

Covenant Lec. I
10/79
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"...which is an honorable estate, instituted by God, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his church...in Cana of Gala ... to be honorable of all men and therefore...reverently, discreetly, advisedly... and in the fear of God. Into this holy estate... just cause why they may not be lawfully bound together let him now speak or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

You don't even know who I'm talking about.

This course is called the Individual and the Family. And both of those words are of equal significance...like so many of our courses ...in the next few sessions are about the sociology of covenant. We are going to look at the political dimension of the family, the woman's role, we are going to look at the economic dimension of the family and the man's role and we are going to look at the cultural dimension of the family and the child's role. I don't have a biological symbol for child.

All of this course has been drawn up from the bottomless well of RSI. We'll experience this course as the intensification and grounding of the four RSI papers and the four RSI questions. Ten years ago I think I would have tried to stand back here and give answers, give the truth... and even the dogma about marriage and about covenant. As Bob Dylan says I'm so much older than I'm younger than that now. What this course can do very effectively is raise the questions and of course the name of the course implies only the individual and family can supply the answers to those questions. That is what it means to stand before God and do the free deed before God. That is the individual's ultimate responsibility.

Now how many people here are married? Nine people married. Well, this course is just perfect for you. Now how many people are unmarried? This course is specially designed also for you. Now how many people here are not only unmarried, but they are never going to be married?

This course raises key questions. Now I am going to read something else. This started off in Bonhoeffer's notebook and then it got printed in someone else's notebook. "God makes your marriage indissoluble. Those whom God has joined together let no man put asunder. God is joining you together. It is...not yours. Do not confound your love for one another with God. God makes your marriage indissoluble. He protects it from every danger from within and without.

What a blessed thing it is to know that no power on earth, no human frailties can dissolve what God holds together. Knowing that we may say with all confidence what God has joined together man cannot put asunder. No one need now to be troubled with those anxious fears so inseparable from love. You can say to each other now without a shadow of doubt we can never lose each other now. By the will of God we belong to each other till death us do part."

Bonhoeffer also said, "It is only by living completely in this world that one learns to believe. One must abandon every attempt to make

in.

Now the family is often claimed especially in our time as the final meaning giver, as the primary and the ultimate covenant within which people show up. I have been amazed by how many people, from great statesman to successful novelists to just people in the street, say well finally what my life is all about is my family. And that is my first value and that is my last value. Most of the best selling novels that I read usually try to promote that as the ultimate meaning of life. That is very curious because at certain points it is obvious that the family is not the primary value. You can imagine Churchill in the middle of World War II saying, "I'm sorry I can't show up to make those decisions or make that appearance because my wife is sick so I must be at her bedside." People would have laughed at him. If today Jimmy Carter said, "Well, I can't get on the phone to Iran because my daughter's graduating so I have to go to her graduation" people would laugh in his face. At certain points in the midst of serious mission is revealed as not the ultimate meaning and other points, it suffers either internally (it seems to just die inside) or externally it seems to be battered to death by external forces, and once more it is revealed as not comprehensive enough to hold what I am living for and what I am dieing for. You can try and live for your beautiful daughter or your beautiful wife and die for her, but at a certain point it becomes an unbearable, unrealistic and inauthentic kind of situation.

The family is really under seige in our time. The reason for that, one of them of course, is just the twilight of the gods. Anything that sets itself up as the final meaning, anything that says this thing will give your life meaning, is under attack. For some reason I suppose it is sort of imitation of radical secularism or radical existentialism, the family shows up as the meaning giver. But then it is at war with other gods. The god of sexual pleasure is a direct assault, attack on the sanctity of the family. The god of financial success is a direct attack on the family. If you are going to make it big in business, you are going to be working 20 hours a day, you are going to sell your soul to your company. You are going to be an ATT man, you are not going to be a family man. You are going to learn their jargon. You are going to do their rituals. You are going to stay up late. You are going to buzz all over the world to conferences and the family's experience will be that father is tuning us out. It is under radical assault from individualism. How can I be exactly what I want to be, when I want to be, how I want to be if I am in a binding covenant with my wife, my children or whatever. Here I am trying to do my thing and my kid comes and asks me to help her with her homework. Either I am going to do my thing, or I am going to help her with her homework. But those gods are mortal enemies of each other. Collectivism is another great enemy of the family. All of these attack each other. Finally they concentrate their efforts on breaking up the family and smashing it to pieces. In collectivism you have to have the same house, the same income bracket, the same way of mowing your lawn, even the same brand of lawnmower, preferably the same kind of sprinkler for the summer. The same places to go to and all of that otherwise you feel like an alien and a stranger and you don't

fit and people give you funny looks and you feel insecure. That is a great god of our time. I was struck by that going to a suburban neighborhood in Los Gatos and I realized that it was a replica of thousands, I don't know how many millions of people are living under the spell of collectivism or by the god of collectivism. If everybody says so then that is the way to go; if everybody does it this way, then that is the way to do it. Of course the family experiences itself I think in two ways. Either dieing from the inside, that what may have started as a glorious adventure of two fine individualisms getting together to get self-fulfillment, discovers itself very early on as incredibly banal and unadventurous and it is just two dumb people getting older and uglier every day. Day after day after day the routine of going off to work and coming back and exchanging some comments over a meal. When someone counted up how many meals an average couple would eat together if they stayed together from 25 when they got married until death they did part, it is quite a lot of meals. The experience you see in home after home after home either through the adolescent children or thru the aging couple is the sheer banality, the aridity and the violent craving for something to break that open. You know that is not the way life is.

That is one way it shows up. The other way of course is not banal at all and in the midst of it, you wish it was banal and that is violently sadistic and masochistic relationships. A husband and wife and their children trying to tear each other apart. The mother trying to dominate the child. The husband trying to dominate the woman. The woman trying to dominate the man either to absorb or to liberate. Before I got married I could not believe how such things could go on. You would hear couples ranting and raving. You would hear china smashing in kitchens. Yet they would stay together or of course at a certain point maybe they wouldn't stay together. But the violent living in lucidity is not to be underestimated. People feel that they have been cheated. Because much advertising, much popular fiction, much social convention and ways of behaving say that the family is the final meaning and it is holy and it is beautiful and it is lovely yet it shows up as ugly, sterile and not at all holy, evil positively evil sometimes. People out to kill each other. You can walk into houses, or I can walk back in my memory to my own family's household to times when there was just sheer evil in the house. That is why films like "The Exorcist" when that little girl sort of gets Satan inside her. That is why it is so popular. People sort of recognize something about their own struggle. The unbelievable power of the hatred of life that can happen quite unexpectedly from the most beautiful, charming, adorable kid and the most lovely, happy, well-off family.

But then people feel terribly guilty. I have betrayed my family. I have violated my wife. I have turned against my covenant. I can't live. I must find a psychiatrist. This is unbearable. Yet sociologically, theologically, ontologically to put the family as the god that gives your life final meaning is bound to fail. It does not hold it, it does not hack it. In the midst of the storm of moralism and guilt about it, that is just the indicative reality.

On the other side of this is that mankind cannot escape from living in covenant. We depend on one another. We are like mountaineers with their ice pick going up the face of a mountain. They have to be roped together. I have a colleague who is an ex-mountaineer and he grounds everything through his mountaineering experiences. That rope that holds mountaineers together so that when one slips he will be held by the others or of course he might jerk the others to their doom as well if they are not quick. That image of the rope that holds mountaineers together is the plight of being human. We depend in a particularly powerful image in terms of taking on the mountain of care, all attempts to do anything in the world without active radical covenants that are a matter of life and death are futile. You see the power of covenant over and over again in history particularly in this century and the weakness of acting without it.

We are bound to each other and the question is how we abandon ourselves to those relationships, how we choose among all the claims the sacred claims that are going to claim our obedience. We are united with others. You choose your covenant because you have not got any choice. You either choose it by default or you choose it by a step taken.

And it is a dreadful step to take. I found that the step I took in terms of getting married, I was relatively lucid at the time, was still the most dreadfiling thing I ever did. With both of us so dreadfiling about it, we wanted to have as our processional music for the beginning of the wedding, we wanted to have "We're You There When They Crucified My Lord". "Something causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble." And that was really sort of our experience. Then we thought for the recessional, for the end of the wedding, we would have that one about "By the light of burning martyrs, Christ thy bleeding feet we track." That was particularly about the bleeding feet because my wife's wedding shoes were painful. It is a dreadful step to take. Actually we weren't allowed to have that kind of music and we had much more comprehensive music. Because the dread is part of the truth about holy matrimony and woe betide anyone who is unconcious of that dread, it will spring up like a strange and terrifying monster at some point quite unexpected if they are not ready for it, even if they are ready for it. And yet the truth about matrimony is that it is an honorable estate, its a holy estate and how to get both the dread and the fascination dramatized is the question that our colleagues confronted us with in that kind of decision.

This category "matrimonial bliss". Do you remember people used to talk about matrimonial bliss. We were talking about what should be in this covenant lecture, and Shropshire said what you really need to do is witness to matrimonial bliss. That is truth about marriage that is often neglected. So I started brainstorming all the matrimonial bliss I have known. And I got a long list. It is like being married to the Christ event and having the Christ event with you all the time. It is the over and over again call to conciousness. It is the inescapable presence of the mystery. It is effulgence. It is critical intelligence. It is the, John had us sing that song - this is the song I realize that as I was thinking about this and singing along about being married. Just listen to this. "This world is not my home, I am a stranger here. You don't know strange you are

opposite another human being. I've seen amidst this world the other world appear. My life is now transformed, though earthly as before - earthly as never before you could say, earthy. All of these - the land of mystery, your spouse is the land of mystery. Of consciousness and care and wild tranquility. Yes, assaults on every side, death is waiting all, there is no place to hide. Especially in our kind of life with one room as your home. A yearning floods my life, more lonely than before, and I can't feel at home in this world any more. A mighty river flows of consciousness in me. A willing child of fate I live creatively. My life's a precious gift that I must answer for. At every point I must answer for my life. I never had an inkling of how precious my life was until I entered that covenant. And I can't feel at home in this land anymore.

A mountain's weight of care seems strangely light to me. You talk about the mountain of care and yet you are talking about what Peter keeps calling, you are talking about true love. You are talking about what all the songs are about. You are talking about what gives meaning to everything in life. Embracing this world's woe, that is who you embrace, when you embrace your spouse you embrace this world's woe. Fantastic.

The sea is tranquil now, it's wild in ecstasy. How do you like that one? Refusing my own life, my only enemy. A didn't realize that was a song about married life, but marriage is consciousness squared. It is sharing an apartment with the Bultmann paper. It is waking up in the morning to find in bed with you sentence seven of Bonhoeffer. You know what sentence seven is? The obligation which alone gives freedom and gives entire freedom is the obligation to God and neighbor as they confront us in Jesus Christ. You want to know how to ground that sentence? Get married. You will find it.

The family covenant is an irretrievable step into the world of mystery, into the world of drama, into the world of adventure. Every paragraph of the Tillich paper comes alive. Its separation and reunion, its sin and grace. Sin abounding, and grace more abounding. Then you think sin is going to abound and then grace abounds more.

Now why is the family falling apart? It didn't used to be like this. Even although I am not particularly ancient compared to some people in this room, but I can remember a time when it did seem to me that the family - my own, but more...(tape over)...I remember one summer I went to live with a farming family, with brothers and sisters, cows and chickens, and all that, and I experienced that family, much more than my own, as an incredibly rich, life giving, self-sustaining dignified and profoundly human context in which to live. I don't know if I would have experienced that if I had lived there all the year round. But for a couple of months it certainly was that to me.

Of course, what has happened, and we looked at this right at the beginning of this journey together, is that the world's life style has shifted. We used to live in a rural world and we don't live in a rural world anymore. We live in an urban world. Even the outlying farms of England are clear about that. They are entirely dependent on massive global market forces whether they are small farmers, big

farmers, urban farmers, rural farmers, or whatever. It has just as much or more tragically, more devastatingly in a way any remote village in the third world that the consciousness of the urban world is in the midst of that village. You can't get people to move stuff much by hand any more because they have heard rumors about this thing called a bull dozer and massive technological revolution has revolutionized everybody's context. We no longer live in that rural world. Now in that rural world, you can say that the family was the foundation of society, the foundation stone. You look at the world wars and it was fine people who had been grown up in human authenticity in their families who went out and fought in those wars and died in those wars. Anything that happened in society that was magnificent you could trace back to the magnificent profound family. In that world the father for instance had a very important mission and a function to play. He was an essential factor in a mother's life. The mother could not do without the father. The father had to go out and kill the wolves and protect the home and either hunt or grow the food. For centuries, for millenias that was the way it was supposed to be. And the mother needed the father to do that. Today of course mothers can kill wolves herself. The family is no longer essential. The man is no longer essential to the woman. It is not because the wolves are now under control. Even if the wolves were under control, the woman grasps herself as perfectly able to kill as many wolves as the man. She doesn't need someone to go out and win bread for her. She can win her own bread.

Now people relate to those facts in different ways. But the objective reality is here and is here to stay. A woman does not need a man to live any more. Another way of seeing that same reality, is that is used to be obvious to everyone that the mother was essential to the children. That a child could not make it into adulthood without the protective presence of the mother, and possibly the father as well. Now that is no longer so. The child needs the mother for about nine months before it gets born and about three months after it gets born. Now there are various options. You can send your child to preschool. You can get someone else to look after your child. In mainland China most people feel that women are better employed doing other things than looking after children and there is a great body of opinion that children might grow up more authentic, more balanced, more profound, more creative if they are not tied to their mothers apron strings for whatever it is twelve, thirteen, fourteen years. Those are just realities.

It used to be economically essential that the family stand together. That the sons remain on the farm. That the man stay with the woman. That the woman stay with the man. They were interdependent. There was objective pressure that held that family in being. It was not just that people used to like each other more in the old days and they did not fight so much in the old days. They were driven by the necessities of economic life, by the forces of society to be an interdependent unit of that kind. Then it used to be in the rural world that the family was a close knit kind of reality. Even in my own memory our space, the place we lived in, our home, was a permanent kind of thing, although we moved houses quite a lot. Each time we started off with the illusion that this was going to be a kind of castle. This was going to be our fortress. We were going to live here. It was going to be our space, our corner in the world. While I was a child and my sisters were children, our

space was a close knit world and we would gather together there, five, six people, over and over again and it told us who we were. Now symbol for the ending of that is that my family is spread all over the place now. I have first cousins that I don't even know the names of. Once you have, I have cousins in Finland somewhere, Sweden, Austria, I made an attempt to keep track of them. But then when my uncle got a divorce and started all over again and his wife had a family of her own and her children, and I was supposed to know all their names as well, I lost track of them completely. My symbol for the downfall of the home as a castle is my grandmother's house in Hungary.

My grandmother and grandfather were clear that to be human you needed a castle to live so when things started looking rough in the twenties in Austria and doom was on the way, they very cleverly they thought moved into Hungary. A nice house in Hungary. Well, the war started when they were in Hungary. First the Red Cross came in and occupied their house, that was fairly all right. Then towards the end of the war the Russian army came and those were wild people. They had been on the march for years and years; they were rough people. They had the wristwatches of all the people they had killed up their arms, ten, fifteen wristwatches all up their arms. They moved in and they got drunk and they fought and that house was really torn apart while my poor grandfather and grandmother cowered in the corner somewhere. One of the things that really grounded that for everyone in our time was the story my grandmother told. One night she tried to close a dividing door, they had one space left in the house where they were supposed to live, but there was only a glass door that separated it. She closed that door in the face of a group men tramping in through the house with their sacred possessions and one of the men took his rifle butt and smashed through the glass and broke her wrist. That to me is a very violent description of how it is at least in our family that illusion of having a house and a castle to live in is safe from the march of history and the great issues that mankind is fighting over and dying over is an illusion never to be recovered.

Now my mother, the daughter of that couple, is still working on building a castle. It is not going to well for one reason or another. See in fact the home that I grew up in, now I see as a kind of a, not a gathering place, but a launching pad. It is a place from which you launch yourself out into the world, whether it is on a daily basis, you launch yourself out into whatever it is - studies or work or various cultural activities or also as the place that you grow up in in order to leave behind. It no longer is a stake driven down forever into the 70 years that tells you who you are:

This _____ where I went to where my wife's parents lived, it struck me that some of the houses are about the same size as the carport next to them. And that in fact it is

almost like they are not even homes. They are sort of drive in places where you go, you stop, you get what you need and then drive out again. Just come home, have a quick meal, have a quick argument about something, then go to bed and then leave. It wasn't just this one home. I saw that the whole of that residential area was built on that basis. You don't live your life in the home the way you used to.

Just in terms of being a person of the family in the home has shifted to something quite different from what it used to be. The illusion that it can still be that thing is still cherished and that is why people get very upset when it doesn't work out.

This shift from the rural to the urban, you remember back in the rural time was long. But now time is short. Even in my relatively modern family, I remember we used to go for long walks together, father, mother, the dog, sometimes two dogs, some sisters, we seemed to just ramble around for hours in my memory. I don't know why. No wonder my father was broke. We just went for walks and then we would come back and we would have these long drawn out checkers tournaments for hours playing checkers. We even evolved a whole special set of rules for our family in checkers. We also listened to the radio together. We would look at the radio times. We would decide we were all going to listen to that program. So we would get home from our walk quickly so we could listen to this program. We would sit for hours, all together, doing nothing, just listening to the radio program. I get the impression that families don't do that so much any more. Even more extreme, my mother's family was so big and so elaborate, they used to write out whole plays and she still has some of the manuscripts for special celebration, wedding anniversaries and stuff.

Time somehow used to be long in the rural world. Now it is short. There was a man staying with us in Termine. He wanted to check back with his wife to find out how she was getting on. He thought probably she should be at home. So he phoned home five or six times at strategic times when she should have been in and she was never there. Finally he phoned the next door neighbor, "Where in the hell has my wife gone?" "Oh she went to some project I think, I think in Canada somewhere." So he phoned the Vogar project and they said, "Oh yes, she was here, but she has gone to Cano Negro now/" People are on the move. They don't spend much time together. I don't see much of my wife at all. She is in California somewhere at the moment. I just saw her. I was going out to buy something and she was coming in the door. She told me, "I'm going to California." She is gone you know. As I looked for my personal fulfillment and significance in the family, I would be a very frustrated man indeed. It would be a losing battle. Some people -

Montgomery was telling me that he had to see Judy about something so she was on her way around the world one way and he was on his way around the world the other way, they arranged a half hour meeting at an airport, compared notes and went on east and west respectively.

The family is a scattered, that doesn't spend a long time together. Then you remember that shift from the rural to the urban world, your roots used to be in the past. It used to be enough for me to look through the family album to find out who I was. Or for me, I am sort of interested in this but only in relation to the future, I am interested that my grandfather invented a thing called the "galloping Red Cross". And I would boast about it whenever I can. I am very proud of him for doing that. But really my only interest in that is that maybe I inherited from him some genes that will ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ enable me to invent something. It wouldn't be a galloping Red Cross because that would be sort of old fashion now.

To keep track of your family, who has died and who is still alive, who your first cousin is and who your second cousin is. I must confess I have given up on that. I am not very interested in the family album and to know that this person smiling at me and that person smiling at me. This gorgeous Swedish girl is my cousin and is married so she will be my second cousin. I can't keep track of that anymore. I think if there was less divorce and all of that it would have been possible. But now it is really an unrealistic project to try and keep track of all of that. The question is always related to the future. When I am dealing with my identity or who I am, it is a question of the future. Even a question like my family is now debating whether or not I should go to my sister's wedding in December. Now this is how the conversation goes. I say, "Maybe I should go to my sister's wedding because she is my favorite sister in my life." My wife says, "Well, what is in it for us? Why would you do that?" These are the kind of things I come up with: "Well, she is marrying someone who has a house in Scotland, so if ever we needed a place to stay in Scotland it would help if I got to put in an appearance at the wedding. After the wedding they are moving to Hong Kong; they will be in Hong Kong probably until 1999 when Britain's lease on Hong Kong is up. Between now and then if we need a place in Hong Kong to go to, this might be a good way of making sure that we would be welcome in Hong Kong." All the arguments are not related to my relationship to her in the past, they are in relation to what is in store. How is this going to effect the future? How is it going to help? Is there anyone in this guy's family who runs a good boarding school for girls that we might get a free education for our daughter out of? If so maybe you should go to the wedding and see about it. If not, why would you go really? It's a really serious question.

I have another colleague from Australia who was over here when he got news that his sister died. The question was well aren't you going to her funeral? He said, very offensively I thought, why would I go to her funeral. I sold everything that I had in order to get out of Australia, move into the future, create a new life for myself. Now you think I am going to go into debt for as much all over again just to go and say good-bye to my past life. I already said good-bye to my sister. Why would I do that? I'm not asking you to agree with him. I was rather offended. Anyway that was the way he responded to that question. It was just unrealistic because his roots were in the future. And besides he had already said good-bye to his sister. And there were two famous quotes about let the dead bury their dead and so on. Just that little picture tells you the family has got to be radically different from the kind of farmhouse life that we dream about or maybe even experience a little bit in our childhood as a permanent place where the significant life would be found.

Of course as we say in the church lecture when those old images are smashed to pieces and are no longer helpful, what new image. As we say in the church lecture, the new image is mission. The family becomes, and this is so of any primal covenant, a thing of power. When it is a covenant based on mission.

The first point about mission is that man decides his mission, woman decides her mission, all in relation finally to God, to no-thing, to the final mystery and it is their own most personal, most sacred, most holy, most inviable decision. Now supposing I decide for instance to burn out my life for a particular purpose. I was going to draw an arrow here but then I wanted a more aggressive arrow. Supposing I decided my life was going to be one rifle shot thru history. That I was going to be one thrust in history. I might call that one thrust as we do sometimes, witnessing and justing love, if that holds it. I mean by that perhaps I would say that every word I say, every silence I keep, every word I don't say will be for the sake of one thing only. To increase the love of God and neighbor among mankind. That every deed I do, every step I take, every step I don't take, every time I move, every time I stand still, would be for one reason only. To increase the love of God and neighbor among mankind. That is the poetry that I am using at the moment. Then everything else is relative to that mission. You can see this very clearly when it is a question of a great statesman or someone who everyone is depending on to be a missional creature. Obviously everything else is relevant to that mission. But as soon as that choice gets made in ones own life, this is true for oneself as any president of the US, any general of an army, any person in any key position, you would want to say everything falls into place in relation to that choice.

And it is not like we should decide to burn out your life for a purpose, your life is burning out. The question is making the free decision as to what it is burning out for.

Now that is my life, that is me. Obviously if I am going to get married I need to find someone who at the very least will be prepared to live with that. Otherwise it is doom from the start. This missional marriage, this primary covenant, is going to be in relation, the most logical thing of course is to find someone else whose one thrust is something similar. If you aim your life directly at another person, all you will do is either obliterate them or obliterate yourself. If you have two people who have the same purpose in history of witnessing and justing love or whatever poetry you use, this is quite different from the tactics you may use to achieve that. I think General Custer was the one who said that the thing about tactics is that they are irreversable. History proved that was a false statement. The Custer decision was irreversable you could say. That was the whole problem.

Sometimes people who don't know our organization very much, I have stop and try to explain what I am doing and how we live and so on. Of course the question is raised well what about your wife. I say well she is doing that same thing. They say boy that is very lucky isn't. You are both doing the same thing. I think to myself, if you call it luck to spend a year doing indicative battleplanning and tactics on how to get the right wife and then about three weeks day and night building models, arguing through and thinking through how it is this family is going to be one thrust in history, you call that luck, I guess I am quite lucky. I don't call it luck at all. I call it storming the kingdom of heaven. Taking the kingdom of heaven by storm. There are great things in the life of Jesus like that. You see him hammering and hammering on the door. Finally the mystery will relent. I don't mean hammering and hammering on the woman that I wanted to marry until she finally consented. I mean hammering and hammering on the mystery of life to allow this kind of life to be lived.

There it is you see. This increase of love of God and neighbor among mankind is very abstract until you get married. Then you can ground in the everyday what it means to love God and to love the mystery. You can ground when does a woman discover what it means to love the mystery in the man. When does the man discover what it means to love the mystery in the woman. That is the most fantastic symbol and analogy and metaphor or whatever, image, emblem of loving God when it is entered into with all reverent, wise, discreet, all that. But you can find what does it mean to love the world, what does it mean to love the mystery is all grounded in that.

What you discover is that this covenant when it becomes a covenant grounded in the particular life, the particular destiny of another person so that there are two destinies now being played out in relationship to each other. It is sort of like before you life was a rifle shot, but in the midst of this holy covenant, you are sort of like a guided missile now. Guided in the sense that every point you decide to go one way and the other says why are you going that way; you decide to say one thing, why did you say that; you decide to be abstract, the other grounds it. The other awakens, the other engages. Some people call marriages human development projects. It is a fantastic emblem of what it means to live the authentic life. The primary covenant empowers the decision to be one thrust in history. It is a symbol. And the same I would like to hear someone do this same lecture on the covenant of celibacy and how that in its turn takes the mystery of life and decides to live in obedience to that. One thing that I do know about celibacy is that its power as a symbol rests entirely upon seeing the mystery, depth and greatness of the state of matrimony. It loses its power as symbol when the state of marriage loses its power.

I have a lot of things to say about all of this. I am going to end up by just making some statements and putting some words on the board.

Covenant is decision. Your binding yourself to a particular way of life. You are trapping yourself in a particular way of living out your life and dying your death because you decided that is the way you wanted to live, that is the way you wanted to die. My idea of a happy funeral to myself is that the ring of my covenant will be put in the box of my ashes. That to me will be the final statement that my life was a free deed in history. That it was a life giving event. You bind yourself to the decision you make about where your life wants to go. Not a very original idea. You know Odysseus wanted to hear the sirens singing, but not get trapped and shipwrecked by hearing the voice of the sirens so he had his sailors tie him to the mast with a rope. So when the time he would be captivated by this glorious, beautiful, captivating mysterious, tantalizing, scintillating music of the sirens, he would definitely want to jump overboard and guide the ship straight onto the rocks and smash himself to pieces; but he would not be able to because he was tied to the mast. That is a decision. You bind yourself. That is what a bond, a band, binding - all the same thing.

It is a promise. (Tape change) For good or ill, sickness or health. Whatever. Up to the edge of doom, till death us do part. The covenant is a symbol. This is what we started off by saying in RSI. It is not the reality. It is the symbol of the reality. It is my poem.

It is my artifact. It is my divine comedy, if you like, on humanness. People say, you mean it is only a symbol. I don't mean it is only a symbol. I mean it is that sacred that it is even a symbol of the way life is. DH Lawrence talks about build your ship of death; build your ship of death. Your dying, oh build your ship of death. Your married, your primary covenant, is the ship of death you build.

Covenant is vows. A solemn vow. I think really it is the three vows once more of poverty, that is to say in binding yourself to one you make the vow of detachment from in my case all of womankind except that one. It is the vow of chastity. To make that the symbol of willing one thing with your whole life. It is the vow of obedience. I don't just mean doing what you are told so as to avoid having a fight. I don't mean that at all. In fact I think that is disobedience. I mean obedience to the fact that you have moved in with the wrath of God in your life and you have moved in to the glory of God and that is the way it is going to be until you die and you have decided that is the way it is going to be.

Covenant is roads not taken. It is going down one road which means not going down the other roads.

Covenant is till death. It is the profound act of faith in the way life is. It is a constantly renewed act of faith in the way life is. It cannot be a reality until death decision is made. If you say well I will stay in this marriage until it turns me off, until it turns ugly, until my spouse starts cheating on me, then the reality that you can trust the way life is never put to the test. Not I am not even saying that you can trust the way life is to refrain from battering you into a zombie or a pulp or a nothing. All I know is that unless you make that decision until death, there is no way of raising the question. I want to witness that I have seen over and over again in my marriage and other marriages indescribable suffering like despair, like impossibility, yet over and over again, I have seen life from the dead like there was no reason to expect it. Life from nothing. There was nothing left. Yet over and over again life has come back. That is what you put your trust in when you make your covenant until death.

Finally covenant is a challenge. Covenant says bind yourself irrevocably to the mystery because you are bound to it. It says bind yourself irrevocably to the needs and the possibilities of this world so that you are immersed in it up to your armpits. Because you are immersed in it anyway - you don't have any choice. It says bind yourself forever to the word which says you are accepted in all of you mystery and depth and greatness. Bind yourself to that word. Because you are bound to it anyway. There is no way to shake off.

I am witness to covenant that it is through covenant your faith as a helpless human creature is transformed into meaningful destiny. There are a lot of fairy stories and magic stories about the magic ring. I believe there is a great wisdom in that. The ring that can make you disappear. The ring that can transform you. You put that band of precious metal around your life so to speak everything is transformed.

One last image. It is very strange isn't it that for thousands of people the symbol of the free man, the profoundly human man is a symbol of one whose hands are nailed down, feet are nailed down, whose head is spiked through and whose side is spiked through. I am not making a bid now for Christianity is the only answer. I am just saying that it is a very strange truth that the one most irrevocably nailed to the covenant by his feet where he goes, by his hands, what he creates, by his brains, the most irrevocably bound covenant has become one of those powerful emblems of freedom, of profound humanness. Now we can look at this in our seminars.