

OPENING PLENARY ADDRESS, SUMMER '72

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We have been on the way for fifty-five years. Somewhere toward the end of the 1950's, certain people in the Spirit Movement, God's Spirit Movement, not ours, began to sense that a radical alteration was taking place within the forces of renewal. It soon became clear, as we symbolized it, that forty years in the desert in the effort to renew the People of God had passed and that the theoretical job fundamentally had been accomplished. That was 1957. Then it seemed as though it would take about a decade to shift from the emphasis on the theoretical recovery of God's People to the practical. In 1967, according to our symbolic time, that decade was concluded. We are now five long years into that aspect, that dynamic of Church renewal which has placed the emphasis upon the practical. To arrive at our symbolic figure of forty years of practical renewal that is, to the year 2007, we have thirty-five more years to go. And there are some of us who have promised ourselves and God that that dynamic in Church renewal is going to be accomplished. It has taken the forces of renewal these five years to think through what tints practical march toward the Great Reconstruction of society and the Great Resurgence of humanness, which will be the practical recovery of God's People, is going to take. This summer becomes, therefore, a serious turning point in the twentieth century renewal of the Church and the world.

As you look back across these fifty-five years, it is clear that in terms of what the renewal forces which began about the middle of World War I intended to accomplish, the Church has been renewed. I recently attended the General Conference of my own denomination. And with not just a small amount of sinful glee and a touch of wicked envy, and an even more demonic kind of resentment, I heard people of the established Church saying things which twelve years ago you and I were being roasted by those same people for saying. And when I recovered from my sin, I found myself more than delighted, for that is what we have been about all of these years.

When I look back over the fifty-five years and the people involved most of whom have already shed their blood one way or another it is pretty clear to me what has really happened. First of all, the Church has recovered the centrality of the Christ happening in the human journey itself. Secondly, the Church today has a fresh operating image of itself as mission in the civilizing process. It is hard for some of you young ones to realize that only twenty years ago the Church did not have the foggiest image of her practical function in society. And the third thing that has happened is the recovery of the universal quality of God's People. It has been a long time, maybe several hundred years, since the Church really believed that she was ecumenism itself. The Church knows nothing about Japanese churches and American churches and Australian churches and Indian churches and Black churches and Youth churches and White churches and Female churches. The Church is one.

The next thing the Church has recovered, and I scarcely know how to put this, is that to be a man of faith is to be disciplined; that to be a man who has been sent as the Church to bear the burdens of this world means discipline. In the past, the Church has understood that a man of faith is a man consumed

in his inward parts with discipline. She has recovered that in our day. There is not a soul in the room who does not know that to be God's People in the next thirty-five years is going to require a kind of discipline that would have frightened the daylights out of you ten years ago. The Church knows again that to be the Church means rigor.

Lastly, although the renewal forces did not start out to find this, since if you seek for this kind of thing, it never shows itself. These forces stumbled upon the other world that is always in the midst of this world. That breakthrough of the consciousness of consciousness has brought a fresh radicality to humanness itself. Sometimes I think it has been more that 500 years since we have known anything about the other world as a reality in the midst of the concretions of this world. And perhaps this is the glory beyond glory of Church renewal, for even Jesus Christ grasped himself as the nothing one who opened the realm of God, the domain of the divine, to mankind.

But now that task has been accomplished. Of course, I am quite well aware of the fact that it is going to take even more than thirty-five years to enable every last human being to understand what you and I are talking about, but that too shall come. Therefore, there is no more need for the forces of renewal in the Church since their job has been accomplished. This does not mean that the Church does not have a long road ahead as she concretizes this new awakenedness that has come to her in the social forms of operation, actualizing her function, her task, her mission in civilization. And to accomplish that, she is going to need the assistance, as never before, of the revolutionary forces within her very body. But the Movement that is required at this moment is something quite different.

I am reminded of a movie I once saw of a wagon train. It got stuck in what appeared to be a blind gully that ended with a sheer cliff. So the drivers got them into a circle and made camp, and some of them kept the fires burning while they sent their scouts on ahead to see if the canyon were blocked, and, if it were, to discover some other route. It occurred to me that the movemental dynamic within the historical Church always has to be the scouts of the wagon train. Somehow, I have a deep appreciation for all those pastors and laymen who have kept the home fires going in the established Church, so that those of us who were called to scout out the future might have something to come home to, and something to scout for.

Now another scouting expedition has to be sent out. What the Church needs are demonstrations in the concrete arenas of society of what it means to be mission in the civilizing process. Therefore, a new Movement within the movemental dynamic of the Church is called for. It is going to look different, because it will emphasize the practical. We must build within ourselves the concrete illustrations of what it means to be the Church to be mission to the civilizing process always within the local parish level. That is what lies ahead. This is the Great Turn that we are on now.

But you also have to look at the secular. I am convinced that already there is breaking loose in the civilizing process at large a new bubbling of the radical deeps of humanness. This has been brought about by many revolutionary forces: the black revolution, the youth revolution, the nonwestern world revolution, the feminine revolution. But within all of those revolutions, the movemental Church has played a role, the results of which are not nearly so clear now as I believe they will be within even ten years.

Now let me say that a different way. I am sixty years old. In my whole life, there has been apparent only the trough of the wave. I have lived my total existence in a world which understood itself as going to pieces. Think of that. You can almost see yourself hanging on with your fingernails. But now there is a turn. The world is moving to a crest where a brand new perspective on life itself is slowly coming into view. We are beholding things we could not have dreamed of ten years ago. There is a bubbling within my existence that I have wanted all my life, but never dreamed I would live long enough to experience. It seems as if, all around me, showers of blessing are falling. It is not that they were not falling before, but in my moment in history you could not grasp that they were showers of blessing. Now it is changing. I want to come back to this in a moment.

As you look ahead for this new Movement, or this new thrust of the Movement, one of the interesting things is that you can see rather clearly what your goals are. Twenty years ago, you could not perceive your goals. Day after day, you were putting one foot out in front of you without any idea where the next one would go. That is what it meant to be in the movemental dynamic of the Church during the past fifty-five years. You were chipping away from one handhold to the next. This upward turn, this moving toward the crest, means that you now can perceive clearly what has to be done. What that does to your own spirit deeps is almost beyond description. And I am pointing to the fact that it does not make it easier. In one sense, it makes it far more difficult. When you look across the decades ahead, you now see that the goal is the Great Reconstruction of society, whereas in the past the goal was the renewal of the Church. The Church is renewed. You must now be concerned for the renewal of the world, and that means you become the demonstration to the Church of what the Church has to be if it is mission to the civilizing process. That is the Great Reconstruction. That is the goal that lies ahead.

But there is also another goal, the flip side of the first, which I call the Great Resurgence. I like that word because it is a secular word. I also like it because one of its meanings is "resurrection." By Great Resurgence, I mean the release of a fresh sense of motivity from the deeps of mankind and in every man. What resurgence means is revival. But I do not mean by that the kind of revival which Protestants have called the Great Awakening and which went to seed in the last part of the 19th century.

I mean something closer to what happened in the 26th and 25th centuries BC in Egypt, when a people who were nothing experienced a strange outbreak of human motivity. Almost overnight (really during the course of two centuries) that great civilization of the Nile was built. Unfortunately, all that you and I have been taught to remember, due to our pious moralisms, are the taskmasters and the hard work. But I wonder If you could just for a moment think of yourself as a farmer without any hope or meaning in the rice paddies along the Nile, when suddenly your whole culture explodes. What I hear with my long distance ears back across those millennia is a group of men and women who had got their crops in and went to build those pyramids, singing as they went, even in the midst of the taskmasters' whips, the cruel labor, and the fact that today they saw a twenty ton boulder fall on two of their next door neighbors. There was an outbreak. I could talk of the 16th century, when England, for some unknown reason, broke loose in her deeps and went out to spread the modern world across the face of the globe. I still cannot understand how so tiny an island as that found the kind of drive from the interior spirit deeps to let loose that mission in civilization. Or I could talk about India. I could talk about China. That is what I mean by a revival. The Great Awakening was not the kind of revival I am talking about. You would have to go further back, perhaps to the Middle

Ages, when two men, Cyril and Methodius, by themselves broke loose the whole Slavic peoples for the Roman Catholic Church. I am talking about that moment in which we reach outside the church to secular men, and find a way in secular language and secular postures to release the "last fat lady" to that very deep, long confined feeling for the wonder and awe which is the gift of consciousness of consciousness. That revival is coming.

Now you cannot have one of these without the other. You cannot have a reconstruction of society without a resurgence of human motivity. They work together. You will only have that New Societal Vehicle at the moment that a new deep spirituality is broken loose. Those are the visions ahead for the next thirty-five years. And do you know something? I do not have the slightest doubt that the Movement forces will realize those objectives. But you have to remember one thing: no man, no group of men, and no Movement ever renews the Church or the world. God alone renews his Church, and God alone creates revivals, and God alone restructures the human adventure. But God never renewed kits Church nor kits world save a body of people decided that his world was going to be renewed. And that is what happened at the beginning with the renewal forces: a body of people decided the Church was going to be renewed. However, when God decides to renew something, on the other side of bodies of concerned people deciding to renew it, what comes out is never precisely what was intended by those who began the renewal. And that is just as well.

There is one more point here. Those who set out to bring into being a New Social Vehicle and a new spirituality have to be that new world even as they begin the task. Do you think Bonhoeffer could have done what he did, if he had not already become what he intended to do? I have got to be that New Social Vehicle now. What does it mean for me to think globally, to live globally, to resolve globally? I have got to be that new outbreak of the Holy Spirit now, or it is not going to happen. You are not playing games here. Either you are out to renew the world, or you are not. And many there are who will fall by the wayside, for this is a Long March. I have never liked people to refer to what we have done up to now as before I take the Long March. But what lies ahead now is I take the Long March. The Long March can only happen when you know where you are going and when you are clear about the price of going there. Then it becomes a Long March. And then you and I have to decide all over again tonight and this month, whether we are going on the Long March, knowing that it is not for five years or ten, but for twenty long years. Many of you in this room are going to be older than I am now before you even get near the end of the march. Some of you are going to be dead. Some of you are going to fall along the way when the going gets even tougher. And, of course, some of you are not even going to start.

Now, about this summer. I had to give a talk not long ago in which I felt pressed to say rather concretely what I felt were the essential ingredients in bringing off the practical aspect of a revolution. There are many self-styled revolutionaries who never intend to practically bring off the revolution. I told them about where my own spirit struggle was most vicious and most wracking. I used the Imagery of the Psalmist when he feels that he is surrounded by mad dogs on every side. Well, I feel surrounded by mad dogs, but they are hyenas. They all have a grin on their faces. And they do not say anything, but the grins speak. They say, "Joe, you don't really intend to do it, do you? You don't really intend to accomplish what you're talking about. All of those triangles last year you know, you meant to just keep them there in the abstract. You don't mean to be practical. . That's where you get hurt. You want to remain an intellectual abstractionist. . "That is what their grins say. And again and again I have

to swell up my shoulders with a strength beyond my power and say, "You go to Hell! I do mean it." That is what this summer is all about.

When I laid out what I thought was essential to the practical aspects of revolution, I said that you first of all need a practical vision. You are not going to get anywhere if you do not forge a practical vision of that reality you want to bring into being. That is what finally captures people. This is what you did last summer. I have again and again at my desk all by myself praised God for the work that many of you here did last summer. A practical vision always has to be a fundamental reinterpretation of society. Last summer you worked that out with the dynamical processes. It has to be a statement, in the language of last summer, of the Imbalances that are present in light of that theory. It has to be a clear statement of your own vantage point your ideology, if you please and a clear articulation of those contradictions that stand between what is and what you intend to bring into being. Then there have to be what last summer you called proposals. And with those has to come a hint of how they are going to be accomplished. You already have your practical vision. You hammered that out last summer.

The second crucial thing for a practical revolution is what I call your tactical systems. This summer you are going to build those tactical systems. I do not know what they will look like, but one thing I am sure of: only a naive liberal would believe that you will work out some kind of tactical system for each one of those triangles. If you make a frontal attack, you will be dead 500 years before there will be any serious change in society. What you have to look for is what somebody has called the "whistle point." That is, if you have a mountain of snow, and you find exactly the right places to stand and to direct your whistle, and you get the right whistle, a whole avalanche starts. Your tactical system does not itself do the job, but it gets the snowball rolling whereby, in principle, every last soul on this planet is a part of the initiating factor in the social revolution. Half of you here are going to be working on the tactical system this summer.

This third thing that has to be there for a practical revolution is what we have called an operational design. If you had the best tactical system in the world and you did not have any forces to do the whistling, you would not have a revolution. Half of you are going to be concerned with the training of forces, the disciplining of forces on a global scale. You are going to work out designs for specific engagement. And the concern, as you well know, is both for the local parish and for a global Movement.

The last thing necessary for a practical revolution is spirit training. If you and I do not find a way to build a factory that can grind out spirit, there is no hope for the tactical concretizing of any model, any strategies, or any tactics. And we have to start by unlocking the spirit in ourselves. This summer we are going to be engaged in that. We are going to attempt to discover, not intellectually, but with our being, the contours, the topography, of the other world, of the radical dimensions of consciousness right in the midst of this world.

Somebody has said that a Movement moves on its singing. We are going to sing this summer and we are not going to sing the kind of songs that we have been singing for the last fifty-five years; we do not live in that kind of world any more. The spirit is flowing. On this long march, you are going to learn to waltz or you are not going to make it. If you think of a movie director having a man and a woman up on some 100-story building in New York City dancing around on a fifteen inch ledge, he

had better not have them Jitterbug. If they do not waltz, they are not going to get around it. Just think for a moment. Up to now, we have been walking around the edge of the abyss. On the Long March, we have to walk right across that abyss. And you had better not try to march across that. If you do not waltz across that abyss, you are not going to get across it. So we are going to learn once again the meaning of the waltz music and the waltz singing.

But you are also going to have to learn marches as you never have before because that terrain is rough and those marches consume long hours. If you do not learn once again to count cadence one, two, three, four, you are not going to make it. And not only that, but on a long march you have to tell yourself fresh stories, day after day after day. This is where the new form of folk music is going to have its role. You are going to learn to sing folk music and sing it in a new way. Lastly, you will learn that to keep your stamina, you have to have diversion. You will learn to sing popular music again. You will learn to whistle those tunes which you spent your lives saying "no" to, and, since some of you are not going to have the courage to do that, you are not going to last long in the march.

We have got to experiment as a Movement with new means of internalizing discipline. I have never cared one bit for any kind of external form of discipline. They have to be there, because I can only learn to be a disciplined man if I have external structures. But that is not what I mean by discipline. What you are out to do is to discover and to build a discipline down inside. I think we had better experiment with some kind of sign of chastity. We should experiment once again with vigils and watches. And perhaps we should experiment again with fasts. I would even like to see us experiment with a grand ball. Some of you are not old enough to know what the old Aragon Ballroom ever meant, but it is right down the street from this building in which we gather. Ted Weems used to come there.

I think that the mood of this summer has got to be serious fun, and I mean the kind of giddy fun that I experienced with troops during World War II the night before we had to go ashore. We would sit around nobody could sleep, of course and we tended to have fun, a sort of silly fun. Hell, this summer has got to be that kind of serious nonchalance. Those of you who were here last summer know that you are going to work and work hard. But in the midst of that work we have got to have fun. Not for the sake of fun although that is all right, too but for the sake of the march, of the next twenty years, the next thirty-five years.

And so, with these rambling words, I call out of history, out of existence the old Movement and call into being the twenty-year March, the new Movement. <continued – next page>

And for me, this is the sign: there is the wedgeblade; that is the old Movement. The globe is put over it, divided into the pro-establishment and the disestablishment -- and we are both of these, as structural revolutionaries. But outside the circle is the trans-establishment, which alone enables one to stand in both camps at the same time yet transcending both. This leaves only one thing: the decision, my decision and your decision. Maybe you have a month to make that one decision. And as you go into this month to make that decision, while you build that about which you are making the decision, go with God. Amen.

