

Joseph Matthews

Lecture - Southeast Asian Trip

I bring you the uneasy dreadfilling peace of the east. This is the first trip I have been on where I didn't learn anything. In the sense that almost every trip that I have been on before, I was out to do. I didn't see anything that I hadn't seen before; and, I didn't learn anything that I didn't know before in terms of the cultures of the east. And yet those things happened to me.

I have never gotten over my experience of the rain at Victoria Falls in Africa. And a sad part of the report of my colleagues who went to Victoria Falls is that they were there during the dry season.

Rain on this trip moved in on my being in a new way. Through rain I became aware for the first time that my close friends in the Communion of Saints only addressed me on the ontological dimension of life. Being an incurable moralist that is sort of a rude awakening to me. And it's the rain that helped me see that.

I began to yearn for rain. Everyday I would look first to see if maybe today would be the day it would rain. In the midst of that I became aware of the Mystery in a way I had never experienced it before. Because when I was yearning for rain, it finally became clearer to me that I was yearning for the Mystery. And that is an odd statement coming from me, for all my life I have wanted to love God and never have known how. Had it not been for these years of colleagues of all kinds, through the scriptures, and through the radical interpretation of the scripture in our day through which I became clear that God loved me, then I'm sure the possibility of loving God would never have been there. But long before I knew much about God loving me, I wanted to love God. And the rain somehow helped me grasp in my yearning....no it was deeper than yearning, it was an agonizing outreaching for rain....what it means to fall in love with God.

For the rain came to me as the mystery of new possibility. And in an extremely heavy sense, I am looking out across the world with a new sense of frightening and wonderful possibility.

I found two bits of verbalism that spoke to me deeply while I was on the trip. I spoke in the Great Methodist Church in Kuala Lumpur in their first service after they had discontinued it because of the riots. The text that I used was from the third chapter of Amos which has been so meaningful in my past. "Does evil befall a city save the Lord is in it." And some translations put it a little more strongly...."does evil befall a city, the Lord hath not done it." What I experienced on this trip made these words of long ago alive and filled with fire.

The second kind of verbalism came from the first part of a soliloquy from Hamlet. I'm not sure I have the right words but it goes something like this...."to be or not to be." And, I don't think some of the psychological interpretations in the past are adequate anymore. "To be or not to be, that is the

question. Whether it is nobler in the minds of men who suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of trouble and by opposing in them." And that same way or another is sort of what Being has done to me. It's placed me in the dilemma of whether you just say...."O my God."

D. T. Niles said to me that we in the west are too active and that we have to learn the passive quality of the east. And I listened to him you know...."is it nobler in the mind of men to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous....or....and I shoved back at him. I said yes I think I've come to appreciate that but then the active side has to be there. But the answer to that question is not simply easy if you put it in the theological context, for certainly you and I have to learn in a new way to be waiters on the Lord....waiters on the Lord. We have to learn all over again that the Lord is going to do what the Lord is damn well going to do....just period. And some way or another we have to gear ourselves into it; but, yet on the other side of that must we not take up arms and risk ourselves? I think both of these have to be done.

And this some way or another was in the rain and was tied to the awareness that Kuala Lumpur shoved upon me. You always have to say when riots break out in the city, earthquakes come, wars repeat themselves...."doth evil befall a city save the Lord is in it," That's the rain for me.

Now I want to talk a bit about what I saw in the socio-political area in the east.

But first of all, I was deeply impressed with the fact that I was sort of crushed in a delightful way by the reports of the colleges. I felt I could hardly move as one after another piled up; and, it made me aware of the fact that the established church more than ever before is in trouble. And it is not the kind of trouble where you want to have that tiny grin like I told you so. It only brings out pathos and compassion out of you. The church is in trouble. And almost everywhere you go they say....well here is the scepter....you be the church.

Roman Catholic Arch Bishop who was one of the sponsors of our seminary academy in Singapore came to hear me speak on the corporate life and the new religious mode. He sent for me the next day. I sat in his office and listened to him pour his heart out on the horrible problems he is facing and particularly with the Religious Orders. They have become so fascinated with doing out in the midst of the world that they no longer are performing their religious offices. And he knew that all this going on out in the world is utterly doomed without the symbols of the religious dimension.

And the second thing that interested him was our corporate life, for corporateness has gone out of the Orders almost entirely. He invited me and two or three of our families to come at his sponsorship to Taipei and join two or three Catholic lay families and assign a couple of priests and nuns to make up a house as a sign and a symbol of the new order. And I could give you many more illustrations of the fear in the churches of the east where they too would say...."here, take our crown if you can wear it." The

time is now at hand for any group of disciplined religious to be the perpetual revolutionaries for the alteration of civilization.

And I've said before other old war horses in the struggle for the renewal of the church that their hour was at hand. And I repeat that again to those of you who have given up. And I have some appreciation of what you have given up in terms of your family life and in terms of your economic security in life and in terms of your accomplishments that could have been in life. And I want to say to you it would seem to me that the rain that struck me was whispering the hour has come in which some fruit perhaps even you shall see of what you have been willing to lay aside for the sake of humanity and for the glory of God.

The east is filled with deep tension it will not get over save it brings forth a new baby and that means there is tragic suffering ahead.

I mentioned in Korea....you probably are aware of Mr. Pah who is a puppet of the United States of America that we put in after the student's had laid down their lives to have a democratic man at the head of that government....is now shoving through an alteration in the constitution whereby he remains until he dies. And the students will move for they have an iron heel upon them like the last time they moved against the type of tyranny the USA and the rest of the Western World has executed in South Korea. And some of you have seen the grave where 148 of them lie buried together. There is tension there....deep tension.

And then you move to Japan where the students have closed up every major university with boards and barbed wire and the government is scared to death. And to say that about the government of Japan is to say something because Japan has always ruled its own people with a fist....period. There is tension there and I doubt if the great exposition at Osaka comes off there, for the students say it will not.

You move to Taiwan and meet the great old revolutionary underground man who was desparately ill in the hospital and I couldn't go to see him for they said if I even dared to go in that vicinity of that hospital the Ecumenical Institute would never set foot on that shore again. And the other man whom some of you meant here who wrote those documents which we have here privately is now under twenty-four hour surveillance. There is deep tension there.

I was at the tail end of the riots in Kuala Lumpur and while we were under curfew I smiled a little bit at the Barley's, for I told them they had volunteered to go there to get out of the damned riots in Chicago and they walked right back into them. There were over 600 people killed and some 600 more very seriously or critically wounded. And most of them Chinese as the Malays began to mow them down. It is not a race problem but a cultural problem because you see you have two great cultures over there. And it is even deeper than that for man across this world is sick and tired of the kind of social structures that now prevail in our times. And no matter where you go the sign is on the wall

that those structures are not going to long endure.

What I'm trying to say is that the revolutionary hour is closer than I ever dreamed of. I could talk about Australia and the beginning of the student movement there. And then in India I was under curfew once again and that situation is not just a linguistic problem by any means whatsoever. The students are on the move. And although the people in Bombay deny it I saw streets that I used to walk on barricaded with large numbers of police milling around in that area. I sensed problems in New Delhi and was warned not to go into Pakistan at this particular moment because of the tension. I could go on and on with this but the one thing I want to communicate is that tension is ripe and deep within the east.

I then came back to New York and spent twenty-four hours reading the private files that had to do with the Black Manifesto and our dear friend Foreman. I am not interested in the particular manifesto, for I don't think he is going to win. But the point is that he is going to win whether he wins or not. That job is done and I mean done. The thing that impressed me most within it was the kind of concrete revolutionary strategies and the ideology behind the strategy which Foreman himself is a little uncomfortable about. But the point is that every single major congregation in each denomination in this country is scared to death. And one indication is that if you walked into 475 and said I would like to become the head of the Methodist Church or the National Council, they would grab you like a hotcake. Now I say all this to say something that is very brief and that is that the hour of the New Social Vehicle has come. And I mean for us. I remember that I used to say, from time to time that I was hoping that the moment would come very quickly when we could get rid of all this religious nonsense. That time has come now.

But before we look at the NSV, let me back up and say that this tension in the east made me aware and in a deeper sense of the sickness in the west; for that tension in the east is the sickness in the west. The malaise in the west has filtered across the whole world so that wherever you go you meet that malaise. Well, the tension in the east made me aware of that sickness and it helped me I think to understand a little bit more clearly how you would put your finger on that sickness. And I put it in these two ways: In the midst of developing our fantastic gift of rational know how....and it is fantastic and you have to get that said for no other nation has any opportunity ever of participating in the future save it embraces this fantastic gift of bourgeois man in the west....we developed a malaise deep within ourselves. The first manifestation of this is we lost our capacity to be sensitive to the raw edge of humanness which is over and beyond our rational capacity to organize that sensitivity. Do you hear that? That is we lost our capacity to stand immediately present to the utter irrationality within life. Now when I say this I am talking about a sociological phenomena, for any kind of a NSV is going to be built out of the recovery of that kind of sensibility. The dichotomy between the church and the state that we developed in our country is a part of our sickness. There is no healthy social

vehicle that is not grounded upon genuine deep religious spiritual reality. Anybody in this room who does not know what it means to be an utterly religious human being is going to be useless in terms of altering any type of structures for the well being of mankind except as one more body to stick before some outburst of the machine gun. God uses you in that fashion too I suppose. That is our first sickness.

Our second sickness is our loss of sense of our sociality or of a relatedness to human beings. This whole nonsense of psychology that we created was an artificial means of therapy for this deep malaise. You go to a head shrinker, some pastoral counsellor, therapy group or sensitivity business because of this deep malaise that we no longer have relationships with one another. And one of the tragedies which I screamed against is that of the western church bringing these young pastors from the east over here to train them in pastoral counselling. They go back to the east where hell that isn't there problem at all....going around pastoral counselling.

One of the reasons we idolized our particular kind of fragmented family and made it sacred was the same reason. Our family that we hang on to and seems so sacred is but a manifestation of that deep malaise within the west. Therefore every family does nothing but kill itself and crush every member in it. Now if this analysis be somewhat true, then it is pretty obvious that God raised up centuries and centuries ago the eastern world primarily to minister unto this exact kind of illness.

There is nobody in this world who knows more about the immediate presence to beyond the rational than the people in India. When you see on a college campus that a Guru from India finds the doors open, this is one indication of it. Now mind you there is great sickness in that I am quite well aware of that. But it is also feelings beyond powers to articulate the direction of where therapy is. And the Beatles going to India...now there is a deep sickness in the Beatles, but behind that sickness is a correct kind of an intuition. These people understand these kinds of depths as you and I never would. Its got nothing to do with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It has to do with what it means to be a human being. And the second therapy comes out of China. And if you and I take seriously what you and I know about the Ur images what I am saying now hardly needs to be said. It is just clear that whatever else the Chinese developed it was the sense of relationship. The whole system was built on the awareness that we are related and that you don't go around trying to relate.... you are related. And that is what it means to be a human being.

Now what has to be done is the practical channels have to be built of where those kind of insights can genuinely flow into the west. I see no other possibility for the west participating in the new kind of MSV in depth that has to be built for tomorrow unless those channels are constructed. Now there may be other ways in which these can be built but I don't see any other way save the church of Jesus Christ. I don't see any other possibility. This is our task and it is not an easy one. For we superimposed our sickness on the east itself and made them ashamed

of their great and fantastic gifts that we are now in dire need of. I've many times said that sometimes I think I know more about Hindu culture than a hell of a lot of Hindues and certainly Christian Hindues so called. And the same is true of the Chinese people who are expatriots that you and I come into contact with. The first step that has to be taken is that they have to recover the awareness of the greatness of their own gifts. They have to reappropriate them.

The second task is to transpose those gifts into the 20th century. There is no going back in history. There is only going forward. We only use the past in understanding and creating the future. That's the transposition of the past and that's what these people have to do. I would like to suggest that even those people you meet in India or the Western Pacific out of their fears which we in the west have helped them create, deny this; but, on mainland China I think this is exactly what is going on and that's the transposition of the fantastic gifts that have come out of that people into the post modern world. And God help India. I suspect that the great seething that is going on there is going to explode and if it explodes the streets are going to run wild with blood. The Indian is a calm guy except when he gets excited and then he's a wild man. And the British have reason to understand that. In those moments human life seems to mean nothing to him whatsoever. I think one of the reasons for this is that he has lost any sense of the wonder of his own gifts and he has lost that through which he can participate in creating the future.

If the church is to be those channels, then the church has to be renewed and it has to be renewed in the east. Church renewal in the east is for the sake of the civilizing process....and indeed religion was created as I grasp it only for the sake of the great human drama or play of mankind. We need to remember that church renewal was actually brought to be in the west but it did not really begin in the west. It was not occasioned in the west; it was occasioned in the east. One of the things that I guess you and I always tend to forget is that the Christian Church came out of the east not out of the west ...and we have to learn that with our bowels and not simply with our minds. And the present renewal of the church came out of the east....on the practical side; for I believe within Protestantism church renewal began the last part of the last century when the so called younger churches of China rose up and raised the question that we haven't gotten over even in this day....why is there Baptist Christianity, Methodist Christianity, Anglican Christianity and Roman Catholic Christianity? We in the west didn't have an answer and we haven't got an answer to this day. That was the beginning of church renewal in the west with the ecumenical movement or awakening so called. On the theoretical side it came out of the east also for the kind of intellectual resuscitation that has taken place among God's people that bear the name of Jesus Christ in our day is the framework of that job which came out of the east. And you and I cannot understand Tillich, Mitche, Kirkegard, etc. without which the theological awakening would never have occurred. I say we

cannot understand them if we cannot understand that they drank deeply, deeply at the well springs of the understanding of life that was developed in the sub-culture of India. So in church renewal I come back to China on the practical side and to India on the theoretical side.

I said it could really only have been forged in the west because the only articulation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ that has ever been forged in all of history has been the western understanding. And because the theoretical had to begin the west itself had to retool its whole conceptual framework in order for the church to be renewed. And now that the theoretical task is done, the next 40 to 50 years is going to be the practical task. And I am after that channel of therapy from the east to the west because the next 40 years the practical job is going to come out of the east. And the first practical job is the indigenization of the gospel.

I don't like that term - indigenization - but we have got to understand that what our Sunday School teachers taught us were in the framework of Plato and Aristotle fundamentally. Now we have to grasp that that could just as well have been stated within the framework of Hinduism or Sinoism as it could in Platonism or Aristotilism. This is why the indigenization process cannot be carried on by scholars. Invariably scholars take the western articulation and then try to state that articulation in the metaphors of the east. Do you hear what I am saying? Its only the guy whose belly is upagainst the belly of the Hindu and the non-Christian Chinese.... and that means the pastor, the teacher, the concerned layman...is the one who can do this job. That means we go back to the awareness of the contentlessness of Christ. Now that is an offensive term to many people and they seem to think that if you would use another word it would be easier to swallow. ...But that is where you begin...with the fact that the Christ happening is a Christ happening and it is a universal happening. And that the content on it always comes out of the time, place and the individual's own interior history. Indigenization means to start on that level. I would hope a year from now we could have some of the brightest young pastors, teachers, and other kind of layman in the western part of the Pacific gathered together in an indigenization conference in which we could first of all get aware of the methodology that you use whereby you do that. And I would want to say to you that you and I have that methodology. As a matter of fact I had a tremendous time at a language school of Roman Catholics. They invited in a Budhist...a tremendous man... and when I had finished speaking they asked him to speak and he said that this was the first time he had ever heard a Christian speak who had the slightest idea of how you would talk about Christianity in the context of Budhism. Indigenization is the first practical job to be done. I might also say that you and I are not going to fully understand the meaning of the glory of the Christ happening in our lives until people that are in cultures that are totally unsynonomous with ours have been able to articulate that happening.

The second practical job that is going to come out of the east and not out of the west is the actual social forms for the church for the next 1000 years. It's going to recover ancestor worship. One of the things that struck me is that when we went over there and poo-pooed ancestor worship as paganism, magic etc., I became aware of my ancestors...Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Augustine, Mark, etc. And I pay homage to them and at this time in life more than ever before. These people know more about this dimension of what we call meditation than we in the west ever will know.

The third type of practical channel is that of the practical break loose in the east. And if this tension breaks loose in one place it will be like a chain of firecrackers. It will hit the church over the head in a way she will never forget that the way your doing won't do any more.

NSV
Now I want to say a few words about that new social vehicle. You notice that one of the most shocking things that happened to us this year was that when we began to spell out the religious mode we got ourselves into the sociological. What we discovered is that the religious mode is not just simply the psychological and I mean that as a philosophical term not as a psychological term as Plato would use it. It is not just a matter of the psychic and yet it is. It has to do with our unrepeatable solitariness and then it has to do with our unavoidable sociality. So that you have what we call the solitaries and then you have what we call the corporates. Then we began to understand that the journey does not exist outside of these two...and keep knowing and doing in your mind. It will save you a little bit from getting lost here. The journeys were at the white hot center. Your NSV is going to be experienced it seems to me in almost the same kind of a form and you will see that I do not have clarity here at all. Your going to have your civil social structures and then you will have your religious social structures. And the new SV will be both of these and in the middle of these will be the movement period. The journey and the movement are inseparable. And the third part of it is the being part of it. In our original form of the Christ Word as the style was in the white hot center. We are very clear now that there is no genuine knowing save in doing and there is no genuine doing save in knowing. So that you always have the word deed and the deed word and that these are inseparably intensified in the center. I suspect the frontiers systems of the new form of the church which is the regional constructs will have a missional centrum made up of training institutes and religious houses. This will have to do with the solitaries which are made up of contemplation, meditation and prayer. But we have to get some concrete theoretical data down underneath these. Then in terms of the inverse of this you have the cultural, political, and economic aspects of the NSV. I'm not trying to get any kind of detailed construct at the moment. But I am trying to point out two things: first, we are further down the road than we thought and, second, you are not going to have a NSV without a new religious vehicle.

After I had talked about the church being ecumenical, denom-

inational and movemental, D. T. Niles pointed out what he agreed with. Then he said that what you and I know is that this word denominational can't be used here. So, I pushed him hard for another word and we came up with the pluralistic church. Now that is not a good word but it does get rid of that word denomination. He said that denomination is just one form of this pluralistic church in history and that is gone forever and ever. And I said to him, ...and I want you to understand that I am a shocked man.. ..o.k. D.T. what is the new form that is coming to be. And he said....you people are it and people like you. It is a new form of the religious order and you and I do not know what God is going to do with it. But I want to dramatize to you the fact that in terms of the NSV every aspect of your life is just life or death. Every aspect of what we do here is just life or death to an effective new religious vehicle in the world. This next year we have to be dealing with the practices of the NRM. This next year also we will have to be emphasizing the theoretical-practical aspect of the NSV. Then the next year we have to begin to get down to the nitty gritty of the practices of the NSV at the moment.

Now my last word is that you and I are moving into a stage in which we are seeing ourselves as revolutionaries in a new way and we cannot avoid this. And I want us to grasp that we are not revolutionaries but we are revolutionary revolutionaries. We are the transparent center of the revolutionaries and that means we have to forge a brand new type of style relative to this. And I have to go back to my early training with ^{CARUS} KAMU in the Rebel in which he uses the category rebel in which he says a rebel is always free to be a part of the conservatives in a social structure and at another moment to be a part of the liberals within a given situation. A rebel can never be a reactionary or a radical. Now when you begin to put that in terms of the relationship we are going to have to have with the revolutionary forces of this worldand you understand that's what it is going to be...you have to understand that the spirit man who knows this secret is a set aside revolutionary. He is a transparent revolutionary and he does four things: he encourages the revolutionary, he directs or gives context to the revolution, he begins to control the revolution so that it is comprehensive, futuristic, and intentional and finally he is the one who is always there to pick up the suffering and the tragedy within. This we have to think through. I like to think of Foreman today as my symbol. I have liked him and he has known I liked him but one of these days I want to go and sit down with him and encourage and get the context and then I want to say NO. But I want to say a creative no. Something like this lies ahead.