

Summer '71 Tuesday
Research Assembly
July 27, 1971

PLENARY ADDRESS

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Because this is the day of metamorphosis in which the assembly becomes the council, it seems to me befitting that I introduce someone to you. The introduction of whom symbolizes as far as I can see our future, namely the marriage between the movemental and the established church. Out of which union shall come the new manifestation in our time of God's People. This one I introduce is my brother, but I don't introduce him in that role. I introduce him in the role of our colleague which indeed he has been, is now, and shall continue to be. I present to this council the United Methodist Church's Bishop of Boston.

Guess what? It's Psalm 84. When the term Zion appears here, in your imagination substitute the People of God or the Church and that's not to take away from Zion. Zion has come in its particularity to signify the universal.

How dear is thy dwelling place, thou Lord of Hosts!
I pine I faint with longing for the courts of the Lord's temple;
my whole being cries out with joy to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow has her nest,
where she rears her brood beside the altar of God.
O Lord of Hosts, my King, my God,
Happy are those who dwell in thy house;
They never cease from praising thee.
Happy the men whose refuge is in thee,
whose hearts are set on the pilgrim way!
As they pass through the thirsty valley they find water from a spring;
and the Lord provides even men who lose their way
with pools to quench their thirst.
So they pass on from outer wall to inner wall,
and the God of gods shows himself in Zion.

O Lord God of Hosts, hear my prayer,
listen, O God of Jacob.
O God, look upon the Lord our King
and accept thy anointed prince with favor.

Better one day in thy courts than a thousand days at home
with our wives and children,
(That last part isn't there)
better to loaf by the threshold of God's house
than live in the dwellings of the wicked.
The Lord God is a battlement, a shield
grace and honour are his to give.
The Lord will hold back no good thing
from those whose life is blameless.

O Lord of Hosts,
happy is the man who trusts in thee!

I want to use you to wander a bit. First of all, where we've been and where we're going and what our state of being is, at least mine. I'm excited by what's going on here for so many reasons I don't know how to sort them out in the midst of almost unendurable anxiety. I was interested in Tideman's emphasis upon polity. For a long time I've not been able to endure people like some of my colleagues who are always afraid their vote isn't going to get into the decision-making processes. For it's become clear to me that if you want your guts, your creativity to

get into the decision making process, that means if you really want to bend history, then who could care less about voting. Because before any issue is ready to be voted on, it is already decided. Where freedom is located is in your creativity that gets into a stew that determines what men vote about, therefore, determines the course of history. That's what we've been doing here, and as far as I can see, this kind of a massive three-week Problem Solving Unit is some way or other reflection: what has to happen in the local level across this globe to once again to turn history back to the local man where it belongs.

Now we had a long journey in creating this stew, and even if this stew fails, you and I know that it's altered the course of history. Someone pointed out to me no earlier than this morning (a newcomer in our midst) that what was happening here was getting a dialogue in history (whether the dialogue be helpful or unhelpful) as a result of this there's a dialogue in history.

Now what is this dialogue? Well, I have to rehearse where we've been. We started out with attempting to get clear on the dynamics that constitute the processes of society. The difficult thing for me to keep in mind is that those triangles are not the way society is. You see, society is stuck and those triangles are abstractions. That's not society. That's not the way society is. Those triangles are normative, therefore, abstract, and they were invented. They were invented by the new that's come into being through and over-against the old. They are abstractions. I want to come back to that. But without those abstractions there's no place to go.

A certain revolutionary in our time said that the major contradiction of any body of revolutionaries is, if they don't have a model, to create one. Did you grab that? That if you don't have a model and you are a revolutionary, the primary contradiction is to get a model. That's what these triangles are. And sometimes I get all balled up and think that, in terms of some kind of eternal essence that's the way society has been and always will be.

Now the flip of this is that once the revolutionary creates that abstract dynamic of society then obviously that's the way society has always been and must always be. Do you get that problem? And there's nothing abstract about that problem. That's what makes your stomach and mine turn over a thousand times a day, even though we don't know why it's turning over. That's the problem. Philosophically, I'm fairly clear about it and have been clear for twenty years. It's part of our basic anthropology in our day which also is a normative statement. It's namely that the essence of man is that he creates his own essence. That's where we started.

Then we had to get clear about the perspective from which those abstractions concerning society were formulated, and so we dealt with how the new is produced by the old and, therefore, becomes that before which the old is a basic paramount primary contradiction. That was implied by our efforts to do the ideological document on "All the Earth Belongs to All the People."

When we got some relative distance and clarity upon the fact that we were standing completely outside the given situation, while at the same time immersed utterly in it, we then turned to building the orbit construct for the purpose of grasping in some kind of vivid depth the utter inter-relatedness of every single aspect of society or of every minute triangle upon that large abstraction. That was the function of the orbit. Then from that orbit system, we took a quick look at the basic contradictions of society that is from the right-wise in terms of malfunction, and in terms of trends. That was Document B that you wrote.

One of the exciting things about an assembly like this is that, on any kind of work in which you create, is that you do it basically by intuition. But intuition isn't something which exists in a vacuum. This is to say that those social trends, though intuition was in their invention, it wasn't out of nothing. The trends of society, if I say the master trend, is indicated by the fact that you talk of a cultural revolution today rather than an economic or a political revolution. Then you have to say that that cultural bias in society today is manifest in three huge revolutions in one sense under which all other revolutions can be subsumed, namely the scientific revolution, the urban revolution, and the secular revolution. Then you become aware of the fact that all your life, whether you were aware of it or not, you not only lived in the scientific, urban, secular revolutions, but they lived in you! That's the basis of your intuitions. That's why you have intuitions like you have and that's why you can out the intuitions you have - they didn't come out of nothing. I'm trying to point to the fact that there is a goingness over and above the goingness that you and I are even aware of in society.

Then after we took a quick look at three contradictions, if you please, from the right-wise orbit, then we reached in and inverted that orbit so that the universal in that orbit, (in the orbit system) became the most particular of the particular that we dared to go down to for the sake of uncomplexity, down to the tertiary level. Now what you were fighting against here is a kind of platonism in which you would have a tendency as a rational being to locate every problem up at the top of your triangles, namely the symbolic. Or you were trying to avoid being trapped in your own abstract model. So we began to get further a hold of what I like to call "pre-contradictions" and then you had some experiments in what I'm going to call pre-proposal writing.

Now I want to take a little bit of an aside here. You all are aware that we're behind. As far as I'm able to figure it, were three days behind. We got behind due to a mistake that I blame on those people in Room E (they are easy to blame things on) I think you need to try to follow this even if you would want to put it quite differently. I think now that if we had it to do over again we could have saved ourselves some time. However, we've got more data than we would have had if we would have saved that time And you can be grateful for that. We thought that when you are down there at the tertiary, if, (and this had to do with the dumping part of it) if you would deal with how they could help that tertiary and write a pre-proposal that you would ferret out what that tertiary saw wrong in that other dynamic. Well, when people began to turn in their in their work, and you began to talk with them, what you began to see is that they were turning their tertiary in on itself, and were not dealing with the fact that the tertiary has no life of its own. It only lives in relationship in that abstraction to 56 other tertiaries. That is to say that . . . how should I put it? about myself, I haven't got any problems "in here" because I haven't got any "in here." My "in-here-ness" is my relationship to my wife, my children, to my colleagues, to my nation. You have that picture? And when I begin to think I have myself a does of psychological problems, you know, then I get all fouled up and have to go to a psychiatrist who complicates it by agreeing with me. Well, I mean that right seriously.

Any way then we had to go back over. that whole -- do you understand where we got behind? And then that meant twice as much paper. I think from Sunday morning until Monday noon that something like 1700 stencils or the equivalent went through some machines across the city of Chicago night and day. So we got behind; now that puts a bit under stress as we begin to look at the end. What lies ahead?

We're ready for the first time to deal with contradictions. I think Room E has been sloppy in terminology. If we were a little brighter, probably we wouldn't be quite so sloppy. Up to now what I call "pre-proposals", we called indices", indicators, if you please, of contradictions. That is because you are dealing in abstractions.

Some of us have felt we haven't been dealing in abstractions. We have been dealing with the concrete stuff. I disagree with you. You have been nowhere but inside those triangles, the whole grid of them and that is sheer abstraction. Sometimes we gave you a workshop that forced you to look down through them into the stuff of reality; but don't get mixed up. You were not down there. You peaked down there. You wrote out a big abstraction and someone said illustrate it. So you peak and come up with an illustration.

I'll go back to the first definition of "contradiction" that you heard. And it was something like this: a contradiction a block that deters the new from moving toward dominance over the old. Well, you get that mighty clear. A contradiction is not some kind of a malfunction within a tertiary, nor is it a blocked trend within a tertiary. You'll not be able to deal, I believe, with bringing into vision a contradiction without dealing with malfunctions and blocked trends and all the rest. But a contradiction is that which stands between somebody who's utterly outside every tertiary and some block. When you now move to put flesh and blood on that you are dealing with the real stuff of the social process, but you have between you and that social stuff your valuational criteria or screens. And in the Assembly you have forged three of these.

The first one is the abstract set of triangles itself. I said before that these are normative, and that, once for the revolutionary they become normative, they disclose what reality is for him. Or take this paper that many of you have read, would make that pretty clear. This is the screen of least intensity.

The second valuational screen that you've created and worked with is the warping, the bending of those dynamics in the triangles by the supposition of weight given to the cultural dimension sitting on the whole system. That is where these colors of red and yellow and green flow down through the whole system. you're bending the system. Or to put it better, because you have two gold diamonds up in the culture as over-against one in each of

the economic and political, you have bent everything toward the cultural. That is the second. This is why in the smallest unit in the quaternary or the tertiary, that bent is still just as present as it is on a much larger level. The whole system is bent by that. That's the second screen you're looking through. And that's of the second most intensity.

One of the greatest intensities, as I grasp it, is your ideological screen: "All the Earth Belongs to All the People." Now you are no longer standing in those triangles; you're outside the process in terms of the posture of the new, though you're looking through this. You're not in it. Now the contradiction is what you come up with, looking at the real stuff of society through these screens, that deters the position you occupy from becoming dominant over the old.

Now how do you get those contradictions? I like to call them matrices of contradictions, for I see them as highly complex and spinning a million miles an hour. I like to sort of think of arriving at these contradictions sort of like a May-pole dance in which you have a lot of streamers out, only if you tie big rocks on the ends of those streamers and the wind starts spinning the pole. Can you begin to see what would begin to happen with that? What I'm trying to say is that the contradiction is not some logical process whereby you move from the data that you have into one more abstraction. That is, if any of you think you've got the foggiest idea of what those contradictions are, then what you think is that the contradiction is going to correspond with the rational processes that were built into those triangles. Forging these contradictions, if you please, is an art. It is not a rationality. It's taking this body of data, and you've got a body of data now (I call them stock piles of data) from eight different complex sources. You've got so much, I don't know how you can get on top of it. Now you've got to start spinning that data, if you'll allow me to use dramatic images, until that data forges its own center. You don't start with some presupposed center. If you did that what in the hell go through this research. You could have said that with your feet propped up on a chair at home. You've got to spin it so it creates its own center. And when you get it (I'm moving to Van Gogh's "Starry Night"), when you get that spinning so that it coagulates in such a sense that it created its own center, it shoots off offspring. And in the abstract model of it, we're going to have four off-spring. Now mark you, that's arbitrary. But we don't know what those off-spring are going to look like. It's sort of like the gene problem (not the Gene Marshall, or people like...he's got some problems too). Anyway, then these start spinning into a matrix if you like. Now that's the way you say it, I believe, artistically.

Now the job tomorrow is that you do this unrational process rationally. The unrational part of this process is that there's going to be a gap between any rationality and what you come up with. This is called Creativity. This is where intuition is the final word, but your intuition, I repeat, does not come out of nothing. It comes out of living in the midst of a world that's already started to spin in a new way. You are bringing simple vivid self-consciousness, but your intuition now and the end of three weeks - and mine - has been intensified one million fold. In one way such a research assembly is nothing more and nothing less than taking intuitions you already have and intensify...Can you imagine what Document B would be like if you'd write it over right now? I mean if you just start from scratch and write in Document B. Why, you wouldn't know yourself as you met yourself coming back through that book. I tell you, our intuitions are highly refined

I was interested in this economics speech up here a little while ago, and I kept saying "Yeah, yeah, yeah"! I've said to people that I've got in the last couple of months- I've got an education all over again that makes all those years I went to school (how many - 25 or 26 or more or more), appear like no education at all, almost. It's that kind of intensity that's happening. That's the intuition that goes in there.

Oh, boy, now - now - you discontinue today! and you'd better rest. And I don't mean sleep - hell, that's not rest. Sometimes you've got to sleep, but you know - I mean rest. Because on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, we've got to do as much as we've done already. It seems like that to me.

Anyway, on Wednesday' probably all day, you've got to come up now with those contradictions. But if you get...and maybe you're going to have to go to Thursday noon, because the way we're operating here, if you get that contradiction said, I mean if you allow them to say themselves, then you have the flip side of your proposal. Now it's not that simple because new creativity and intuition have got to go into that, but you've got the job. So I would hope that by Thursday morning, you could have the contradictions done, and then start forging your proposals and write them on Friday. That means a body of us stay up all night to get the printing done, but on Saturday morning

about noon we just barely make it at the end of the Assembly. And that, of course, is going to be your most important document.

I think Document A on the triangles and C on the ideology and this one that you're going to write between now and Saturday are the crucial ones. What we do with B and this work you've done since last Wednesday is more or less, maybe, pull some of it together in some ordered form, but that's not important except it's the data out of which you've done this last one.

In addition to that, one college has been pulled to draw together in some kind of document, the philosophical presuppositions and the methodology that we've used during this month. I suspect that's going to be, if it isn't great, it's going to be extremely helpful to us. Maybe it's too early for it to be great, I don't know, but it'll be helpful.

And then a college has been pulled to start on the Manifesto. If we can get through with this other work, we ought to, maybe as a whole group, work on that Manifesto, perhaps on Friday afternoon or if necessary maybe Friday night. And that will not be, I suspect, in any finished form, but it will be the beginning of a statement that tries in capsule size to hold together every thing that you've done this summer.

That's where, as I see it, we're going. I hope I was a little bit clear on that.

Now very quickly! those Psalms are something. I have been having Being suffering and Being glories this month, I think, like probably I've never had them in my whole life before. I was supposed this morning to give a lecture on Being, but I'm not. I'm not (but I'm tempted...)

The thing that has come clear to me, and if I were going to give the lecture this would be in it (There are many different ways to sneak into a lecture.) It has come clear to me - somebody almost got this said a little while ago - that a Psalm is not something that is on a written page or that you write or say. A Psalm is your life with intensified consciousness. That is, today is a Psalm. It's my Psalm. Now from a slob I never have a Psalm, you know. These are the deeps of human consciousness. BOY! Oh, and I've had Psalms this week in which I tried to beat the heck out of certain people. But it's a Psalm. And I've had Psalms in which I got the heck beaten out of me. But it was a Psalm. Now this whole month has been somewhat of a Psalm, and the one thing I've had to learn is to live in ambiguity. I mean existentially so, like I've never experienced before. I know this (I think it's true of us all); we've tackled intellectual problems that were bigger than I don't know what, but I never got my mind into any thing that was as complex as what I've been in this month. Just period. And BOY! Oh, that meant raw ambiguity twenty-four hours a day. It's Psalm for me, if you please, my contingency.

The second was to have to dare to try to say out loud to myself what perhaps the practical meaning of all those banners back there mean, meant that I had to make a horrifying decision all over again about who I was going to be in history. Have you heard as you sat in these workshops somebody hammering on your own coffin, and finally saw that it was you? That's what I mean.

And that brings me then to the last one, what's going to happen on Wednesday? I have more pride about that than about anything else, anything that has been before here. One thing is that by Thursday night or maybe Friday noon, we're going to know whether we've got something or not. I want to repeat that again. If you know what we're going to come up with you're going to be surprised, I mean; then you aren't going to be surprised. But you're going to be surprised first. Then you aren't going to be surprised. You cannot predict we may come up with something, .. you know, or we may have something. If we have something, we won't know it. We won't know we have something, we'll intuit it. It'll take you three months or, I think maybe, even a year to ferret out what it is you've got. But you'll intuit it, one way or another.

Now, oh, I have to talk to myself. If we come up with nothing, for me, we've got the dialogue into history, therefore, this is the most meaningful month in my life up to now, I believe. I believe that is a true statement. But it's moving to these contradictions where I experience the intensification in seeing my contingency in a deeper way than maybe ever before. I've been thrown up against the faith in having to say out loud who I am, and have been, and intend to be in this world. They threw me up against the decisions of my faith. And now to say these contradictions, this tells me what I've got to do the rest of my life - and I don't want anything to tell me what to do

the rest of my life. I mean" I'd do almost ANYthing to keep me from having anything or anybody tell me what I have to ... I mean that's when I hear that hammering on my own coffin. And, see? I've got the hammer in my hand. So my anxieties that almost drive me crazy are anxieties about the new decisions I have to . . . I sit up there and say to myself - in deep unfaith - "My God, next week all those people are going to be gone, and I'm not going to have any problems". Then it dawns on me that what this is, is the Church. And next week, I'm the Church, and the week afterwards, I'm the Church, and the week after.

One of the things that struck me, startles me, is these three congregations. It dawned on me that's what a congregation ought to be. The power of 300 people in a local congregation, or a thousand, startles me. Why, what they could do to change the world in a year's time is almost beyond getting said in a sentence. We are the Church! And this kind of thing is what the Church has been doing in history even in its sickest moments. And we're in one of those now, and the renewal of the Church means to find the way to pull the church back to this kind of living over an ambiguity that never goes away for the sake of perpetually building new social vehicles to enable the creativity of every man to get into history.

And with that thought I brace my shoulders in the midst of my sense of weakness and anxiety and walk toward Wednesday and Thursday and Friday. Richard Neibuhr told me long ago that God always fulfills our hopes, but it's never our hopes that he fulfills.

Joseph Wesley Mathews