

PRIORSHIP IN THE TIME OF RESURGENCE

St. Augustine tells the story of a young boy who took a pail of water out of the ocean and poured it into a hole. He repeated this several times as Augustine looked on. "Young man, what are you doing?" Augustine finally asked. The little boy looked up and said, "Why, I am going to pour the ocean into this hole." "I hate to disillusion you," Augustine said, "but the ocean will not go into that hole." The young boy looked at him and said, "The ocean will go into that hole--at about the same time the Trinity will get into your feeble mind."

Being a Prior is like trying to pour the ocean into a hole. Or, it is about as easy to grasp the Trinity as it is to be a Prior. Whenever you run into someone who wears the label "Prior" who tells you he knows what it means to be one, then surely you have not met a Prior. Priorship is a dynamic, a living reality. To think we will ever fully understand what Priorship is all about is the illusion of illusions. However, I want to share with you what several feeble minds had to say from the pulpit about Priorship.

The key to Priorship is Mission. If someone asks what it means to be a Prior, the first response should probably be something like, "What it means to be a Prior is to be one who is involved with renewing the Church in order to impact the world so it will be a more human place for your children and your children's children." That is to say, what it means to be a Prior is to be clear that you are not a Prior. A Prior only exists because there is a job to be done. The difficulty or the danger in having such a job is that you and I are capable of becoming what I call "missional moralists." To say that a Prior has a Mission also is to know that the Mission is not to renew the Church or to create a new world, it is only to love God and serve His creation. To fall short of the final Mission is to step into the dangerous waters of justifying one's existence over against the human creation called Mission. Priorship has to do with enabling other human beings to grasp that they are Mission.

We have discovered that Priorship is always defined in terms of the times; or, to be a Prior today means you are a Prior in a time of Resurgence. If you find yourself attempting to formulate and articulate Priorship in some other time than this one, you are not formulating or articulating Priorship. We must shape our revolutionary principles in relationship to these particular times.

As revolutionaries, we take seriously the fact that we operate geographically. Our conception that the world has been gridded into Parishes is no mere notion. It is a reality. Unless we operate out of that reality, there is no way for us to grasp what it means to love God and serve His creation. In terms of the social milieu of our times, the stance of the Prior is the stance of one who has discovered himself, one who is anchored in the reality of Sanctification.

I was not here this summer, but in our ITI, we discovered that even though we did not formally touch the category of Sanctification, we all experienced it. There was no way to keep it out. There was no way to discuss the Other World in the ITI without using the categories you and I find helpful in efforts to understand Sanctification. As it happened, even though I was not here this summer, I was here.

Sociologically, we find ourselves standing in the time of Sanctification. This has to do with how we image ourselves. The best image that comes to mind is generalship. A successful general is one who understands that his generalship has to do with moving down through the fabric of the organization he is in charge of. Priorship, or generalship, is always downward. That is to say, if a general comes off, it is because of his division leaders, his colonels and his majors. They do not make him a general; he makes them division leaders. Do you see the difference? He is a successful general not because he has good division commanders, but because he enables his division leaders to be good division leaders. That is how battles are won. That is also why we remember so few generals' names. Wars are won by division commanders who were brought off by generals.

The other reality in our time is that we are in the midst of a Movement. Some of the people you find yourself on assignments with may leave you wondering whether or not there really is a Movement. So will the experience of a Metro Cadre meeting at which only the dynamic duo show up. Nevertheless, there is a Movement. Sometimes it wears blue; sometimes it would not be caught dead in blue. But it is a Movement. We did not start it and anyone who thinks we, or someone like us, started it does not understand what I mean by Movement. The Spirit decided the Movement, not us. At best, we struggle to give form to that which is already happening. When we struggle to be on the edge--which obviously we must do--we discover ourselves over an edge that the Spirit has already crossed. In fact, the Spirit decreed the edge. How ludicrous it is for us to think we go out somewhere and find the edge! The Spirit marks the edge and we cry with every ounce of our being to put our feet where the Spirit has already said the edge is. That is what it means to be and give form to a Movement. We live in mortal fear and fascination that we might put our feet down on the wrong edge. Once someone said, "I don't think I could bear being part of something which did not know where it was going." His anxiety was understandable, but wouldn't we be deadier than a dodo bird if we knew exactly where we had to go in the next forty years? If that were the case, most of us would resign--whatever that means--and I would be first in line. We live in the ambiguity, the authentic struggle and risk of planting our feet where the Spirit wants them--not finally knowing whether it was the Spirit who marked it or whether you will ever get firmly planted there.

Once a long time ago, in 1968, I asked a man a question. He was talking about carrying out the future and I said, "What if I get to the end of my life and discover that I've been going down the wrong road?" He was very clear about my operating images and answered, "Well, if you have consciously decided every single step of the way and you wind up in Hell, the one thing you can be assured of is that you'll be shoveling coal for the glory of God." That is what I have been through the past ten years of my life. That is what it means to be the Movement, to risk authentically.

What is the power of Priorship? A Prior has only one power and that is corporate power. This is difficult for most of us to grasp and I imagine many of us will die wondering if there still is not the power of the individual. The richness of our colleagues around the world is that a great many of them do not have to struggle with individual corporateness the way we do. They have a different struggle. The only power we have as a Movement is the power of the corporate. In saying this, I do not mean the status of someone in relation to the corporate, I mean the power of this corporate body in relation to other corporate bodies. We are a powerful body of people. We are powerful economically, politically and culturally. If you doubt this, then stand up and take a look at this body. I did not realize our power until I stumbled into House Church after a LENS course. I looked around and the whole room was blue. That is power. It was not simply power in terms of impacting the world, but in the sense that when I encountered that blue mass, I stopped stumbling.

Sometime, we are going to have to decide to demonstrate our power to ourselves so that we always have it under control. Someday, we may have to take one of the collapsing structures of the Historical Church and restore it to health with a snap of the fingers. My personal pipedream is that one day, two weeks before a denominational seminary closes its doors, we will impose our corporate power and keep that seminary open--whatever that means. If it means underwriting the budget, then we underwrite it; if it means going down the row and saying, "You've always wanted to go to seminary, haven't you?", then we do it. We literally pick the seminary up--not so people will say how great we are, but so we can demonstrate to ourselves that we can do whatever needs to be done. That is what I mean by corporate power.

I am excited about the Troika. The cruciality of the Troika has to do with our grasping not only our power, but that power is in our control and not outside it. Power is always in the corporate. If we lost that, we will be finished. If we ever succumb to the bureaucrat who lurks inside each one of us, if we ever succumb to efficiency rather than effectiveness, if we ever succumb to compartmentalization, if we ever succumb to assignments being made on any other basis than Mission, we will be finished. The Troika will help us retain our clarity that power is in the corporate and not somewhere else.

A Prior is walking lucidity. Several years ago, I visited a group of pastors in northern Alabama who were struggling with what they called morale problems among pastors. I remember becoming somewhat irritated with them. In the midst of the meeting, I indicated that as far as I could see, morale was a decision problem and nothing more. I said morale had nothing to do with where one was assigned, or how much money he made, it had to do with his decision about the particular given. The pastors did not like my insight. In fact, I have never been back to northern Alabama. Later, I discovered that what I was stumbling around with was Motivity. For a Prior, Motivity is a given. We do not create or generate it. Motivity enables us to re-empower our old stance in relation to the concretions of our Mission. We could not talk about Motivity until it was clear that our time was one of Resurgence.

I have always felt very close to Bonhoeffer in his Community paper, especially when he talks about the difficulty in human community is the tendency to walk around taking one's spiritual pulse. Whenever I enter a room, someone always says, "Oh, the mood is very low." My response is, "So what." "But we need to get the mood up," comes the reply. My question then is, "Maybe the mood ought to be down." Who said it is bad to have a down mood? Who says it is

better to have an up mood? In about 15 minutes, I notice a change in the mood of the person I am talking with. We are people who go around with our fingers pressed against our spiritual pulses. Check yourself when that happens. In reading a corporate body, the only thing to put your finger on is Motivity.

One morning, I got up for Worship and Worship went well. We had breakfast and breakfast went well. The Collegium was one of the best I had ever done. Then came our House meeting. At that time, there were five women working along with me. I looked around the table and all five women were crying. I turned to one of them and said, "What is wrong?" Through her tears, she said, "If I could tell you what was wrong I would not be crying!" They had the Word. What life was about in that situation was five crying women and me washed out. This is not to say that we are insensitive to what is happening to human beings, or what is happening to the body. But those struggles are always handled in relation to the corporate. I was trained as a pastoral counselor and I find that every time I am tempted to do pastoral counseling I hold myself back. God help us, the education may not have been on target, but it was good enough that I have had a hard time shaking it. That is, I have to guard myself against my own propensity to fall into the psychological perversion of our time. Our task is to enable others to struggle their struggle. I have discovered that when I succumb to my psychological bent, I invariably get people to struggle my struggle or to struggle some other struggle than the one they are in. The ministry we have to each other is the key to what it means to enable the recreation of society into a fabric of humanity. We enable our colleagues to dare be their own struggle--whatever it takes. This probably means that in our time, the prophetic role is more in line than the preacher role. Footnote: Do not get those two separated. Preaching is still an authentic dynamic. My point is, right now healing most often takes place in the prophetic. The first time someone told me he was leaving the Order, I did not have much of a response. A few years of experience in such matters, and I discovered at least I have an answer. It has to do with vision. Ten years ago, it was a different thing to leave the Order. Now, when someone decides to leave, he has already felt his life. You used to ask, "What are you going to do?" Now that question would elicit a four-hour lecture. The crucial question, I have discovered, has to do with vision. The only question any person or family has to decide is whether or not the group task is what they need to be doing. If not, then God speed and God bless. If it is, then they have no other place to go. That is what I mean by daring to minister through the prophetic.

The crucial struggle in creating corporateness has to do with the ontological Yes over against the No. The perversion is that we discover ourselves saying No at every point. The Pharisee is more of a problem than the Libertine. However, Phariseeism is no solution to Libertinism. The cure for the Pharisee is the Man of Faith, not a libertine. When we lock ourselves into the role of Pharisee, we block our ability to see the necessary alternatives that will meet the reality with which we are dealing.

The struggle within the female and its manifestations is usually more dangerous to the corporate than the struggle with the male dynamic. This is not to say that every female is immediate, it is that every one I have ever met is immediate. In other words, whenever you encounter a propensity for immediacy, you have encountered the female struggle--even if it shows up in a 280-pound fullback. Immediacy has to do with always solving your own problems. When the ants in your pants are eating you up alive, it is not in relation to the

Mission, but in relation to your situation-ship to the Mission. Immediacy is getting caught with your models down. Anytime you find yourself "antsy," the chances are it is because you have been blown into a situation for which you have not built a model.

Never look at the people in your House to discover where the perversions are. Look to yourself; that is where you will discover the problems and will be able to create a method and model to avoid those problems showing up in the corporate. When you discover perversions loose in corporateness, you are one step behind. The Prior discovers the perversions in himself and blocks off the propensity and temptation from infecting the corporate body. A Prior is the general because he has the method for keeping his consciousness on the whole body.

This means that as Priors, you create, discover and carve out times to brood. The criterion for brooding is very simple: When someone tells me he is brooding, my question to him is, "Where are your models?" Brooding is not the process of going away to think. Brooding has to do with productivity and creativity pushed into the forms that enable Mission to happen. If you are sitting in your prayer closet forty hours a week and not producing models, then you are not brooding.

Priors also know how to bracket. When you bracket, you also decide when it is you are going to take the brackets off. Incidentally, this is crucial in relationship to your family. If you have not discovered that bracketing is necessary in families, then my guess is you are consumed with your family. Of course, never bracket the family entirely, but there are those aspects of being a family that you may decide to bracket. I know some families who have done quite well by deciding to bracket the question of divorce. This means that whenever the question of divorce comes up, the partners say, "Don't you remember? We decided to bracket that. We are not dealing with it until our twentieth wedding anniversary." It solves a lot of problems. Decide in the context of Mission what to bracket. In this way, your creativity is pushed into those areas you have decided are critical for accomplishing the Mission.

A Prior has self-doubt. I think the more responsibility one assumes, the more self-doubt he decides to live with. I found myself driven to read Paul's letter again this year and two things shocked me about it: His bold-faced audacity--always just short of sheer arrogance--and his racking self-doubt. When he said, "I am responsible for all the churches," that was a decision he made. He decided all the churches were his responsibility. If one has decided to be a Prior, then he has decided that all the Religious Houses are his responsibility. We need from Centrum all the materials from all the Houses so that we can adequately take responsibility for them all. The only way we even dare talk about responsibility for all the people is through responsibility for the Kuala Lumpur House and the Anchorage House and the Chicago House and so on.

A Prior has one place to stand: On the Gospel. That is where he starts and where he ends. He stands on no human word. The crucial think about a send-out in the morning is not the witness or the insight, the crucial thing is "In the Name of." Think what would happen if you said, "In the name of the David Wayne Scott family, or In the name of General Motors, or in the name of the Order." No one would leave the room! Only one thing claims your whole life: Not your family, or G.E., or the Order. The only thing that unabashedly claims your whole life is the Word in Jesus Christ. If you find yourself

saying some other party is required, then run as fast as you can to the nearest sacred space and do the Daily Office.

In a little book called "The Defense Never Rests," F. Lee Bailey describes a situation in which an Air Force pilot takes his first solo flight. He starts to approach the landing field when all of a sudden his instrument panel starts lighting up, signaling danger. The indication was he was about to flame out. In the course of six seconds, the pilot remembered the advice of his instructor: "The only time a pilot ever has any difficulty flying is when his aircraft comes in contact with the earth. As long as you are airbound, you are in great shape." In a fire, your whole being is going to tell you to get that plane on the ground. Yet what may be needed is to get more space between you and the ground. The pilot recalled the advice and began to nose the plane upward, gaining two thousand feet of altitude before the flame-out. The altitude was enough to get him to the landing field.

Our instrument panel indicates a flame-out and our propensity is to get away from that about which we are flaming out. An old instructor told me once that the clue to staying in the battle was staying in the battle. This next year we are going to experience the sensation of flame-out and our whole being is going to tell us to get distance from that about which we are flaming-out. It will not be the Mission, or your family, or your crummy colleagues. It will be God. When it happens, remember that the secret is to hold to the struggle, get closer to it, embrace it, be it and if you do that, you may discover a small, small part of what it means to be a Prior. We will discover that we not only have the Word, we have a Movement. We will discover the Church awakening to new life. A new fabric of society will emerge in which your children, and Mao's children, and Indira's children all will have the possibility of grasping what it means to be a human being, from birth until death.

---David Scott

June 21, 1974