

Core Curriculum Revised Manual

November, 1973

Parish Leadership Colloquy

LECTURE 1

I guess if we had to take a look at our times (and Tillich's dying the other day reminds me) that probably Barth who rang the bell 48 years ago. He is still alive. And 48 years ago when the bell was rung something just brand new happened to our time. The intellectual revolution took place, and what a revolution it has been, the 40 some odd years. Well, let's just take the 40 years the church has been in the wilderness. Here the contemporary theologians have been hammering, hammering, hammering, trying to break the gospel into the twentieth century in relevant theological terms and, just in the last few years, as people like Richard Niebuhr and Tillich go under that this is an indication to us that the 40 years in the wilderness has ended. A few years ago, the seminary professor, the man in the tower like Tillich and like Niebuhr they were the ones that just stood out, and you went to the seminary, you returned to dig, dig, dig, to get hold of what took place. Now, without these greats, we wouldn't even be where we are today. And yet if you want to put it on the other hand the 40 years are over.

We have bumped up against the promised land, and to bump up against the promised land, we sent out scouts out to it and what we found was they came back just scared to death. You and I were just shoved out of seminary into our parish, out in the world, and we came back and those giants, they are a hundred feet tall, you know the weapons they have got, they take away your money, they get your wife angry at you, or they make the denomination snarl at you, or they, all the people in the church begin to kick at you. Why those giants are just horrible out there. You can't go into the promised land, let's go back into the wilderness, and so back we go to wander around some more.

Yet this is the time, that the Lord has just rung down the curtain on this 40 years of wandering. And if we are 8 years beyond that. OK.

But now we are just shoved up against a brand new situation. The theological job has been done for the twentieth century. If it has not been done for us, in the sense that we have not come to terms with it, then here is where we have to start.

But the theological job has been done, objectively. These men, these great theologians, 8 or 10, they focused the gospel in to where the gospel is just utterly present to us in our day. Shifted some by now to move into the parish ministry, into the local congregation. You just look at our seminaries, are they in trouble, we begin to treat students like football players, we run around and give them scholarships and we battle one seminary over against another to try to hold them, but they are in trouble, trying to hold and keep students. People are dropping out of the ministry like flies, they sell insurance or sell bonds, or go in with papa in law, or anything else, or just drive a truck. "I don't give a damn where I go I am just going to drive."

Now, you don't beat our colleagues over the head for this. But on the other hand, it is a tragic time, to leave the local congregation and to leave the parish ministry, because it is precisely the time that the shift has moved into.

Joe Pierce and I were talking to Karl Barth a few years ago and we asked him, where is the theological dialogue going to go from now on? Who is going to be carrying the ball? And he pulled that bony finger out and stuck it in our face and said, "with you". By which he meant with guys like you and me who are in the grass roots level, not in the seminary

So I don't know. Barth is still our papa. I grew ten feet when he said that to me, because he wasn't trying to hang onto the theologian. Now this is going to be, this is the movement back into the concrete situation.

And the cutting edge is here. It is in the midst of the concrete situation, with the layman in the local congregation. The battle line has moved out into the world, there to affect history. And I would submit that if you and I want to go back here and play games or go around the side and play games, or any other way, without meeting this, the present historical manifestation of the church is just gone. Now, the Lord will never leave this world without his people, but that is not the point. When we see what we see and know what we know, then the demand is on us.

In the promised land the going gets rough. Things are mixed up and turned over and chomped on and spit out. So when we bump up against what it means to be in the world here is where we have to sit.

The leader at this present point in history is people like you, the local congregation, the parish minister, whether we like it or not we live in a position, administratively in the local congregation that it cannot possibly move unless we move it. We talk about our congregational structures and all this but still it is there. So the question then comes down upon us. Shall we move, shall we move?

The point of moving today is the job of just building adequate images. And to do this, you know what T.S. Eliot said: "Between the idea and reality falls a shadow." To talk here, our wisdom of our time. Our ideas, here twentieth century wisdom is as overflowing today with the paperback explosion that education just jumps in on us. And here is our practical lives over here. And, this gap, between the wisdom and our putting it into practice is a gap, that turns out to be an abyss. a billion miles across.

And by image I would mean that which illuminates how you can bridge this gap, and at the same time motivating people to cross the gap, or to bridge it or to close it. Images bridge the gap, it is different from concepts or ideas in this sense, but it is that which . . . a person with the practical concrete conclusion as to how to do it, and then motivates him to cross it. It is only through an image that you can deliver a person, you can give a guy a second- hand concept and he can just chew it up and swallow it and put it back and never touch it at all, but you can't give a guy a second-hand image. If he appropriates that image, then it is his because it goes to the bottom of his life. Therefore, the requirement is pushing in this direction.

And you know how Bergson talked about it. He said that here the mystical going-onness and suddenly an insight bursts into the plane of history and then out on the plane of history this insight begins to get solidified into the structures and then finally this solidification controls the insight until it is no good anymore. It is just woodenized and held into position and it bursts out again.

You take this out of mysticism and what he is doing is just pointing to a going-onness that is just taking place in our time. A better way to put it is that here is just a going-onness in our day. And out of this going-onness, what comes about is new insights, new awarenesses take place and people take these and weld out images by them and then with these images inject them back to educate the masses and the masses are entering into the going-onness of history, change history. Therefore, the image, the developing of these and the educating of the masses, is primarily where it rests upon us today in the local congregation to move.

You know how it goes, we sit around and talk about, I have got to wait on someone to come and show me how. I have got to wait on a Luther to come; I have got to wait on a Calvin to come. I say no.

You sit around in meetings and how we use our theology to thumb the Lord in the face, we know, we have to wait on the Holy Spirit. We have got to do this or that, some way just to keep from moving out into the world. And the East German pastors when Marxism took over most of their parishioners were just cultural Christians, therefore they just put on, whereas they had on the clothes of cultural Christianity, they just immediately oozed out of that one, and oozed into cultural Marxism. Then there were a few that said: "No, I don't want to be Marxist" and left. Then there were those that already were, or made a decision to be the Church. Sometimes they would end up with 4 or 5 people or something like that or 10 or 15 would be all that would be left out of a huge congregation. But those 4 or 5 or 10 or 15 are there grinding away.

I was sitting with a group of American pastors, talking with a couple of East German pastors, and they said "Oh I wish the Holy Spirit would reveal this," by which, they meant that if the atom bomb would blow up and they would only have a few left, maybe they would be ready to move, and our East German friends used a four-letter word about that point and said: "What in the hell are you talking about?" Here we have to go out and beat the bushes to get the people, you have all the pagans in the church already, all you have to do is pick them up. This is the kind of thing that we know. No one has any excuse anymore. We can't blame it on the Holy Spirit, we can't wait for a Luther and a Calvin, so Barth was right when he stuck that bony finger back, you are the Luthers and the Calvins.

There aren't going to be any more big names, they have already been done for in our time. Oh, you are going to have names like Martin Luther King, and other people like that; you are going to have people that get thrown out into the front of the battle line and get chewed up and become a symbol, people like that, but the leaders are coming from the grass roots and all the gimmicks, all the ways we have of hiding. I'm not clear what we have to do. I'm not clear therefore we sit back and wait for another meeting. Or we go to conference after conference and meeting after meeting and we come back, and we go running down to see Mayor Daley and he peeps around this way, or that way, and

he only sees five or six troops and he passes us on, and says: "Go on home boys, you are good Christians but go on home and when you come back with 20 or 30 thousand others we will listen to you."

There is one thing: That's training of the troops, this is the key here. Of putting in the images that are utterly necessary, for them to move. Now it takes courage to form images, because your being is mixed with them. These are not in the abstract. It comes out of the hard headed digging, the hard headed thrusting into the midst of the situation and reflecting, not bubbling up with just ideas but with images that are involved in action.

Therefore, strategically today, it is a question of whether we have the courage of doing the deed.

This is not something that is in a vacuum or that isn't the world in a hell of a shape, you take a look and find: look at the heavy concentration in Illinois here, wherever you go around the world you will find whirl pools of revolution, whirl pools of revolution, whirlpools of revolution going on. Laymen, clergy, people inside the congregations and outside the congregations, all in these little whirlpools of revolution.

In four years these whirlpools are going to be gathered in riverlets to where people in that area will see them moving all around. In ten years this is going to be a mighty stream and a mighty roar that will be going around in history. Some of my colleagues think it is even earlier. The historical manifestation of the church has to make a decision . . . our society. It will become that clear, as to whether people are going to live in it or whether they are going to die, and I would submit to you that is the way things are. If you don't agree with my timetable, you create your own. But it is that kind of thing that is there.

Whether we do it or some one else is going to do it; it is going to be done. But that light never comes to me that way. It comes to me like that bony finger, that if it is going to be done, you are elected. You are elected.

In our time together we want to spend ... you do it this way instead of that way, etc. so we can just get clear with some of the tools that have been developed in this area. In the whole area of the cultural revolution, everything is just upended, everything is just up for grabs. Therefore, how do we get hold of what is taking place? How do get clear and delineate what is going on? Where the cutting edges of the revolution are and the demand it makes upon us for new life style, and the dynamics in the cases involved. And then the church practices, how do we begin welding out a model for the local congregation in our time?

Now, you know the church in our time, the local congregation is gone. Period. Just gone. Now some of us have buildings but the whole image of how we operate, of what in the world is going on is gone. Therefore, if we see that kind of handwriting on the wall, how do we enter into this. There is no magic in this area, no magic whatsoever, but you have to have a model out of which to start to go into our times, out of which your model may change. So it will be this, we will begin to hammer on a relevant model, or way to attack this whole problem.

Then what we will be doing together is: We will be worshipping but we will be reflecting upon our worshipping, but what we will be doing is just worshipping and we will be asking you here to use our family orders of worship. For example, tomorrow morning we will ask you to worship with our order. All of us go into the chapel, we worship each morning at six-thirty there and we invite you to participate in that. Such things as this will be part of the whole, part of the whole colloquy so that we can immerse ourselves into the activity and then from time to time reflect on what's going on and trying to share out of that.

Then on the other hand here, we want to work in the whole area of symbols. As you know the twentieth century has just given to us that man is a symbol making animal, and what this means, so we will be working with methodology in this whereas, here methodology in worship, methodology in just the art form. How in the world does man today get hold of the art form and the symbols. First of all, in his understanding and then in his relationship to what is going on. Then, not only with methodology and art forms, but a practical theological methodology. All of us have a practical theological methodology; our problem is that often we are not self-conscious of it or present to it. How does that methodology weld itself out as we are walking through our daily lives, and how is it expressed? Here is a possibility of reflecting on it and dealing with it. Then the whole area of our spirit life. Take a look at our faces as we were going around introducing ourselves. Today the minister is in the worse situation of anyone, of his own spirit dimension of his life. Laymen at least have some sense of significance, if they are working in the meat packing business, or selling shoes, or some sense of contributing to what is going on in history but we have so long been brainwashed and given images of the church as something that we hope somewhere may have some sort of significance. And therefore, the kind of thing that just forces back on us to appropriate and live in and operate. And this is not for beating ourselves over the head. But to see what it means to see what is going on, to take a look at our sharing life and then see what it means to live out of that as people of faith. Then just the whole area of what it means to be free. The whole area of corporate discipline. What does it mean to be a disciplined group of people and we here will be a disciplined group of people during our 4 days together. What does it mean then to stand out as we go through discipline. Or we participate in a discipline where we are utterly accountable to each other, and to reflect upon this and see what it means. Then again, to reflect on the tools, 90% of your laymen haven't the slightest idea how to read. That means they are giants in their own field. Literally giants. Yet, (you want to make it 70% or 95%). Then tools, and how to share it. Then pedagogical tools, the whole area of teaching, how can we work that through this. A fine way to sharpen our own tools, where the layman who comes in our parish, as a pedagogue we are over against that person 24 hours a day. Where he is at every moment, everyday, we see that he has the opportunity to receive life. and to develop the tools here for this.

We will be operating out of this room, for a meal and for a lecture. We are to be divided into units, from breakfast to lunch, lunch to dinner, dinner to closing time in the evening. Each one of these units will roughly be divided into the area of lecture/study/ and seminar. This will be true in the theology section. We will lecture exactly as if you are a group of laymen here, we are not to dispense eternal wisdom but here to get out the whole area of where the theological dialogue is, where the stew pot is bubbling on the side, where the pressure cooker is cooking. Then we will have

a period of study where we will take one of the contemporary theologians and break him into pieces and put him back together and come back and fire at him from the seminar. And here we are not one bit interested in whether anyone agrees with the contemporary theologian. The time is past for, well Barth says this but Tillich says that, who gives a damn, it is what do you say? Until you come out, I say this? This is the whole point with the layman. In the seminar we get him to line up his gunsight to see what that theologian is pointing to then he can either say yes, or no. If he can see what the theologian is pointing to, then he is released to become his own theologian. And to do his own thinking. So this is where our methodology gears in. In the church practice area, what we will be doing again: a lecture to get out the stew pot, and then we will have a workshop, except one time we will have a paper, a worship to pull the wisdom out of ourselves to see what is going on and see it and chew it and get it into some form and some way so that we can put wheels under it.

Then in the cultural realm we will have the lecture, then the film and this will be just to blast into that dimension of life that we will be dealing with and then we will be working over against a paper here.

And then during the time, we will have a movie, which will serve a number of purposes, but sharing the art form methodology, with the theological methodology and the working back and forth. These will be the general areas. We will also use our meals for times of conversation, to work on certain things that we have talked about here.

I want to ask if there are any questions concerning the mechanics of where we are now? Rooms?
etc.?