

April 16-18, 1982

### DAILY OFFICE WITNESS

What I have witnessed in the recent past is fear... fear in the community around us both in this country and elsewhere in the world. And, I see two major non-constructive responses to this fear. One response is withdrawal, a turning away, a turning inside. The other response is anger, a striking out, bizzare behavior or acts. Let me give you two illustrations of this that I have come across just in the last twenty-four hours.

My wife and I went to the Art Museum in downtown Chicago yesterday, and at the museum they had one large section that was an exhibit of art done by students connected with the museum. What struck us was that there were two threads running through the entire exhibit. The first thread showed the withdrawal response I was talking about. There were more than half a dozen pieces of art, both paintings and sculptures, of the human body as viewed from the rear-- the person represented in the art is turned away from us -- AWAY from the real world. The other thread in the exhibit showed the anger or the bizzare. One of the sculpture pieces was a large tree surrounded by grass, but the tree was mis-shapen, and the grass is tall, spiked, looking more like iron spikes than grass -- not a place I would feel comfortable walking in bare feet in ... not a place to trust.

The other illustration that impacted me was when a colleague was telling me about an RS-I that was mostly youth. As usual, they were asked in the course to name their death date. Not one out of the 15-20 youth put their death date more than twenty years into the future... amazing... what that implies makes ME afraid.

The significant thing about this fear is that it is not the usual, individual, specific fear that we all experience at different times. This fear is society-wide. I am not talking about fear that the old lady down the street has because her purse has been stolen and she is afraid of it happening again. I am not talking about the man in the neighborhood who was afraid when he was robbed. The fear I am talking about has risen above this level -- it is the general feeling of society, both ours and others -- it is sociological fear.

It has become a situation wherein people are fear-filled, and my response to that is that we need to be SERIOUSLY HOPE-FILLED. I use those words self-consciously in that I do not mean hopeful -- we all feel hopeful or presumably we would not be here -- hope-filled is the outside of hopeful, the visible sign. It is when the "hopeful" become visible to others so they are confronted, and the word "seriously" refers to the acting out component -- it is engagement. This is what I mean by "seriously hope-filled". Only a powerful "seriously hope-filled" stance can meet and change the sociological fear-filled stance that now characterizes much of society. Indeed, this is what we are always about, from the time we rose up and thought our first thought as a human, to the time the universe comes to its natural end.

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