

Chicago Centrum

Closing Plenary S '74

July 27, 1974

THE LONG MARCH

Grace and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

We have a tendency to think that after fifty years of one miracle after another, one wonder after another, the new world is here. It is not. What has happened in these times is comparable to what has happened so far in the renewal of the Church. It has been nothing but the coming to fruition of the Protestant Reformation and, by that, I do not refer to those people in history who call themselves Protestants. The Protestant Reformation went on in the Roman Catholic Church as well as in those sectarian efforts of ours, called Protestantism. The 20th Century has been a cleaning up of the Renaissance, or of the scientific, technological revolution. We are only on the threshold of the New. And we have been set aside to play a significant, though invisible, and extremely humble role in the new world.

These days, I describe the new world as the transparentization of time. We know so little about it; but some of you will live long enough to be ashamed of some of the things you have called wonders. The mysterious forces within history, recognized by any sensitive person however he refers to them are going to be using us, for the new world is going to be spun out of new religious modes. Mark you, there is not going to be a new religion. No one can create a new religion; that is ridiculous. However, within the great historical religions around the world, there will emerge new modes of religion. I think these new modes of the religious deeps, or of the deeps of consciousness, have to do with the transparentization of time.

This process of transparentization has to do with that march to the world which we have wanted all along. Those of you who thought we were turning away from the religious deeps into the social deeps are utterly wrong. Those of you who think it is fun to feel secular are deceived. This march into society, this march into the world is the forging of the New Religious Mode which is the transparentization of time.

Now a little poetry:

To have seen me is to have seen the Father, so I want to know why in the world you say, "Let us see the Father." Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? As an illustration, the words that I say to you now, do not speak as from myself. It is the Father living in me who is at this very moment doing his work. You must believe me; you must believe me when I say, that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me.

That was from the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. Now, a little love poem:

Oh, a Dark night, kindles in love with yearnings, Oh, happy chance, I went forth without being observed, my house being now at rest. In darkness, but secure, by the secret ladder, disguised, Oh Happy Chance. In darkness and in concealment, my house being at rest, in the happy night, in secret, when none saw me nor I beheld ought, without light or guide save that light which burned in my heart.

I believe that the heart of St. John of the Cross is found in the fifth, sixth, and eleventh chapters. St. John forms one of his basic insights in chapters five and six. St. John deals with what we call the Dark Night of the Soul. In eleven, he deals with what we call the Long March of Love. Both of these are the Dark Night of the Soul. Our clumsiness of understanding these experiences has to do with having, for our time, to grasp in the concreteness of our own secret lives what St. John was attempting to point to.

In the section of St. John we call the Dark Night, John emphasizes the intellectual. He deals with the dark contemplation. In eleven, he moves more to the practical, or what we mean by the Long March. There, he uses the image of the strange fire.

Throughout the history of the Church and Christian doctrine, there has been long, serious and sometimes violent conflict, between those who emphasize the rational and those who emphasize the volitional, existential, experiential and practical. Though all of us have a deep appreciation for both contestants in this moral war, probably each of us shows up standing with the forces of the practical. So did St. John. This is to say, that chapter eleven is more important to John than chapters five and six. In eleven, John deals with the volitional, with the practical, with the conative or the effective dimension of man.

In the Dark Night, behind the sense of humiliation, or weakness, of abandonment or resentment, and of suffering lies something like this: In the midst of life, a happening happens in which you become aware of that which is other than what you have known all your life. This is the awareness of your own contingency, of the fact that you pass away. It is only because you become aware of an indefinable other than the only world you have known anything about, that you can become aware of movement. When you become aware of death, you become aware of the other-than-temporality where temporality cannot be grasped. These happenings, regardless of how important or trivial they seem to an observer, are always wrenching.

It may be that your first awareness of this was at age three, or maybe two. Was I three when I wandered out into the street, saw the gypsies come by and ran home screaming? That is the first consciousness I have of my life. Perhaps the first experience or consciousness, really, was when they yanked me from the security of my mother's womb into the Godawful; world of pain and suffering guilt and death.

Then weeks or months or years later, someone recruits me for an RSI, which has been taught in a million different poetries during the past twenty thousand years. RSI has always been there. What is important about RSI is that a name is given. Nothing is taught; they simply give me a name. When that name comes, there intrudes on my being a dark, strange, imposing, conquering image. It begins with a strange exhilaration, and also fright. Often, those who strike back at the RSI pedagogue are the most exhilarated, as time alone can tell. When that dark image comes in, one knows dread and fascination. Sometime later, a week, a lifetime, that image becomes filled full. I sometimes call this the experience of the tenton crane falling upon me. What happens in that encounter is held in the phrase of the East: "The one in the many and the many in the one." This is a phenomenological observation, an existential reality we all know about: The strange mystery present to you in the dark, imposing, conquering image is not "lo, here and lo there," but is the All, the Final that is everywhere and is in everything. That is why to love God is to love everything. That is not a metaphysical statement; it is a profound phenomenological confession. "He who doth not love All, doth not love God." This is what Augustine meant when he said "Love your neighbor in God and love God in your neighbor." All fellow creatures, large and small, conscious and unconscious, are your neighbor. Look at how close that table is, or the chair you are sitting upon.

That is the tenton crane. That strange, very dark image that imposes itself upon you and seems out to conquer all, becomes activated. From that moment on, there comes an indescribable warfare in the mind which is cut off from all temporality and focuses itself simply upon the Mystery. This is a long, dark night of humiliation which never ends. Nothing you ever attached yourself to is worthy of you; yet you spend your whole life attached to it. You die! Out of this comes the deep sense of weakness. Your only strength is in your relationships and with the presence of this strange, dark image. You recognize that every one of those relationships shall pass away with you. The only strength is the strange, dark image of the All in All. This is the sense of utter forsakenness which is the core of resentment. Here is the key to life suffering.

The struggle is that another world is in my being at the core of my selfhood. The image is both deep within me and far outside me. It is the reflective part of my being. As St. John would say, when the Mystery intrudes, the effective, conative aspect of being is impacted. Something different, but not inseparable from what I have described takes place. This is the strange fire kindled within. While the dark image imposes itself, the strange fire in one practical, volitional part of my being is enkindled. The strange fire is the awe. The awe is not in US; we are in the awe.

In the RSI syndrome, we know about dread and fascination. But have you noticed, that only when the ten-ton crane drops, only when you see the All in All, when you grasp that your life is only Universal Benevolence, then, the awe is let loose within. At that point, you begin to paw away, trying to get rid of the awe because the small fire within you has burned awe) every emotional attachment you ever had to those things which pass away.

This is why those of you who run like scared sheep from trouble in your marriages are fools. Could you grasp yourself going to the grave, finally becoming aware that you had turned your back on divine grace? Mark you, divine grace always comes with killing, ruthless pain. I told a young woman yesterday, "I want you to remember two things: One, there are not any personal problems in life (that is an empirical statement); and two, the divine activity is in every activity and it may take you ten years to understand that."

The presence of God is in everything. Have you noticed that once you have tasted the awe, every time you snuff it out, a new dose comes oblivious to how far you have tried to run from it? It keeps on kindling and kindling. While you are fighting the dark image with every power, force and troop you can muster, you find yourself ridiculously falling in love with the enemy, God.

You are falling in love with God, with the God in All. You are falling in love with the One who meets you in everything. The experience of falling in love is an Armageddon within it tears you this way and that. I call it rootlessness. When you fall in love, you begin to experience absolute ineffectivity. You experience total depletion. Then you are falling in love, you also experience a strange, utter unfulfillment. This is the Long March.

When you who experience a not-at-homed-ness wherever you are, you are falling in love with God who scorches away your attachments to either this world or the Other World. This God who wants you is a jealous God: and because he is the image of Naught, of Nothingness, it can never be said that he is a being. There is not the Other World and this world and then something else called God. And yet, this otherthan, this totally otherthan, only exists in the Other World that is in this world. This means, that for the rest of your life, you will be torn this way and that.

When you grasp that God has burnt from you any attachment to anything whatsoever including your own spirituality, you are ineffectivity. You are the minnow in the whole of history. To fall in love with; he All in All means that you sense only ineffectivity for the rest of your life.

It is a long, hard road to grasp that you and I are literally nothing; and to be God's man. and God's woman is to be nothing. If there are to be any consequences to your life as a Religious, they will come so many centuries after you are dead that no one will ever be able to find your bones. You are building the City of God, not the City of Man.

Yet, there is no City of God except in the midst of this world. Suppose you finish 5th City. Do you think God will allow you more than one moment of self-satisfaction. You could do one billion times more than you are going to do with your life and it would not leave an imprint on anything.

This brings us to the question of the transparent life. Someone. came in to see me. the other day and did me a service by warning us that we careful of the trap of quietism. Quietism ran more rampant in the Middle Ages perhaps, than at any other time in the Church 'a history. We must avoid that. In our day, however, activism, not quietism. has run rampant in the Church. I see a far greater danger there, as we turn toward the world. Let no one think for a moment that our greatest temptation is quietism. Our greatest temptation is that upon which we have been nursed: Activism.

We are, however, beyond quietism and activism. Both quietism and activism have experienced transparentization. The issue is not quietism versus activism; it is quietism or activism versus transparent reality. To put it in more sociological terms, we are beyond the Roman Church; we are beyond the Protestant Church. Out or both of these is coming into being the new form of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Transparentization means the Dark Night is always with you. The Dark Night itself is the light. The humiliation is the light, the weakness is the light. The resentment is the light. The suffering is the light.

In the Long March, transrationality happens when you belong neither to this, nor to the Other World. Pliny, the Elder, said "These Christians outthink, outlove and outdie any other people. " When you grasp yourself in relation to that which is present in this world, but is not contained in it, you become rational, in such a fashion that. you outrationalize the rational itself. In the broad, when we say rational, we mean civilization.

Civilization does not constitute itself. It is in relation to that which is other than the civilizing process. Otherwise, you do not have movement. That is why any new rational structure which is aware of that which is other than rational, we call the irrational. Once one has visited the wellspring of the irrational, he does not dismiss the rational. The rational is intensified. Therefore, when the religious dimension, or the irrational dimension of life breaks loose, a new construct of reason, a new vehicle for society itself comes into being. Wherever you smell intensified rationality, you have evidence that someone has visited the wellspring of irrationality itself. So when you are feeling sorry for yourself about being homeless, remember that this love sickness you are experiencing is for the sake of burning you through in such a way that you can forge new structures of society on behalf of all men.

Secondly, something like transrationality happens, if you will allow the coining of a word. In the midst of grasping your total ineffectivity, you are in fact, capable of acting transparently, of actualizing impossibility. In Korea, our colleagues have absolutely changed the universe in one year's time. Yet, if you sit around the table with them you see they are experiencing a deep done of ineffectivity.

Thirdly, on the other side of the experience of dryness, or being all gone inside, comes a strange kind of sense that God is my friend. I realize this is next to impertinence, which I fear more than anything else, but I mean God knows I am his friend. He knows I will always be there and he is hefting his future on me. That is what it means to be all burned out inside.

It is hard for us to think the thoughts of God, but we must. We are not God, but we have to think the way God does. He is depending on us. That is why he burnt us out I can hear Peter say, "I'd be glad to be some place else, but where else can I go?" Burning you out is God's doing. He wants you to love him and him alone. So long as you have the least inclination to go out and make a name for yourself he cannot depend on you.

The last category is trans-felicity, fulfillment, Socrates tried to say this with the word "eudaimonea". When a man has all the satisfactions he senses belong to him taken away, he knows his life is fulfilled fulfilled in God. He is not fulfilled because his wife is pleasing to him, because his children have become what he wants them to become, but he is fulfilled in God.

It is precisely in the moment that one is aware of absolute rootlessness, that he becomes aware that he is conceiving beyond his own capacity. It is in the awareness of ineffectivity that one knows he is doing beyond his capacity to do. In the midst of grasping oneself burnt over like they burned over the plateaus of Africa, one knows his staying power, a thrust that obviously is beyond his capacities.

Now, fulfillment is not something you define. My fulfillment is being in love with God, which love is born of God's wondrous love of me. Man invented sin. God knows nothing about sin because He forgave me my sins before the foundation of the world. The Lord laid down his life for me not because I was bad, but because he cared about me. That is my fulfillment.

What in the world is there to say after the Dark Night except, "Praise the Lord?" What is there to do after you have been through the Long March? That Stillness is the stillness of God working; it is being itself working in and through your being. I like the way the New Testament talks about it: You never can see God, but once in awhile you can see a leaf wiggle on a tree.

Now, you are going into the world to create a new vehicle for society. You will never see it. You will do it. You neither go into the world as a quietist nor as an activist. You go as a transparentized person. For our day, this is a way to talk about trusting Being itself. Luther said that trust is out over seventy thousand fathoms. After struggling, you relax. Remember, however, relaxation is eternal rootlessness, eternal ineffectivity, eternal depletion and forever unfulfillment. .

I am not so sure we really want to go on such a Long March. Yet, if all your life, you have wondered exactly what was meant by the Kingdom of Heaven, then remember these words: "Blessed art thou . . . right now, right now. . . for yours is. . . even now, whatever you have . . . the Kingdom of Heaven.

Joseph W. Mathews