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First Two Weeks

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THOU ART MY BELOVED

As God's servants we try to commend ourselves in all circumstances by our steadfast endurance in distress, in hardships, in dire straights, even when we're flogged, imprisoned, mobbed, over-worked, sleepless, and going without sufficient food. We recommend ourselves by the ontological innocence of our behavior, by our grasp of final truth, by our patience and by our kindness to all men, and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and by sincere love, and by the power of God. We wield the weapons of righteousness in our right hand and in our left hand. Honor and dishonor, both praise and blame, are alike our lot. We are the imposters who, nonetheless, speak the truth. We are the unknown men whom all men know. Dying always, we ever still live on. Disciplined by suffering, we are still not done to death. In our many sorrows, we still experience joy. Poor ourselves, we bring wealth to many. Penniless, yet we own the world.

1 I want to talk about the spirit state of the Movement: what one would expect our current interior topography to look like, at this moment in history, and in our existence as a body. The reason I want to talk about this other than the fact that this is probably the only thing that really interests me, is that we must take care of ourselves, for the sake of taking care of the world.

2 This summer I have become deeply convinced that there are finally just three things of significance: one is Faith, one is Hope, and one is Love, but...the greatest of them all is LOVE! To say that, to know that, and to be that, knowing it as you say it, intensifies the necessity of careful care of oneself in order that, indeed, you may love. For, would it

not be a matter of supreme tragedy if you knew that you cared about the world but you did not take care of yourself, so that your caring for the world could never become a living actuality in your short, short existence in this world?

7 I have nothing new to say. But I want to put more passion on what may seem to be old themes of "Silence" and "Stillness." These have to be concretely grounded in our own empirical history; because of all states of being I know anything of, the state of being called Silence and the state of being called Stillness are the least abstract. I suppose that the empirical given might become so intensely concrete that it could burst into fire. If that is right, then it would do so precisely at that point in our interior history where the state of Silence and the state of Stillness emerge.

4 More than a year ago, every person who is a part of our Order experienced a form of the Dark Night of the Soul. Because the Dark Night of the Soul is grounded in history, this happened to us in our everyday existence. In one sense, we were not conscious that it happened at all; or better put, we were not conscious that what happened was the Dark Night of the Soul. I am trying to emphasize the point that there is a Dark Night of the Soul which happens before the Dark Night of the Soul happens, or else the Dark Night of the Soul could not even have happened to us. It was in the Spring quarter a year ago that we brought awareness into our having gone through the Dark Night of the Soul. This means that we grasped another form of the Dark Night of the Soul, the form of intentional experience of what we had already experienced. That, of course, came to a climax last summer when we were able, as a total Movement, to get said to ourselves the meaning of the interior dynamic of the Dark Night of the Soul. But, in doing that, we became aware of a third form of the Dark Night of the Soul. That was the awareness that we had been going through the Dark Night of the Soul all our life long, because the Dark Night of the Soul is neither more nor less than simply the intensification of the intensification of consciousness. That is what it is all about.

4 Yet, we were to learn after last Summer, last Fall, in the Winter Quarter, and in the Spring that has just gone by, that there was still another Dark Night of the Soul. This was the darkest of all the Dark Nights of the Soul. It cast us into profound struggles: deep, deep within our being, in depths of which perhaps we had never before been aware. That is the Dark Night of the Soul which is present when you know and are forced to face the fact that the rest of your life is going to be nothing more and nothing less than the Dark Night of the Soul.

I mean that experience of darkness which is the humiliation that never goes away, when you become startlingly aware of your contingency under the rubric of ceaseless humiliation.

6 One time at night one of my colleagues came to my room and said, "These days I am experiencing just being constantly humiliated." It did not take me long to spot the fact that he was not dealing with humiliation on the surface level of existence that all men know about, but something had catapulted him through the veil. He was feeling with the depths of reality itself the fact that consciousness is humiliation. To have showed up in life is humiliation. There is a period behind that that can never be erased. You and I know of the struggles every-time something in life humiliates us. We swear we are going to defend ourselves in such a fashion that humiliation will never take place again, only to discover there are no walls to protect you once you become aware of the Dark Night of the Soul. From that time forth there is no weaponry capable of keeping the humiliation out of your being. As a matter of fact, it becomes so intense that you scarcely know any moment in which the humiliation is not present. The very fact that you only have to seriously flash your life before your being to discover yourself just a cold, cold cadaver on a cold marble slab is evidence of the humiliation that is of temporality itself, from which you never can escape.

7 But, this dark, dark, very natural experience of humiliation is precisely where (and the only place where) the heavens break open and a voice screams out of the sky, "THOU ART MY BELOVED SON." Would you believe the next part? "IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED." It is only in the midst of the awareness that humiliation never ceases that the heavens break and you hear the voice. But that voice does not eradicate the darkness; the darkness is your light.

8 Once one has become aware of the Dark Night of Consciousness, he has a secret no other man knows. The Dark Night of the Soul is that sense of Weakness which never goes away. I do not mean the kind of weakness that one man can see in another, the inability to perform at any particular point in life. I mean the weakness one experiences about his whole existence. An older sister of mine conjured up the phrase: "falling into a heap of shaking palsy." It is that kind of secret you have about yourself, not that you are weak, but that you are weakness itself. And, it is only in the midst of that dark, dark awareness that once again the heavens open and a voice speaks, "For Thou art my Beloved Son." "Thou are my Beloved Son." "THOU!" Does it sound absurd? If it does not sound absurd, you have not heard it: "THOU art MY beloved Son!" And then is added the unbelievable, "In whom I am well pleased." You see, in

the midst of one's humiliation, the voice turns that humiliation into glory. The voice does not change the humiliation; rather, it speaks clearly in the midst of weakness.

9 People ask what charisma is. Charisma is the constant standing in the desert under the white hot sun, while one's colleagues buckle and fall. There is no magic to it, there are no personality tricks to it; it is just standing there in the same sun while the colleagues collapse. That is charisma. This is what our fathers meant when they said, "Our weakness is our strength." That has nothing to do with morality; it is a deep ontological understanding of consciousness itself. It is not that in our weakness we are strong; our weakness is our strength.

10 In the Dark Night of the Soul one experiences resentment. Oh, what I know about resentment! In Washington the other day while riding in a cab to an appointment with Senator Percy and Congressman Stevenson to talk about the Bicentennial (I had prayed for that meeting, and having it scheduled was absolutely a miracle.), in the car I became aware that I was resenting having to go to that meeting. That resentment is a part of what life is all about. I resent having to get up in the morning; I resent the Daily Office; I resent my children; I resent my wife; I resent my colleagues; I resent having to work that day. I have the greatest job that you could even imagine, and yet I resent it. Someone comes in to see me; and because I cannot keep a "poker" face, they see the resentment for their coming. Shall I go on?

11 It is the Dark Night of the Soul, and in consciousness it never goes away. When primordial man first oozed himself up through the ooze and his head popped into consciousness, most of them turned around and went back in. They resented consciousness; and that resentment is a part of myself. Yet, out of that resentment Universal Benevolence or Love is born; and only out of that resentment is Love born. (For, only through the resentment of the mundanities and the temporalities of life can a man break through the attachments to his own children, to his own wanting to be somebody, to his own worldly goods, to his own nation, only then can he care for all. Only then can he care for his children, and his wife, and his nation, because they are now a part of all and not just a part of himself. It is in the midst of the Dark Night and only then that one can care. For it is only in the midst of those resentments that the heavens break loose and the voice is heard, "THOU art my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.") The darkness becomes your light. I would like to look again at the whole concept of Sanctification, taking the words: perfect love, perfect righteousness, perfect blessedness, and using these morally,

not ontologically. Now, what I described, my beloved colleagues, is the struggle all of us have been struggling: the awareness that this is how life is going to be, and it is never going to go away.

12 Because marriage is the most intimate aspect of our temporality, the struggle of the Dark Night shows up most clearly there. I laugh sometimes (I hope kindly) when one young colleague after another comes up and tells me about the trouble in his marriage. What makes me laugh is that he is telling about all of our marriages, not just his, all of them. When a person runs from his marriage, he is not running from his marriage. He is running from the Dark Night of the Soul that marriage shoves in his face. He just never understood that all marriages are two marriages. The first marriage, which I call the "dream marriage," is the marriage a culture gives to you. It is supposed to be important, and fine, and perhaps even producing happiness. The second marriage, from which no man ever escapes, comes when the Divine Activity moves in and just tears that dream to pieces! You are never going to recover from it; and it gives you an opportunity to turn your marriage from a dream marriage into a missional marriage. That getting married all over again is picking up the awareness that the Dark Night of the Soul never ceases, the awareness ritualized with "Until death do us part." One of my colleagues once said, in my presence, that he ought not to have been married in the first place. I call that "profanity." To say that God did not know what he was doing when he brought your marriage into being is profanity! A marriage has nothing to do with the past, only the future. A marriage is taking your situation, whatever it is, and building tomorrow. The Dark Night of the Soul has to do with your concrete everyday life.

13 This is what I mean by Silence. I hear myself speaking more softly these days. I do not like to make speeches anymore. I do not like to talk anymore. Silence: I do not mean by Silence what people have tried to get us to do in our worship service, have more quiet time. I would be scared to death with any religious exercise that has to do with not talking. For, you are only ready for such rehearsals of silence when you grasp that Silence is, first of all, a state of being. At the center of the New Religious Mode is the naked white heat of Transparent Being. Silence is a state of being that has to do with that center. It is born out of the awareness that the Dark Night of the Soul is never going to go away; and the voice says, "Thou art my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

14 Anyone who has made the journey to the center of Being knows about the Dark Night. For a long time we have struggled with what the return is like. I originally used the figure

"vacuity" to say what we were coming aware of. Someone suggested, however, that I did not mean vacuity, but rather weightlessness. He pointed out that in space there is both silence and weightlessness. Then I saw that the journey of the return is not about silence, not vacuity, not weightlessness, but Stillness.

Stillness is the flip side of Silence. In the Spring of 1971, we began to turn toward the Social. That came to a focus in the Summer of 1971, when we built the Social Process Triangles and gave ourselves secular or social tools. Something unexpected and unbelievable happened to us. When we sorted it out we knew we fell through those triangles into the Other World. I suppose the greatest work that we as a group ever did together was the work on the dynamics of the Other World. And, we got to the Other World through the social. Now we know that there is no way into the spirit deeps of life, to the Other World, except through the secular, except through the social. There is no way to go through the Religious into the Other World. This is why a layman has a better chance of grasping the Other World than those who have been conditioned by the Religious. A cleric has got to become an utterly secular man before he can ever know about the Other World himself. He must become secular as a clergyman in order to become a Religious. We fell into the Other World through the secular, through the social. This is transparentization itself; this is the message we have to take to the masses of mankind. The Other World is in the midst of this one world that God created and not someplace else.

We fell into the Other World, and for those who fall into the Other World there is but one direction to life--that is to claw one's way back into the social. This is why every profound revolution of history in all cultures has come only on the other side of somebody having fallen into the Other World and having clawed his way back into the social. This summer is the time that we got back to the social. And yet, in getting back to the social, we have discovered that we are never going to go back to the social. At the same time, we discovered we are never going to go back to the Other World. This is what I mean by vacuity or weightlessness. I do not feel like a revolutionary anymore, but I know myself as a revolutionary as never before. What has happened is that we have become the eschatological revolution. And the eschatological revolutionary never again has a hope.

A few years ago we struggles with the categories of pro-establishment, dis-establishment, and trans-establishment. Now we know there is no such thing as trans-establishment as an entity. The trans-establishment is a posture in life that

happens when one becomes, with his total being, a structural revolutionary; when one is willing to take on both the dis-establishment and the pro-establishment. Like "Little Big Man," you are battered back and forth, back and forth, to the very end of your existence, until the end of time, which is endlessness. That is the eschatological revolutionary. In RS-1 we say that about the time a new structure is created to take care of the injustices, someone falls out and you have to start all over again. About the time you become "establishment" the flag goes up, and you are "on the move" again. This happens to the eschatological spirit man with the rapidity of a ping-pong ball going back and forth.

18 What I am trying to say is that we have experienced what "The Man Without a Country" must have experienced. We have experienced the homelessness: we have experienced eternal rootlessness. In one moment you are tied into the spiritual and you feel dread of the world, and the next moment you are tied into the world and you feel like you are in apostasy relative to God. Someone said to me on my trip that these days she has been feeling like a heretic. One way or another, back and forth, it is as if we have found our security only to discover, in a deeper sense than we have ever known before, that there is no security for the man of the spirit. But it is only in the Lord of history that we hear, not from the heavens breaking above but down some distant corridors of time, or chambers of history: "Blessed art Thou, for Thine is the kingdom of Heaven." Right in the midst of feeling that you have lost your sight; that you have lost your vision; that you have lost your security; that you have lost the finitude; that you have lost all in a way that you know can never be recovered; only then do you hear echoing down the hall, "Blessed art Thou, for Thine is (you are) the kingdom of Heaven."

19 Then there is the experience, in crawling back into the social, of the sense of uselessness--ineffectivity. Can you grasp that ping-pong ball? On this last trip we went into the Phillipines and discovered that your colleagues there have done wonders you would not believe--yet they felt they were useless. If all of us, together, did nothing more in history than what is going on in the Movement in the nation of South Korea, it would have been worth all our lives. Yet, there is a sense of utter ineffectiveness in the midst of this awareness. You can see that what was done was to dare to pick up the burden of the 100-ton crane. And with that, there is nothing to expect except ineffectivity relative to one's interior state of being. If you pick up the white race to love, or if you pick up the family to love, or if you pick out your nation to love, then you can talk about "effectivity." But, when you

pick out history to love, you even doubt what effectivity is. You experience yourself as a speck of dust in eternity. And I am not talking about exactly what you are. That is the way you experience it in the midst of this. And here is your blessing--do you want to know what it means to go to heaven?

20 The next experience is that you feel depleted. You feel sick. You are "all gone." You are all burned out. You see, you can fool with a reduced part of theology for 90 years and not get burned out. But, when you take all theology at once into your being and become freedom, then you feel burned out. People come up to me and say, "I'm going to leave the Order." It is not that I don't agree with you. It's that I don't believe in it. It's not that I don't believe in the mission. It's just that I don't seem to care enough anymore." That is what I mean by "depletion." In spite of what you know, it is all gone, it is not there. It is only in that moment that anyone ever hears that voice, not from heavens above but from the corridors of this earth, say, "Blessed art Thou, for yours (what you have got and what has got you) is the kingdom of Heaven."

21 And the last experience is the manifestation of the sense of unfulfillment. There is an inescapable deep awareness of unfulfillment; and it comes in so many ways. One day you wake up and you think, "My God! If I do this, I'm gonna miss that--and that--and that. And if I do that, then I will miss this!" And some way or another, almost in a panic, you reach out for something called "fulfillment." It is only in the midst of this fulfillment turning into unfulfillment that we hear the voice...."Blessed are Thou...."

22 I suspect that the covenant with life is the real problem; and it is most thoroughly grounded by the move to the center of Being--the Dark Night. That is life! It is your vocation. In vocation there are always two decisions. One is the decision to be a Religious in the midst of whatever the world calls vocation. You have no vocation until you have decided to relate what you are doing to the whole of history. And that is always a dream; that is always a dream decision. No matter how old you were, no matter how serious you were then, the day comes when you grasp yourself as rootless, useless, depleted, and unfulfilled. And, you have to make another decision about being a Religious. This has to do with absolute trust in God. You understand that when you have no home, then the only anchor you have is that which is between Being and No Being--between Is and Is Not. And that is the Mystery. Either you trust your being, your life, to the Mystery, or you have nothing anymore.



It is exactly when you grasp your uselessness and ineffectivity--the fact that you are a failure--that you are forced into the arms; you have no place else to go. Some years ago when I was in seminary a student asked me, "Now you said the words 'trust God.' What do you mean?" I faked it then. Now I wish he would come back; I think I could talk to him about what I mean--not by faith, but by trusting God. Luther's image was that finally you just lean back over 70,000 fathoms of water. That is all. I have a little secret: It never was your strength; it never was your power; it never was your spirit--it was God's spirit working in and through you. You have no place else to go. All my life, even long before I knew anything about anything, I wanted to go to heaven. I think it was because my Papa used to have me write things on the board. One of them was, "The greatest failure is the failure to get to heaven." I discovered that he was right. "For yours is the kingdom of heaven." It is the certitude where there is no certitude, peace where there is no peace, joy where there is no joy, endlessness where there is only temporality.

23 If this is not the story of your interior state, then I warn you, I exhort you, I plead with you that you understand it. For only if you have some grasp of what I am talking about have you any chance of caring for yourself for the sake of caring for mankind. I said to you earlier that I had fallen in love all over again with the world. I believe you have, too. The world needs us. Let us take care of ourselves that we may, indeed, in some small way, be God's agents for the concrete manifestations of the Love that boasts a new society and turns the tidal course of history itself, for all of His people.

-Joseph W. Mathews