

The Recovery of the Other World

The most astonishing thing that has resulted from the body of awakened people who more than half a century ago made the great resolve to renew the church in this century was this: they stumbled upon the Other World that is in the midst of this world. I never dreamed even ten years ago that such a thing could happen in my lifetime.

I want to try, child as I am, to talk about the Other World in the midst of this world. It has been a hidden world for centuries, a lost world. I am reminded of a motion picture called *The Lost World*. The lostness of the Other World in the midst of this world seems to be a much greater lostness. To have it disclose itself afresh forces one, regardless of the years, to experience oneself all over again as a stumbling child first learning to walk.

Church people or religious people did not discover this Other World. Ordinary people discovered it in the 20th century. It was discovered a long time before it was recognized as the Other World in the midst of this world and before it was acknowledged as the Other World.

There is nothing supernatural about the Other World. It is as ordinary as any mundane activity that you and I engage in. It has to do with the explosion of consciousness that has taken place in our day, in and through which the radicality of humanness became clear as never before in history. Therefore, I would anticipate that what happens from the disclosure of this Other World to people in our century may be more colossal than those other great moments in history, when this same Other World made its presence powerfully known. But you must be clear, when you talk about the Other World, that you are dealing with the ordinary secular world and the secular consciousness of people.

The Ontology of the Other World

One way to comprehend the broad picture is to grasp that the Other World involves an understanding of the ontological dimension of life beyond the moral. But when I say “understanding,” that is not quite right. To experience the being that is the Other World is to understand that Other World. That is the way that world is. It may help those of you who know Nietzsche to think of his *Beyond Good and Evil*. This is the realm of the Other World. It is the realm of wild self-consciousness beyond the superimposition of one’s rational capacities upon it. That is a rather difficult statement to make because even to talk about the Other World is to get your rational faculties engaged in it. But one of the remarkable things about reason is that it points beyond itself. The Other World is the world beyond reason that reason itself points to.

As reason attempts to understand and talk about it, what is being said is only indicative of that Other World. The Other World is radical being or raw self-consciousness, and to make any interpretation of it is to take one step backwards into this world which is the world of reason that reason invents.

Another way to talk about this philosophically is to say that in our time we have succeeded in a rather admirable way in destroying the two-story universe. We understand that we live and die in one world, and when we are dead we are really dead. That means the two-story image has been smashed. We have gotten rid of metaphysics. That needs qualification, because one never lives without metaphysics. The trouble is with the term “metaphysics.” It was related to the second-story universe, or to the understanding that reason finally was the king of the universe.

In our day we are building a *new metaphysics*. You grasp yourself as living on one plane, but you have experienced the *transparency* of that plane itself. I like to think of it as holding a match underneath a paper and first seeing little streaks come out. Then it turns brown, and then it breaks through and pops into flame. That goes through my mind when I think of transparency. Or perhaps it is more like sticking your fist through life itself.

Maybe I can illustrate it this way: you and I have lived in a time in which the uniqueness of the person was emphasized, and this had to be so. This is what happens, I suspect, whenever a culture fails in making clear to people what it is to be human. Then you have a new birth of existentialistic reflection. I am not talking about abstract philosophy. An illustration of this principle is that the black people in our day, in order to be human beings, had to embrace blackness to the hilt. It so happens that in doing so they enabled some white folk, for the first time in their lives, to embrace their whiteness. But when they embraced their uniqueness to the hilt, black or white, they experienced transparency. It is as though their fist went through their uniqueness. Right now we are discovering all over again what it means to be human beyond our uniqueness, not by going around our uniqueness but by going through our uniqueness. That is the experience of transparency or sticking your fist through life.

In this one world of one plane, the transparency of that plane is the new metaphysics. But what I suspect history is going to call this, in one way or another, is phenomenology, or phenomenological thinking. The metaphysical question of *the real* as an abstraction apart from my consciousness is bracketed. Rather, it is your experience of the Other World. A state of being, a state of awareness, or a state of consciousness is the most objective reality that you have ever experienced. I want to warn you not to let the epistemology you were trained in, in which subject and object are divided, get in your way.

Let me come at this through theology. Tillich is a good example here. Those of you who know his *Systematic Theology* know that he begins with the ontological situation and then moves to the interpretation of Christ, which is the existential for Tillich. Tillich himself made the case that when you talk about the essence of humanity being the kind of essence that creates its own essence, the first use of the word “essence” in that sentence is dealing with the ontological. There is more to that than it sounds, for you could not even make the decision that determines your selfhood if you did not already have a montage in your being through which to look at reality. That is the ontological for Tillich.

Therefore, those of us who have come down hard on the existential pole, on freedom and decision, were always taking for granted an understanding of humanness in the midst of which that decision was made. The discovery of the Other World in terms of this transparency is the forging of a new montage. In this case, because the revolution is global, it is going to be a global montage that finally defines humanness that is the Other World. The movie “The Gospel According to St. Matthew” showed a man who lived his existence from beginning to end in the Other World and in the midst of that made decisions that defined the concretions of his life.

State of Being

I want to speak more about what I mean by a *state of being*. A state of being is comprised of an image, an accompanying affection, and a pre-decisional resolve.

I don’t know how many of you have read Golding’s *Inheritors*, but it was about primitive man breaking into consciousness. One of the figures that he used over and over was the primitive man coming into a new situation. He experienced it as though chaos had suddenly taken over. That is, the images in his mind were not capable of giving meaning to the over-against-ness that was impinging upon him. He would have to invent a new image that would give this external situation meaning. In the book he is pictured as pushing on his head to produce a new image. I like that. I have seen people, who were not so primitive, push on their heads to get that new image. I call what was going on in him a *big think*. Grasping the Other World involves a *think* – I do not want to say an image, I do not want to say an idea, I do not want to say a construct, I do not want to say a concept. It is down underneath all those. When you are dealing with a state of being, you are after the *think*.

The second thing in a state of being I call a *great feel*. I have a colleague who calls the *think* impressionistic and the *feel* expressionistic, and that is not too bad. For me, the impressionist painters were starting with what could be seen. Then they pushed it until it bent into the Other World. The expressionists went through it.

If you call that *think* a primordial think, then you have to call the *feel* a primordial feel. That *think* and that *feel* cannot be separated.

When you boil them down, the *great think* is fundamentally composed of mystery – not the kind of mystery that may be solved tomorrow, but the mystery that never goes away. This is what they mean when they talk about *no-thing-ness*. “Nothingness” – the *big think* of nothingness, absolute nothingness. That is the Mystery in which the *big think* becomes the final overagainstness of your total existence, not because you say so, but because you have the *big think* to prove it so. It is the primordial *big think*. It has many faces and many forms.

The *big feel* that always accompanies the *big think* is awe. Awe too has many faces. Awe, as Otto pointed out so clearly in his book *The Idea of the Holy* is always dread and fascination at the same time. When you deal with that *big think*,

you are breaking through reason, dealing always with that which is beyond reason. And in the awareness of your overagainstness to that mystery, you are shattered with terror. I like to think that humankind came into existence through awe. Many stabs at consciousness of consciousness probably produced humanity because those early humans were rocked by terror, by the sheer mystery which consciousness about consciousness is. You want to use the word "God" here? You do not need to use the word "God," but when you talk about God, the God who is beyond God, you are not talking about the moral delineation of some metaphysical principles. You are talking about the One who sends cyclones and the gentle rain to grow the wheat, who rocks the ocean with mighty storms, and simmers them into a mirror of stillness. You are talking about the One who pulls you from a woman's womb and later buries you in the earth from which you come. You are talking about the One who makes you sixty years old, and you do not have any choice about it.

And yet, with this terror is fascination. That is harder to describe than terror. It is a compulsion over which you grasp you have no control whatsoever, and it pulls you on in the midst of and through the terror. These two are there at one and the same time. I remember not so long ago I thought I was caught; I thought people were onto me. Before I knew it, I ended up over a toilet vomiting, with my hands on each side. But in the midst of that terror I perceived a fascination. At such a time you do not say this is the leading of Providence. When you are finally able to get back on your feet, you know it was the hand of the One, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who you have come to call your God and your Father. He does not look like your God and your Father when he beats you up, but he is. I am proud to have lived in the 20th century, in which this has become clearer than it ever was in all of history. But its roots are back there from the foundation and the dawn of consciousness itself. Oh, in our time, how this Other World has broken in upon us!

Perhaps you have thought in the area of psychology. In a recent book Joseph Campbell deals with schizophrenia. I am not sure he says it, but if he did not he ought to, that the difference between a spirit person in the Other World and the schizophrenic is that the spirit person is swimming and the schizophrenic is drowning. Here I make a prophecy. Before twenty years are up, you are going to see the psychiatric profession turned upon its ear. It has to meet the times in which it lives, for the times which bore it are gone and new times have come.

Or what about mythology? You have been taught to believe that mythology is a fairy story that we humans have outgrown. No, not by any means. Mythology is the frame whereby people hold this experience of the Other World. The mythologies of the past are gone. They no longer communicate well to us. Probably the biggest contradiction in our time is the absence of an adequate mythology whereby one has a road map over and through the topography of the Other World. Perhaps, if you seriously intend to renew society, one of the major jobs is to create the mythology which feeds into what we have named the *Social Process*, and within that, "Inclusive Myth," that will flow out through the whole society.

The Poetic Topography of the Other World

In our time the world has slowly become conscious of the Other World in four areas. One we have called *The Land of Mystery*. In our lifetime we have rediscovered this mystery. As a matter of fact, the natural sciences have discovered it; the psychological sciences have discovered it; the mathematical sciences have discovered it. And I need not reiterate that the whole existentialist thrust in the 20th century unveiled for people their overagainstness of that which is no thing, or nothing. This is the first breakthrough of a fantastic arena in the Other World.

The second breakthrough has been in the area of freedom. We call it *The River of Consciousness*. This refers to Jean Paul Sartre's poetry of the *en soi* and the *pour soi* or Kierkegaard's understanding of the self as a relationship which relates itself to itself, and when it goes about its proper business of being a relationship which relates itself to itself, it grounds itself transparently in the power that constituted it. But these are only two of the hundreds of people who have broken through in this area.

The third way in which we have broken into the Other World is with the concept of engagement. The next two areas have been broken loose more by social upheavals than by intellectual schools, although the intellectual schools have dealt with them. I think of the youth culture in our time. This was a sociological manifestation of a search for a dimension of existence that this present world was not capable of providing. One of the crucial insights they saw and held before the world was authentic engagement in life. They are the ones who, however inadequately, began to recover the word "love." In the midst of their lostness – and no one could blame them for it – they began to grasp what it meant to be concerned with that which was unsynonymous with oneself. Their revolt against vocations, and their revolt against money for the sake of money were indicative of this awareness of another realm, which they pointed to with love, if you please, *agape*. How do we give ourselves to the journey of humankind and not just live on behalf of ourselves? This area we call *The Mountain of Care*. The Other World, which is the realm of the awe-full mystery and of radical consciousness, is also the world of taking upon your back responsibility for the historical and global journey of humanness.

Before I go on to the last of the four arenas, I pause a moment to remind you that the Other World is beyond the realm of good and evil. It is in the ontological and not in the moral dimension. Whatever you say about the Other World is always in the indicative and never in the imperative. The Other World knows nothing whatsoever about imperatives, which are in this world and a crucial part of this world. Without imperatives you would not have this world. However, in the Other World there is only the indicative. When you talk about the Mountain of Care or picking up the burden of all mankind, you are not talking about something that says you ought to do it. The indicative is that the one who lives in the Other World just shows up with the world on his or her shoulders. When you live before the Mystery, the world is yours, period.

The last arena we call *The Sea of Tranquility*. I rather like that. It dawned on me that to the astronauts, when walking around on the moon, the earth is “up there.” I always knew “heaven” was “up there.” But when you are on the moon, “up there” points exactly to this life here, where the Other World is. I want to go there one of these days and see, just to be sure, that the Other World is right here. *The Sea of Tranquility* is the recovery of that weird peace right where there is no peace. There is no sentiment here, for the Other World is right in the midst of this world.

I never dreamed that this awareness would break loose in my lifetime. We who worked for the renewal of the church had to fight every second any nonsense about peace or joy in this world. You would never have had the renewed church if you had not slain that sentimental misunderstanding of authentic peace and joy. I never dreamed that in my lifetime it would be possible, however, to use those words authentically. I have understandings inside myself in this arena that I never dreamed could be.

Actually, in the Other World there is only one state of being, not four. For where consciousness is, there is the mystery, there is the world on your back, and there is the peace that passes reason’s capacity to grasp it as peace. There is no sentiment here. This world, in which the Other World is, is a tragic world. Unamuno is quite right when he talks about the tragedy of the world. Existence itself is tragic. If the whole journey of humanity is not your specific vocation, you would never have the slightest idea what you mean when you talk about the “joy unspeakable” and “full of glory.” They are woven together. When you dare to live your life before the Mystery, there is peace and joy. If you have authentic peace and joy, you can be sure you are living your life before the Mystery.

You could have drawn the road map a million other ways with different poetry. We have delineated four areas which we think broke loose in our century, and then we divided each one of those into four treks, which makes a total of sixteen treks. We then divided those treks into four states of being each. That means on the Other World charts,¹ 64 states of being are delineated. But remember they are all one.

I would like to read an illustration of some poetry in the language of a state of being. What I will do is weave together four states of being into one state in a paragraph that represents a trek. You understand there is nothing new at all in what we are doing. What is actually going on is a translation from one language to another. When you deal with the Other World, you are translating from the language of the intellectual dimension of life into the language of the state-of-being dimension of life. It is a poetic language:

One day a person is driven by whatsoever vicissitudes of life into the consciousness that he himself must die. It is like being in a state of shock. A strange force intrudes. Suddenly he is submerged in awe; he feels it hovering all

¹ Brian Stanfield., *The Courage to Lead: BC, Canada: New Society*, 2000, pp.106-13.

about him; he feels its penetration into the deepest corners of his innermost being. In quiet terror, and with an inexplicable fascination, he knows the fragility of his total existence. He feels his contingency, and beholds the passingness of all things. It is like a mortal wound from which he knows he will never recover. As the absurdity and the irrationality of it all seeps deep within, a burning, objectless anger rises and rages until utility itself turns into a heavy numbness and everything becomes disoriented; all is nothingness; there is no place any more to stand, just terrifying mystery. And hanging helplessly, swirling in emptiness, engulfed in awe, it dawns at long last, like the rising of a black sun, that exactly here is the finally real before which he is fated and invited to live and die his life. This is the great encounter with the awe-full mystery.

The Basic Significance of the Other World

In conclusion, in dealing with the Other World that is right in the midst of this world, you are dealing with what it means to be a human being. Thirty years ago our whole world was hanging on by its fingernails on a cliff. It was going to pieces raising the question, “What is life all about?” Now we have come out of the trough and are moving on the crest of the wave. Once again in history people have found the answer. This does not mean that there will not be many crests in the future. But in our time, it is here. Now, when someone asks you what life is all about, you have something to bear witness to.

I have said one thing. The Other World may be the most crucial key there is for actually turning on the processes that will snowball the arrival of a new web of relationships that define society. Very likely, also, within the poetry of the Other World charts is the secret of the new mythology that will enable humankind to find the way to swim, if you please, in the rivers of radical consciousness and become human. It has been a long time since people, with any sense of genuineness, could speak of what fulfillment meant, of what happiness meant.

Moralities rise out of new definitions, of new experiences of what it is to be human. As you delineate the topography of the Other World, you are building the basis for the new morality that every sensitive person cries out for – not only the youth, but old men and old women. It has been a long time in the church since we have known what we meant when we talked about a “Christian man” or a “Christian woman.” You are beginning here to define again what you mean when you talk about a person of faith, a person of Spirit in this world.

In working on the Other World, you are also building the tool for the new evangelism. I do not mean by “evangelism” anything that you have been programmed to mean by that word. I mean the means whereby you can elicit out of other people the decision that renders it possible for them to decide to live an authentic life. Years ago, when I was teaching in seminary, one of the problems people talked about was that they had no way for the new theology really to get down into the pews. It was not that the clergy could not articulate it. They could. But lives are not changed by intellectual ideas. The work on the Other World is the

beginning of the creation of an instrument that will enable people to have self-consciousness about the states of being that define them.

We have talked frequently about popular preaching. You are going to see a lot of that going on in the world. It is the kind of spin you do with somebody sitting next to you on a commuter train – and they do not know until ten years later because you do not use any language that sounds religious – that new possibilities and new life flooded into their veins. I suspect that if you had 200,000 people located according to a rational grid across the world, you could design a popular preaching curriculum so that on April 28, in 1982, all 200,000 people would be spinning on “state of being #36.” If the church is going to build a new society, this kind of tactical work needs to go on.

Full citation for footnote 1 on page 6 of this document follows:

¹ Brian Stanfield, *The Courage to Lead: Transform Self, Transform Society*. Gabriola Island, BC, Canada: New Society, 2000, pp. 106-13. Or See the second edition: R. Brian Stanfield, *The Courage to Lead, Second Edition: Transform Self, Transform Society*. Bloomington, Indiana, iUniverse, Inc., 2012, pp. 250-57. Copyright is held by ICA Canada.

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