclaim his deeds among the nations. For the avenger of blood has remembered men's desires, and has not forgotten the cry of the poor."

Ron Clutz