

Transparent Being

Grace be unto you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I've been working on the lecture I'm going to give this morning for 25 years. (I asked my brother about that the other night and he stated it was 50 years). Sometimes I feel that I've done nothing but prepare what I want to say this morning.

I want to read a bit of scripture from the gospel of John.

You must not let yourselves be distressed—you must hold on to your faith in God and your faith in Me. There are many rooms in my Father's House. If there were not, should I have told you that I'm going away to prepare a place for you? It is true that I'm going away to prepare a place for you, but it is just as true that I am coming again to welcome you into my own home, so that you may be where I am. You know where I am going and you know the way I am going to take."

"Lord!" Thomas broke out, "We don't know where you're going, and how can we know the way that you'll take?"

"I myself am the way," replied Jesus. "And the truth and the life. No one approaches the Father except through me. If you had known who I am, you would have known the Father. From now on, you do know him, and you have seen him."

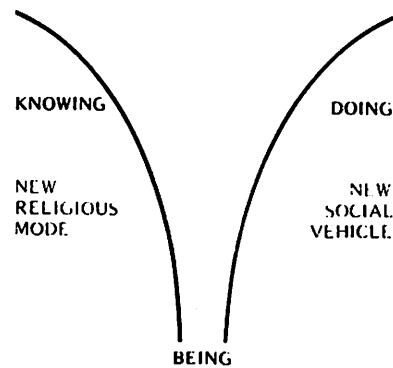
Then Philip said, "Show us the Father, Lord, and then we will be satisfied."

"Have I been such a long time with you," replied Jesus, "without your really knowing me, Philip? The man who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father? And that the Father is in me? The very words I say to you are not even my own. It is the Father who lives in me that carries out his work through me. Do you believe me when I say that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? But if you cannot, then believe me because of what you see me do. I assure you that the man who believes in me will do the same things that I have done, yes, and he will do even greater things than these, for I am going away to the Father. Whatever you ask the

Father in my name he will do—that the Son may bring glory to the Father. And if you ask anything of me in my name, I will grant it."

Two years ago when I came back from our first teaching experience overseas something deep had happened to me. And I went into seclusion. Oh, I was around, but the veil was drawn. That lasted almost a year. Then, three of my colleagues got hold of me and beat the daylights out of me. They said they had stood it long enough, that I had to let the water over the dam. I was deeply angry with them, for I wanted no one to touch me.

When they forced me, I went to the board and drew this figure (see diagram). We had dwelt on the knowing side in deeps that shuddered the fibers of our souls, and we had participated in the doing side with the same kind of frightening intensity. Then we had seen the relationship between the two, and just when we had the universe-wrapped up, it blew from the bottom! And we were in nothing. This knowing and doing were no longer meaningful to me. The bottom had blown, and in that blowing we had a vision of being, of what it meant not only to *know* your know and to *do* your do but finally to *be* your be.

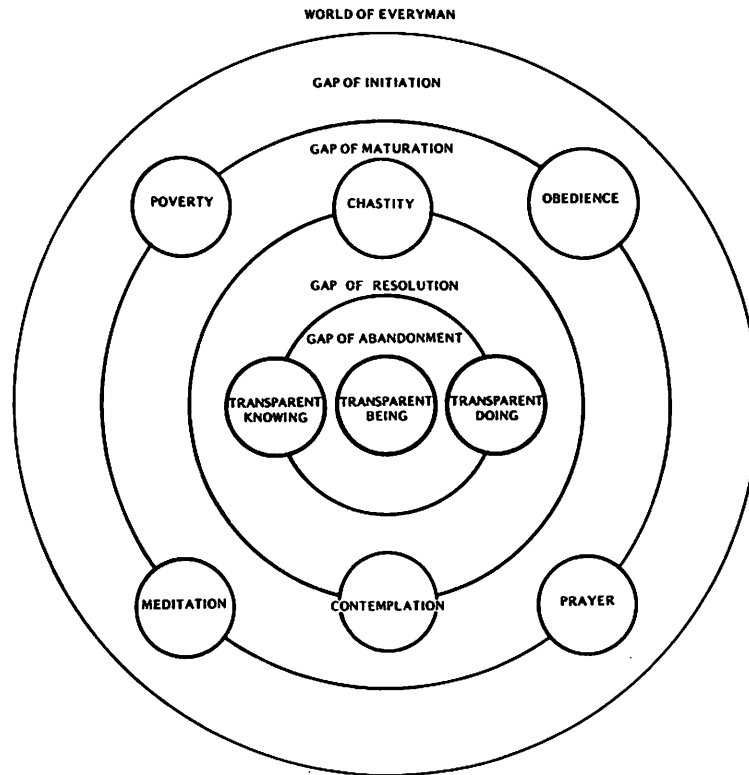


Then we saw that being was simply the radical intensification of knowing and doing, or the radical intensification of intensified knowing and intensified doing. So we began to articulate the intensification of knowing in the new religious mode, and began to articulate the double intensity that comes in doing, in the new social vehicle. And then—and this is *all* I've got to say this morning—the moment that the new religious mode began to get clear, and the new social vehicle began to get clear, it took only a flash for the bottom to blow again. Yes, it blew again, and the bottom of bottomlessness itself blew! And *that* is what is in the center of the charts. And you have to call that the intensification of the intensification of intensified knowing and doing. It is the double zero. It is the *nothing* upon which you and I are grounded. Now we call this transparent being.

Before I start, I have to groan out of myself in abstraction, then, what I mean by knowing and doing three times intensified. For me, just as the act before the act is the key to understanding prayer, so the being underneath any *be* that I can recognize in myself—and that is underneath any manifestation of presence that you can recognize in me—is what I mean by transparent being.

As transparency is to the solitaires, and as the sign is to the corporates, so sheer poetry is to the journeys, and the poetry underneath all poetry, or the story behind all

stories, is what I mean by transparent being. It is *sheer* spirit. It is *sheer* discontinuity. You have to sense the razor's edge of the psychotic abyss, upon which all of us are grounded. Underneath our freedom, underneath our sociality, underneath our detachment, underneath our engagement—all of which are the manifestations of the consciousness of consciousness of consciousness—is the sheer spirit that can be stated only in the rawest form of poetry.



Now the charts are not quite right, yet, but they look something like this. I think I'll put the categories in circles for a moment. Here is transparent being, transparent doing, transparent knowing, and this is chastity, contemplation, poverty, obedience, prayer, and meditation.

The way these are oriented is something, when you begin to think under the rubric of journey, for that's what we're dealing with: the journey to the center of the self, the journey to the center of the universe, the journey to the center of man, the journey to the center of God. That's the journey that brings us to where I want to talk.

I've left out relationships, because they're built in. Here are the four categories which I will use to discuss this, and I don't like them. The first is extreme discontinuity (for a long time I have really called this incarnational union). Under extreme discontinuity transparent being is interior universe (I don't like that), dark passage, awe-ful theophany, and eternal return. The second major category is unrepeatabe demonstration. The third one is impossible reduplication, and the last one is imputed being.

Now what you have here in the figure is the universe within. You have to let your mind loose at this moment as you never did in your life. When you think to the edge of the last galaxy of the universe, when you take that same distance and superimpose it upon your image of your interior consciousness of consciousness of consciousness, then you begin to get the feel of this inward universe.

There are, I think, something like four galaxies within. And in these galaxies, there are descernible universes. but the galaxies are not the important thing. The important thing is what I call the gaps. The outermost gap is because all of this is sitting in the world of Everyman. This is the man who is fixed rigidly on the surface by attachment to his petty idols. I mean, he is rigid. And if something doesn't happen, he is born rigid and he dies rigid. And he isn't going anywhere. He hasn't the slightest idea of what it means to be a human being. These are most people, as e. e. cummings likes to call them.

Now you have gaps here, and it's the gaps that are important. These circles are way stations, if you please, but the journey is the gap in which you pass from one galaxy to another. It's not the galaxy that's important, it's the passage that's important. I don't want to explain all of these, because I want to get to the centermost gap.

But maybe I can jut say a word about the first gap. The passing from the surface world of Everyman into the first galaxy is the passing of entry or initiation. This is the first awakening. This is what happens to some people in RS-I. It is why you teach RS-I. You're not out to give them any idea. You're out to catalyze the passage from the fixation on the surface into the galaxies that lead you to selfhood, that lead you to humanness itself. Now, all of these moments of discontinuity—and maybe *moment* is not the right word there—are times of wrenching. You and I can behold the outermost wrenching, because it is external, it is relatively small, and it has nothing of spiritual pain within it. This is why nobody can ever wake up without that deep wrenching, despite the stupidity of teachers like myself who cause trouble because they're stupid. The wrenching sometimes comes out as a mail fist in the face of the teacher. Sometimes it remains a mail fist—I've seen it take ten years before one got out of that wrenching. Yes, there's wrenching here.

The next wrench, the gap of maturation, I'm not much interested in now. That's where you decide to be God's person. And the wrenching here is much deeper than in the first gap.

The third gap is where you move on the journey of descent. It's a particularly painful one, and I don't know how many years I was in the throes of that. But I have a

little story to tell you. I think that for twenty years of my conscious life I never allowed anyone to touch me beyond this level. Now I don't know just why—maybe I didn't have guts enough to tell what I knew down inside of me. Maybe I was afraid that I would misuse it or other people would misuse it. I don't know.

I remember one time a colleague came into my office. He said he had a problem. And, you know, after you got through the superficialities of it, you knew that this wasn't a problem. It had to do with realms about which the boy knew nothing whatsoever. That fact rocked the bottom of my being. I took him aside and went out on the back steps of the far end of the building. I said, "Sit down. I never said this to anyone before, but I'm going to say it to you." Then I took him by the hand, if you please, and led him through what I have called for years, out of the book of Hebrews, the veil, "through the veil". And this is a moment of great suffering. I have an idea that there are times when he hates my guts, that he wishes that he could have remained where he had been and know nothing about what now he knows about and can no longer escape.

Now, I'm really interested in the innermost gap. It's the race to the center. That's what I want to talk about. What I'm talking about now has nothing whatsoever to do with the Word in Jesus Christ. Then I want to say it has *nothing* to do with anything *except* the Word in Jesus Christ.

The first stage of the journey begins with the hearing of the Word, "You are received. The world is good. The past is approved. And the future is radically open." Then, when you get to the center, the name written on that center was on the thigh of the One in white on the white horse, leading ten thousand times ten thousand. That name is W-O-R-D. Now you keep that in mind, so you don't get lost. You begin with the Word, and you meet the beginning in the end. And it's only after the encounter with the Word that you see that the great Companion on the Way, without which there would have been no way, was the Word.

Now this last descent our Fathers before us have called the *dark night of the soul*, the time in which man experiences his contingency with a force that not only wrenches, but racks his interior being. Language has not been invented extreme enough for the mystics in any culture to articulate what they meant by the gap that they called the *dark night of the soul*. And here nothing but poetry, the rawest poetry, could even begin to communicate. They have hundreds and thousands upon thousands of poetic words to talk about this. I think that they boiled them down into three basic images.

One is the image of the desert. The other one is the image of apostasy, or of dread, or better yet, of Hell. And the third one is the image of blindness, or darkness. Now let's see if we can get our minds around this.

The first image is that of aridity, or the arid desert. The fantastic pain, spiritual pain, in this experience is the double paradox that's present in it. You and I know about arid moments in our lives. We've had them again and again, when meaning in this or that collapses. It doesn't happen that way in this. What I'm talking about happens only when the rains are falling and the verdure is abundant. It happens only when not only are you full of meaning, but there is a plethora of meaning in your being.

Therefore the emptiness that comes is not experienced as a fading away or a seeping out, which is the way we experience aridity on the more superficial levels. You experience it as having been wantonly snatched from you. Filled with meaning, it disappears. The mystics all have been very clear about this. And there's no meaning left. you become, as it were, a meaningless particle of dust, spinning in space itself.

The second image is fearful dread. It comes at the moment when you can point to great *do's* that you've been involved in, at the moment when your lucidity seems that it has never been there before, at the moment when you are more clear about a relationship to the mystery and that you're grounded in God, at the moment when your theology seems to be just dancing for you. It's in that moment that the experience of indescribable dread attacks you. It's not as if there were a collapse. It's as if they'd been attacked before your eyes, and in the attack they disappear. You are left racked with self-doubt in the midst of fantastic confidence. You are left in the midst of no longer being able to sense God's presence at the moment when you have clarity that you'd never had before about the presence of God. You grasp yourself as hurled into apostasy. You doubt God. But you not only doubt God, you see Him, at the moment when He's the Father of All, as the demonic force behind all demonic forces. The atheist to you now seems like a saint. And what you'd better be very clear about is that the spiritual life has been developed as you've never known it before. Why, you could go to the board and talk about universes within, and you could talk about prayer with a power that you never dreamed would ever be given to you. Then in the midst of that fullness, it all becomes a pile of manure. Even this fullness becomes a nothing. I tell you there's a sense of being naked that you'd never thought was possible.

The last image is blindness. It's not only Hell, in which you're cut off from God, but blindness. this comes at a moment when the vision, the cause, is more real than it's ever been in your life. And it isn't as if you get tired and the vision grows dim. It's as if, in the full light of the vision, pitch darkness is dropped over it all. It's almost as if you stand there gazing at the blazing sun in the midst of pitch darkness. And the vision is gone. This is the racking that our fathers called the *dark night of the soul*.

Now for the center. In the midst of that arid desert, in the midst of that burning Hell, cut off from the Father, in the midst of that blindness, you levitate. We were joking recently. I believe that the moment that you and I could be utterly dependent upon the forces in the universe, we would levitate. None of us speak much anymore about the times we've levitated. But I suggested to some that we all have levitated. But we don't speak about this, either—not out of humility, but because in our day we've lost the poetry.

You levitate. For you were standing here and you didn't move, you didn't walk, but suddenly you woke up here—and the darkness is intensified. It is *pitch black* darkness at the center. And as you stand there in that blazing light which is sheer darkness, you see what you cannot see, a figure, the center of the center. And you say, "Aha! Is it a stone? Now that I am at the center of the consciousness of consciousness, what's there? Is it a stone?" And it seems as if you are drawn closer, and you peer at it: it's no stone. The Aborigines in Australia would like to be here this morning. You say,

"Is it a tree, the Tree of Life, maybe?" You're drawn closer, and you peer into the darkness, "It's no tree!" And you're drawn another step, and you say, "It's *nothingness!* That's what ought to be at the center!" And you say, "No! It's not nothingness!" And you come a step closer and behold! It's a man! It could have been naught else. Once you behold it, it is a man! I mean a common, ordinary, dirty, smelly *man*. It could be naught else.

This is what the mystics have talked about in every culture when they have talked about the union of reality with the center of the interior universe. It's a man! Is it Gautama? Yes! Is it Moses? Yes! Is it John Smith? Yes! Is it Sally McGillicuddy? Yes! Is it Henry What-ever-his-name-is? Oh, you bet it is! And so you're drawn another step closer. And you peer, and behold, it is The Man. I mean Jesus. I don't mean Christ. I mean Jesus! You remember when they came to Gethsemane to get him? Jesus said, "Who are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." He says, "I'm the man." You get that story? At the heart is Jesus. Not Christ...Jesus. Oh, I don't care whether you want to use other poetry. At the center of the universe is the figure that represents *everyman*, or consciousness of consciousness of consciousness in all of its fullness.

And then - you won't believe what I'm going to tell you now: it's sort of like a Martian science fiction thing-a-ma-jig. For you see, down in the center of that figure of Jesus, a little light glows, in the midst of the pitch darkness that is bright light. And you notice exactly at the same time a kind of circle of light surrounds him, and the light grows stronger, and brighter, and hotter, and you step back, for there's the key: the Mystery shines through a common, ordinary man. Then as you stand there, you hear for the first time in your life. You behold it with your own eyes -- what Jesus meant when he said, "I am in the Father (I am in the light of the Mystery), and the Father is in Me."

But you're not through. For you notice a strange glowing in yourself, and you step back up to the figure, and do you know whose face you see within the face of Jesus? Your own unrepeatable, crummy, broken, perverted face. No, that's not quite right. It's the face of that crummy, perverted one who has passed through the dark night of the soul, in which he is stripped of everything behind which he can hide his utter contingency. The same old crummy me, but collapsed into a heap of shaking palsy. The mystics called the dark night of the soul the *time of purging*. But you say that only on the other side. For you know that you cannot behold the meaning of even spiritual poetry, even awarenesses that are rare. It's *your* face. And then for the first time in your life you understand. And because you say, "Now, I have beheld it with my own eyes," you understand the second part of what Jesus said: "Father, as I am in you, and you are in me, so I will be in them, and they will be in me."

What does it mean to have the eschatological hero in your being? There's nothing mystical about this, nothing ethereal about this. Peter said in the midst of transfiguration (no magic in transfiguration), "Let's build three tabernacles." But Peter's not the one who said that. *I* said it. I wanted to stay. And there in the midst of that wonder of wonders, I offered a prayer that I might never go back. But I got sent

out. He did do that for me. Now, I like the word companion, for when he sent you back, he sent you to be a companion for mankind—and *nothing else!*

That reminds me of the great story about Gautama, the Buddha. He experienced what you and I have been talking about, and, therefore, he was taken to Nirvana. At the gates of Nirvana he said, "No! As long as there is one ounce of human suffering upon the earth, even though I am worthy of Nirvana, I will not accept it." And so he returned to walk among men, and he walks to this day, serving suffering humanity, being a companion, if you please, of man.

Now this sending means that you get born all over again in a way that you couldn't even dream you could be born all over again. You are born of a Virgin. That means that you have your commission, and that you have no right except those papers with you. But being born of a Virgin is like what Luther meant when he said, "That babe in the manger was actually a man on the cross." Your commission is so rigorous that there is no possible way for you to avoid your death on the cross.

Transparent being is a state of being that everybody experiences. It's not for the few mystics—I don't even like that word. It's not for the rare ones, though you're going to have the rare ones. I think the Roman Catholic Church through the years overdid the contemplative aspect of this. There will be the rare ones, who can make what I've said this morning sound like utter prose. They are professionals in the sense that they must be signs to the rest of us. But I am talking about a state that is in every man all the time. But then I am saying more. I am saying as I tried to say of meditation, that when we use the term *transparent being*, we are talking about a state of being to which radical consciousness is brought. That's a state within a state.

This happens to us long before we have any images or poetry to say to ourselves that it happened. When you come back, when you come to be the companion, you carry the scars the rest of your life. Night and day, there is a bit of desert, of aridity. The rest of your life, day after day, there's a touch of apostasy, of Hell itself, within the deeps of your being. Day after day, for the rest of your life, there's a touch of darkness that never goes away. these are the signs. And then there comes moments when there's a shudder—just a shudder. And there come moments when there's just the touch of a glow. And then there come moments in which there's just the touch of the tensing, as when you're having guru conversations—no, as when any life situation begins to bleed its inner meaning, and you remember the journey that you were on and know that you're still on that journey, and know that as long as consciousness is consciousness, there is an eternal return. In the beginning was the Word, and in the ending was the Word, and all along the way you walk with Jesus in whom the Father is and who is in the Mystery. Amen.

II

*Grace be unto you and peace.
From God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.
Amen.*

These lectures are an effort to ground the new religious mode charts in humanness. This job is far more important than renewing a local congregation. Now I didn't put that right. This *is* the renewal of the local congregation. It's going to take you forty years. The work you have to do in this area is overwhelming. I think you young ones are going to be the ones who have to do it, and the younger you are perhaps the better. You don't have to unlearn so much as those of us who are older. And you are immediate to this arena, whereas some of us have to struggle like crazy even to come within spitting distance of it. I suspect that I'm tangentially dealing with the relationship of the gospel to what we've been talking about.

The most important thing for us to remember about this area, I believe, is that it has nothing in the first instance to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ. It has nothing in the first instance to do with Christian theology. In the first part of this talk I attempted to describe the blown out bottom of humanness, or extremely intensified consciousness. When you deal in this area, you have at your disposal only raw poetry. It cannot be done any other way, just raw poetry.

I got an unsigned note in the mail which said, "Mysticism is idolatry." I didn't think that would have been too much to sign your name to. Now I happen to believe that also—if you get mysticism mixed up with the gospel. Now very obviously you make use of mysticism, the poetry of mysticism. The reason why you make use of mysticism is that it's the mystics—what we call mystics—and the mystics alone who have experimented in these deeps. Or to put it another way, anyone who experiments in these deeps gets that tag put upon him.

It's very interesting that in every culture there are those who have set themselves apart to explore in this area. The concept of Muntu, out of the black man's invention of humanness, is the dimension that I was talking about in the first part of this talk. The human sacrifice in the Latin American culture was dealing in this particular area. I do not need to say to some of you young ones that marijuana was used within these rituals. My quarrel on the dope issue and even on marijuana is not a moral one, first of all. It's an ontological one. This is a cheap way to heighten consciousness without having to assume responsibility for living in heightened consciousness. That's the ontological tragedy of this. When this was used in a social context that was highly symbolic relative to the everyday life of a people, this was something entirely different from what the two-bit long-hairs are indulging in in our day. They do not know it, but they are scarring their spirit deeps, and some of them can never possibly recover, even though on the outside they may look as normal as some of you look.

This is obviously present in the Tao out of China. One of the very interesting things about this, which took centuries to be accomplished, is that the ontological and

the practical aspects of the Way were held together. And, in a way, I want to talk about the practical part of it.

But you have to go to India to find the experts of the experts. The term *Upanishad* literally meant the disciple putting his ear up to the lips of the guru. That's interesting, isn't it? Then the guru pronounced into that ear the secret of life. Those of you who are familiar with that culture know good and well what those words were. They were *Tat tuam asi*. You ask, "Guru, what's the secret of life?" And he says, "*That thou art.*" And it's all over. You have the secret: "That thou art."

I have deep quarrels with the mystics on their own ground. The first and major one is that they have attempted to make the journey into a specific experience instead of seeing the dark night and the illumination as what the deeps of human existence are about all the time. You have pretty good evidence that they're wrong about this, for when I, with my poetry, was describing this in the first part of this talk, everyone of you was sitting there saying, "Yes, listen to that. I know all about it." You might have preferred another kind of poetry in order to articulate it, but you knew all about it. When I was describing the illumination, you were saying, "Yeah, yeah." I think that one of the great experiences that we've had in our order is when we studied Teresa of Avila's *Interior Castle* and struggled several months with her to get from Mansion One to Mansion Seven. The shocking thing was that when we got to the end of it, everyone in our group knew what she was talking about. Do you hear that? It's describing what life is, what human existence is, what consciousness is beneath the bottom, or what heightened consciousness is.

My second quarrel with the mystics on their own ground is that they say only the aristocracy can know of this and participate in it rather than seeing that this is a description of an *unstate* of being for every man. To the end of time there are going to be certain individuals set aside who use themselves on behalf of all men to explore these deeps with a kind of scientific thoroughness that most would not care to give themselves to.

I want us to go down into the *beyond the bottom* once again. Remember it's pitch dark in the midst of overwhelming light. You also have to get some image, like utter stillness. This comes again and again in the great classical discussions. To get hold of that I think you have to start out on the surface galaxy. You see, I'm standing on the earth. It's moving like anything, but I don't experience motion with it. So when you get the first glimpse into the galaxy beyond, that galaxy seems as if it's going ten times the speed of light. This is why life becomes intensely frightening the moment a little chink comes in the armor. This is why they have to crucify the occasioner of that chink, and the sooner they do it the more easily they are going to sew up that chink.

If you start out to do this job, you are not going to make friends. You are going to make enemies. Let's be sure we make them for eschatological reasons, not for temporal stupidity.

If you participate in that gap and land on this first inner galaxy (poverty, obedience, meditation and prayer), it doesn't seem to be moving at all. But the moment you get a glimpse into the next galaxy, that seems like it's going a hundred times the

speed of light. Then when you get there, it's not moving (you just test your own experience here). But that center is going so fast that there are no metaphors capable of describing that speed. It is speed beyond capacity. then when you levitate there in the midst of darkness, you experience utter stillness in the midst of fantastic speed—utter stillness.

I don't want to take time to talk about the peace that passes all human understanding. You talk to yourself a little bit about that.

The other thing you're aware of is utter silence in the midst of unbelievable noise. What I think that noise is coming from... You know I had to have a little medial work done on myself recently. Afterward I went away to a suburb outside of Chicago. For three weeks I lived in a house all by myself. The first week I was there I knew that something dreadful was wrong. I couldn't figure it out. After about seven days I became aware that what was wrong was that it was quiet. Then I knew the horrible noise that you live in in the midst of the ghetto, twenty-four hours a day. What I think that noise at the center is coming from is, first of all, the screams, the cries of all humanity that ever lived, live now, and ever shall live. It's the scream of the ape. Then mixed with that is the rawest noise of off-key angels who are rejoicing over one human being experiencing the center of consciousness itself. But in the midst of that noise is utter silence.

I have little patience with people who have been around me and who want to experiment with silence, for I am not persuaded that they knew the ontological meaning of silence. You don't play with these symbols, or they'll burn you alive. You have to deal with the fundamental meaning of them. This has to do, I believe, with the center of consciousness. Any other kind of playing there is dangerous almost beyond description.

In the midst of that blackness and painful stillness and painful silence comes your commission. I have suggested that you'll want to stay. The fascination fights the dread, and if fascination didn't win you and I wouldn't be here. Can you in your imagination think of that first burst of consciousness into history? I always feel it as unconsciousness oozing up through the ooze of life, and suddenly consciousness dawns. The head pops up. And that is the invention of humanness. But the first experience is overwhelming dread, and that's why I suspect consciousness broke into being. Many apes broke into the kind of consciousness I'm talking about and were so frightened by the dread of it they disappeared again. How many times did this happen before what we call man finally stood? But along with that dread was fantastic fascination. It's almost as if the fascination is about the dread itself. And that drew some to stand. Here you and I are. In the midst of that experience comes our commission. We are sent. *Not wanting to go, we are sent.*

I've sometimes described this experience as the primordial colloquy before the foundation of the world, when I received my orders. The commission, when you open it, is ever the same. You are sent back to do nothing but love. That word, *love*, I've fought for twenty years. I have not been able to stand the moan of it because of what the degenerate 19th Century Church did with that category relative to the Christian

faith, which occasioned the Church to baptize every kind of psychologistic sensitivity that's been attempting to engulf and destroy mankind since at least the turn of the century. That's one of the words that I've put out on the clothesline to dry—for a hundred years as far as I was concerned—until it got aired out a little bit. For when you reduce the Christian faith into temporal consideration of one another, you haven't even begun to hear that "God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son."

I get irritated with people who think the Christian faith is reconciliation. By that they mean that if certain people don't like each other, you reconcile them. No, that's the way you destroy humanity. But the gospel has been reduced in it. You bet we are reconcilers. But we reconcile the world to God, if you please. And I want to bear witness again to something that you need witness borne to—that when one is reconciled to God, there isn't any trouble between man and man. The New Testament is shockingly clear at this point. You are sent back with one mission: to love.

Try to get inside Jesus' skin for just a bit. He was sent to *be* God's love. He wasn't sent to *say* God's love. He wasn't sent to *do* God's love. He was sent *as* God's love. His job was to be a zombie, if you please—just walking around being divine love. That was his commission. Now, it's pretty clear what happens to divine love. It always get a stake through its heart. Always. That is part of the commission. It isn't that he was to be divine love even if it killed him. Divine love is precisely that, if you please.

If you're able to appreciate that just a little bit, then you can understand what the commission of the center is for everyone who dares to visit it. If you don't want this commission, don't get very close to that whirlpool: when it sucks you in, you finally hit the bottom. For the commission was exactly the commission that was given to Jesus—exactly the commission that you are to return as God's love. That's your one vocation. That means that you pinch me if this is my commission and you never find me. For I am God's love in the world. The responsibility that you experience is that you have utter vocation, that you have absolute vocation. You'd secretly laugh, I hope, at anybody who asks you if you were a lawyer, a doctor or some asinine priest of a clergyman. Why, that doesn't even come in the same ballpark as your vocation. Your vocation is to be divine love. This is *the* indicative of your life, which makes clear at every point what the imperative is upon you.

You can put this in a mundane way. I heard somebody say today that everybody in this room has to be great. I want to put it stronger than that. Everybody in this room has to be a great deal more than great, those who are returnees from the center of being itself. One way you experience this is that you can no longer sit around and wait for somebody else to be the Benedict, the Thomas Aquinas, the Martin Luther or the Gautama in our time. Do you know what you have to do? You have to decide that you are it. You cannot wait any longer. Every situation that you find yourself in, until the day nobody finds you anymore, calls for a Guatama. I want to push this further. You cannot sit around and wait for a Jesus. You must become a Jesus. When you see this, you know that the indicative is very clear. You already have your commission. You already have been assigned to be Jesus in history. That's what you were sent back for and for no other reason.

I wonder if I'm making this clear. If anyone dares to experience the raw heightening of consciousness, this is his fate from then on. But when anyone receives a commission at the bottom of his being, he has to make a decision about it. Those of you who know New Testament theology know that there has been a dispute through the ages as to whether Jesus was the Christ before he came or whether he became the Christ, for instance, at his baptism. That's not talking about abstract metaphysics. It's trying to talk about humanness. Jesus arrived from the bowels of being, and when you arrive from the bowels of being, you are sent with this commission. Then you have to make a life or death decision about that. Let's say that it was at his baptism and the time in the wilderness that he made the decision to be what he was sent to be.

I wonder if we are not talking about the roughest decision that anybody has to make. One of the most amazing implications of this to me is that here is the primary hidden principle in any understanding of contextual ethics. My field is ethics and my mind goes there so frequently. There are no norms in any situation. You have to create the norms out of which you forge your concrete act, or decision, if you please. But the hidden principle there is an unlimited affirmation of life. This is the day that love -- I don't mean this stuff that comes over pulpits Sunday after Sunday like one bucket of slop after the other, I mean divine love -- is the foundation of all contextual ethics. You were sent to do nothing but love this world in an unlimited sense, and all of it from the beginning to the end.

How do you talk more concretely about this kind of love? It is just opening up every future that you meet. That's divine love. It is pronouncing absolution on every past that you meet. It is also filling every present full of the meaning that every present has. I suppose that's what's love is. If you want some other kind of love, it's here by the hundreds. But the human soul has a propensity, a desire, for the *divine* love that is so deep and so broad that it's incomprehensible. I approach boasting just a touch here. I was given a situation in which I had a chance to love the Aboriginal people in Australia. One of the great joys of my life is that I wrote a bit of poetry, terrible poetry, but it said to them the meaning of their past, including the brutality of the white man which is a part of their past. It gave new meaning for them. Then it painted a new possibility of the future relative to the black men across the face of the world. And it laid out the meaning of the present in terms of the demands that are here. That's what I mean by divine love. That's all Jesus did. He opened the future, made new the past, and filled the present full of meaning. That's our vocation.

The tragedy of this is absolute failure. One thing that has annoyed me since I was a young man is when the Methodists wanted to take all metaphors out of the hymnal that seemed to depreciate man, such as "such a worm as I." He is a perpetual failure. He is born failure. But mark you well: that's eschatological failure and not temporal. I become deeply irritated at what I call the "failure mentality" in some of my colleagues. A rather classic example of this is when they would lay out a series of courses for a quarter. Many of them would cancel. Then the next quarter they would cancel. But this failure mentality reached its climax one day when one of my colleagues came bouncing into a meeting with a gleam of joy in his eye, and said, "Statistically this

quarter we have had fewer cancellations than last." I hit the fan, and he'll never forget that I hit the fan. A revolutionary never fails. The reason he doesn't fail is that he accepts the unavoidable failure at the center of his being. Any saint knows that he experiences his sinfulness in depths of which the "un-saint" couldn't even dream. I like to say that the further up the mountain of lucidity you get, the further you can see the valley of sin in your own life. You are doomed to failure.

This is part of the struggle that Kazantzakis talks about. The struggle is to win what you set out to do in the awareness of the eschatological failure at the center of your being. That's the struggle that he is talking about.

I like to think of the new religious mode charts as an electric grid with lights going on. In the image that the Church built of Jesus, all those lights were burning, interrelated at full power. In some people those lights blink. And there are great hunks of them that aren't functioning. That's what I mean by failure.

This, I think, is the key to what our fathers have called spiritual suffering. It's the grave humiliation of knowing that you were sent to be divine love and discovering yourself and unavoidable failure in carrying out the commission. This is the spiritual suffering, it seems to me, at the heart of man.

I want to say just a word about the imitation of Christ. Some of you may remember the book *In His Steps*, published the turn of the century: "What would Jesus do?" Or some of you may remember *The Magnificent Obsession*: "Don't let your left hand know what your right is doing." I tell you, what we did to poor Jesus in the last part of the last century and the first part of this century . . . we made him into something less than an effeminate boy. Somebody told me that in a Buddhist temple around here there was Gautama's picture and Sallman's *Head of Christ*. You can almost see why they picked that, can't you? We have made him into a superficial, bourgeois man, into a superficial, pious, bourgeois man. Sure, you imitate Jesus but you be sure you get clear what you are imitating. The church has seen him as the unrepeatable sign of the center.

Jesus was a man of prayer. That means that he was his own man. I like the illustration of Lazarus. You remember Jesus was going to get him out of the tomb and a lot of people came by to see him do so, and he says, "Lazarus, come out." And Lazarus didn't come out. So he says, "Lazarus, come out!" And Lazarus didn't come out. Then he says, "Please, Lazarus, come out." The people got discouraged, and along about midnight they left. Then Jesus got serious. He says, "Now look, Lord. Either you bring Lazarus out of that tomb, or you're going to have to slay me." Well I mean, the Lord got busy. And Lazarus came out of there like that. This man was his own man. He prayed.

This man meditated. He grasped himself as the federal agent of all of Israel. He was sociality. They called him the second Adam. *A detached man*: here was a character you couldn't buy. *An engaged man*: you remember when the Greeks came to him just before it was all over and said, "If you hang around here, they're going to crucify you. Come on up to Greece, and you'll beat the rap." Jesus replied, "For this cause I came into the world." Shall I go on with contemplation and chastity? He was the

manifestation of sheer being. That's why the Church called him *the man*. There is where meditation comes, it seems to me.

There is one more thing I want to talk about here, that is what I call **imputed being**. I have great trouble with this. You remember the theology of imputed righteousness? We Methodists and Roman Catholics have never shined up to that very much. We like to talk about actual righteousness. Briefly, the great poetry is this: Jesus took all my sins and put them on himself and handed me back all his righteousness. These people saw something in humanness. And when I call it imputed being, I mean something like this: Being takes within itself my unbeing and makes Being out of it, and bestows upon my unbeing sheer Being. This is fundamentally where the Word comes into focus. If you look at your own life you can see that. Here you *be* in the midst of all of your unbeing. It's as if Being takes your crummy unbeing and makes Being out of it and bestows the possibility of Being upon you.

This exemplar stands at the very heart of what I am talking about here. It was within that fluke of history that this kind of awareness came with fantastic clarity. Put another way, it means that the Word is that without which you and I would not dare to make the inward journey. The Word is that without which we would not dare to take the next step. The Word is that which enables us to take the next step. When you say, *All that is is good*, and *All that I am is accepted*, and *All that ever will be is significant*, and *All that ever was is approved*, you are talking about the heart of Being, which we experience as imputed Being--that all of our unbeing is absorbed by Being. All Being is bestowed upon our unbeing at any moment. That's how, it seems to me, the Christ happening is key relative to the categories of the new religious mode.