

Summer '73

Research Assembly

July 18, 1973

THE AWFUL LEAGUE

It is surprising that no one reported the news that yesterday, at 4750 North Sheridan Road, in Chicago, an all-time record for the number of lectures and conversations and research sessions was held. But that represents what we are afraid of. Someone said yesterday that he had a fabulously exciting Guild meeting, and most people were asleep in it. Now, I have been doing a lot of sleeping myself, and it has frightened me the last few days. When you go to sleep, and wake up and cannot remember when you went to sleep, you are in trouble.

This sleeping trend reminds me of a story that used to be popular in East Texas churches about a pastor who had a man in his congregation who always went to sleep during the sermon. The pastor decided that something needed to be done about it, so he made a plan one Sunday, and when the man went to sleep, he stopped where he was in his sermon and said in sort of a quiet voice, "Everybody here who wants to go to heaven, stand up," And they all stood up except this one man who was sound asleep. Then he had them sit down and shouted, "All present who want to go to hell, STAND UP!" which shook the sleeping man to his feet. There he stood all by himself, looking around a little bit dazed. The clergyman put his fingers together, stood up on his toes and said, "Now, brother, why are you standing up?" The man looked around and said, "I don't know, pastor, but it appears that you and I are the only ones who are."

This whole year has been so confusing that it is still very difficult to put into words the course that Sanctification has taken with us. This means that some of the things I am struggling to express here are as old and tested as this 3:00 just past. But it is clear that to begin to discuss the Sanctification category of The Awful League, we have to probe back as far as we can. It calls to mind the structure of cosmic reality, and raises the question: when you go back to the very bottom of reality itself, what do you see? We are thrown back upon the old classical categories that philosophers and theologians have used ever since man has been thinking and attempting to articulate relationships among nature, man, and God, or nature, man, and Mystery. That is where you have to start, back at the dawn of human consciousness when the dynamic of universal reality took form, and by universal I mean the reality that every man knows about or can selfconsciously know about.

As the scriptures lay it out in Genesis, in the beginning there is the chaos of nature, and even before that, black woolly chaos. Then nature comes into being and man, and behind the two of them is the creative force, or Mystery itself, or, as we have named that Mystery, God.

Then the next thing that happens is that a separation takes place between man and nature, which means that a separation takes place between man and Mystery. The thing that has been revealed to me, and not just in the wee hours of this morning, but over the last few years, is that the rebellion of man, the separation of man from nature and therefore from the Mystery, is not the same thing as immorality. That is to say that sin is not a moral category. We have been saying that for a long while now, but I do not think I ever understood its implications before. There is no way to think about a human being, about a man being a man in distinction from the Mystery nature unless you think of him as being separated or in rebellion against them. Man was given the command to have dominion over nature, and there is no way to have dominion over nature except to be in positive rebellion against it. In relation to the Mystery, it is the other way around. To be man is to be in submission to the Mystery; he has no choice about that, but that in itself is also a creative rebellion. We have often said that a man who has never shaken his fist in the face of the Mystery and cried, "I hate you for the universe you have given me," has never made the first step in terms of radical selfconsciousness.

As we begin to see how things developed in the history of mankind, it is apparent that the League came into being as a way of dealing with the radical wrenching man experienced in the midst of his rebellion overagainst

his situation and the Mystery which gave it to him. If you remember the Garden of Eden story, man gets all confused about his freedom. He believes that somehow he ought to tell himself that he has not rebelled, when he has rebelled, that his rebellion is not necessary, and therefore what he really is in himself is the Mystery, or God. When a man, or sometimes mankind, has the idea that it has become God, it is in a state of self-destruction. It is easy to see that is the way it is, when you remember that every man shows up rebelling against God, but telling himself that he is not rebelling against God, but that, as a matter of fact, that he is God. It starts with little children, and we do not even need to give examples.

In the dynamics of history, somehow the Mystery begins to implant in the consciousness of every man the notion that something is wrong, that something has to be changed in the way mankind operates. Some men respond to this, and so there comes into being, what we have called on the triangles of the People of God, the Latent Church, people who know somehow man has to be dealt with. Then that beings to take the form of the Established Church and established religion. You also always have some form of the Local Church, or the local manifestation of religion, and something like Historical Christianity, our primary focus here. Within that Historical Christianity; is the Movemental Church. Now there is no way to talk about these forms of response unless first of all we have in our minds the primordial, cosmic picture of how we got where we are. If we cannot talk about reality in its practical terms, I mean cosmic reality, as we can about tables and chairs, then we are just spinning theories, and our words will not be helpful. It is important, then, to attempt to speak practically, but this is a step toward articulating clarity where there is none.

What happens as the League begins to express itself in concrete forms, like churches and religious groups, is that there begins to be an inevitable turning in on the issue of Justification. The issue of Justification does not bring the Church into being in the first instance, but it makes that coming into being necessary. Man wakes up and realizes that something is wrong in his relating to his situation and to the Mystery which gave it to him, and so begins to think about how to get humanity back on the track, or he thinks about forgiveness, and that is the issue of Justification.

Remember, however, that the issue of Justification arises on the other side of the reality of Sanctification. Theologically speaking, Sanctification is prior to Justification. Until, selfconsciously or not, a man has inside himself some kind of beatific vision of what it would mean to live a perfect life, then the issue of his being a forgiven man, that is a man who is not living the perfect life, does not arise. As St. Paul says, "Until the law was given, you did not know there was any such thing as sin." But the historical result of this is that the Church or religion begins to turn in upon itself, and to deal with the issue of Justification by actually denying Sanctification. It is a very interesting and ambiguous dynamic. What happens is that man, especially the religious man, builds for himself a false notion of the good creation. He does not really believe that all that is good, so he contrives a universe that is good. Since this is not the real universe, man begins to turn in to seek for Justification, and in the process denies both Sanctification and Justification.

During the past 20 years or has it been 50, or 100, or maybe 300? the Church has been turned in upon itself, trying to deal with the issue of Justification. Of course, behind that has been the dawning of a new age of Sanctification, which has now come upon us full blast. If you are suffering from an identity crisis, if you raising the whole issue, in the corporate sense, of who we are, then you are on target. That is the fundamental, almost psychotic question, that is facing us, for we do not know any longer who we are. We have turned radically toward the world, and have received the full blast of Sanctification in our faces, and we do not know where or who we are.

Last summer about this time, for the first time in my life, I put on a clerical collar to stand up and give a lecture. Now, that was a weird experience, and I struggled for a long time about what I was going to wear to give that lecture. The struggle was over my representative identity: what had I decided, and what was I going to communicate to the rest of the people? And I decided that I had become, as never before in my life, the Religious, so I put on a collar. This morning I put on something different, and that was not because I could not find my collar. It was to say to you and to myself most of all, that we are in a new dimension of relating. I do not want to say a new time, because Sanctification has more to do with space, but we are in the midst of

something new. The point is that we are and must be the Secular Religious, else we will become what every other religious order that has failed to serve the depth need of mankind became, and that is a turned-in religious group, irrelevant to what is going on in the world. Symbols like this offend me, but I am even wearing the Turn Symbol. How do we select the symbols we wear? I do not know. It is embarrassing to be guinea pigs, but we are in the process of discovering ways to externalize our stance in relation to the world.

Then there is the role of the Movemental Church. When the Historical Church and the established forms of religion turn in upon themselves, they must themselves be changed. The Movemental dynamic of the Church arises in order to re-clarify Justification and Sanctification for the Church. Now what we have been doing the last 20 years is getting the Church clear on Justification. During those 10 years, we have experienced the last era of the dark side of history in our time and there, especially in the 50's, we were faced with a Church which build for itself a false universe in which there was no need for Justification. In the church I grew up in, you could not have a prayer of confession in the worship service, because they did not want to think about what it means to be a sinner and therefore what it means to be Justified. Therefore the movement has operated like a hammer for 20 years, banging away at false optimism, whether it was in the form of Norman Vincent Peale's theology or sensitivity training, demanding that the Church think about justification, that it confront man as a sinner and raise to consciousness what it means for him to be forgiven. That has been the fundamental task of the movemental Church. This has been going on now for 50 years, not just the last 20, but for 50 years.

Then, of course, behind the Movemental Church, and this is crucial, there is the Religious Order. There is no way for the Movemental Church to be motivated unless there be a further dynamic of discontinuity from the Historical Church, and that is what we have called the Historical Order, and what I believe we now must begin to call the Religious Order. This Order's task is to help the Church re-grasp what it means to be Justified. A Religious Order comes into being, as we read the history of the Church, as a protest against the Church's worldliness. It is really a protest against the false image of the world that the Church has decided to identify itself with. It is appropriate to say, then, that a Religious Order comes into being in faithfulness to what we now call the Protestant Principle. During a period like the one just past, the Order plays the role of servant, and even of charismatic to re-motivate the church, but most of all, in a period like that you have the Order as illuminator. That has been our primary role: all over the world, teaching, turning on the light in RSI, enabling the breakthrough of the light, to which people respond by saying, "I cannot stand to see the way things are!" That is what RSI is all about, and that is what a Religious Order's task is.

However, when God decides to shift history into Sanctification, if a Religious Order decides to keep struggling with the issue of Justification without responding to the new thing that has come, then it is lost. That is where we are right now. It is what we mean by the Turn and the images that you and I have had of what it means to turn toward the world are really exciting. The experiment with the Sodality's going to nightclubs, plays, and movies, seemed tremendous, secretly down inside we thought, "At last, discontinuity from the mission." We thought we were going out to have some fun. And we did! We went to all kinds of places, and some of us shriveled-up Methodists had hardly been in some of them before. Most of us are here in this Religious Order not because of a clear picture of what it means to be mission to the World, but to save our souls, because we are religious. And there is no way to be really secular unless you know how to be religious, of course; that will be our gift to history. But what happened to us when we went out to those places was that we could not watch what was going on for watching the audience. We noticed that everybody was dead, and all we could think of was the mission. We kept wondering how in the world we were going to bring life to those corpses. And we talked to the performers. They were interested in us, because we were different. We sang, danced, and enjoyed; oh, it is a fiesta when a Religious turns to the secular. The performers told us, "You know, we usually play every night to dead people." They were pleased to have us there. But we could not have the kind of fun we wanted to, for worrying about all the rest of the people there, and that was healthy.

Now God has decided that we are turned to the world, and there is no turning back. It is a cliché around here now, that this has been a great year, but that it has been a hard year. Both things are true. It has been the hardest year we have ever had. And a lot of people have fallen by the wayside in the Turn toward the world, because if Justification was painful, that is only because we had never had to face Sanctification. Some Methodists who

thought we wanted to be sanctified just did not know what Sanctification is all about, because when Sanctification hits, you realize that you have never even been justified, really, within yourself. What happens is that God gives you a very clear picture of what your participation in perfect life would be, and you look at yourself and say, "My God, I am just a pile of manure. I cannot participate in a perfect world." And you have to be justified all over again. Not only is Sanctification incredibly new pain, but Justification turns into incredibly new pain all over again, and you see that these two dynamics are never separated, but finally one thing.

Now, this is what the Guild business is all about Sanctification, turning toward the world. There are going to be all kinds of silly things that are going to happen in our Turn to the world. We are going to try to be worldly in ways that are going to make us look ridiculous. That in itself is nothing new; we have also looked ridiculous as we were trying to be churchly in the last 20 years, so looking ridiculous is our normal state. We do not need to worry about that, except to the extent that we might lose ourselves by being too foolish. Where we are now and will be forever is in the predicament of having two faces, or two sides to our face. One side is turned toward God in Justification, and the other is turned toward the world in Sanctification. We are going to have to remember the Bug Model to realize that the first face always was, is and ever shall be turned toward the world. Our text is John 3:16, which I have found that I did not believe all my life: "For God so loved the WORLD. . ." Not the Church, but the world, is the only thing that God loves. He does not care anything about the Church. He certainly does not care anything about the Order; it is only the tool for Him to love the world with no reservation. He are going to have to live as every Order has to live, if it is serious that means living with the tension of being the Order and the Guild, the Religious Order and the Secular Guild, or the SecularReligious Order. As Bonhoeffer said before he died, "The vocation of the religious is gone forever." What he meant was that the vocation in which the Religious is seen to be primary, or that Justification is seen to be primary, or that what life is really all about is getting everybody into the structures of Christianity, is gone forever. Authentic secularity is here, and we shall never be able to return to that era when we thought that it was the Religious that was primary. This is why our attention and experimentation now is on the Guild.

What does it mean for us to be the Order, and at the same time, to be the Guild, to be the Religious, but to be the Secular? We are not pretending we are not putting on the disguise of the secular when we are really out to make everybody Religious like ourselves. No we are being authentically secular, which is what life is all about. As a matter of fact, the JudeoChristian traditions as well as the other great religions of the world have always been secularizers. Jesus was crucified because he was secular. The religious people could not take the radicality of his secularity. Of course, when we decide to be the Order and the Guild, we are attacked from both directions. We are attacked by the falsely secular people who think that they have got to kill any form of religion, and we are attacked by the falsely religious people who think they have to kill anything that looks like secularity. This means that if you like to get killed, you are in the right place. This is a serious statement, because the name "Symbolic Order" no longer makes any difference in the intensity of commitment. There needs to be a new name, perhaps. All the Order is symbolic, and everybody who shows up is the Order; that is God's decision. Of course, anybody can say no, and that happens from time to time. But we are at the point where there is no difference between the "Symbolic Order" and the so-called "participants" in the Summer Assemblies. The garb we have been experimenting with is the blue shirt. Anybody is welcome to get a blue shirt. That would be great. If you do not mind feeling ridiculous wearing the thing, you might as well get one.

In this "Turn to the world" as the secular/Religious Order, we are going to know pain as we have never known it before. Sanctification is the turn toward the light side of history from the dark side. In the period of Justification we looked down into the abyss of what it means to be human. In the period of Sanctification, we turn and "look up to the light." Now it is painful in a time of Justification, boring in upon the darkness of mankind. The pain is excruciating in turning to look at the possibility, at what our Fathers called perfection, as we see that the New Heaven and the New Earth can be built by the Secular/Religious Order along with the Movemental Church and the Historical Church and all of mankind, and as we see at the same time that it is not there yet. Only those who are radically, seriously committed are going to make it. To put it religiously, it is one thing to stand the pain of receiving forgiveness, but it is quite another thing to embrace the pain of the assurance of salvation. That means being grounded in the assurance that the only thing standing between the new City of God on earth and what we presently have is our own decision to build it.

It is as though God has said, "Now I have sanctified the world, and you can see Resurgence taking place everywhere. Now you build the forms for that Resurgence and the New Heaven and the New Earth will be here." And suddenly, you are back to Justification again. "How can a crummy guy like me do that?" Remember Peter? Jesus came along, and Peter fell on his face and said, "Get away from me, Lord, I am a sinner." That is the response we have. We have known all our lives that we wanted to be sanctified, and here comes Sanctification, so we scream, "Get away from me! I cannot participate!" But that is our calling. Now it is clearer with some people than it is with others, but we are all called, there is no way to escape. People try. It is just too much; they want to go and be comfortable somewhere until the next occasion when God decides to speak to them comes along. That means they go ahead and live their lives in this constant looking around corners, "Is God going to call me again this morning?" We all know that. That will be fine.

But the great possibility is to decide that you were not born accidentally, that you were born for this time. You did not choose it, it chose you. Therefore everyman's role in our day is to be the Sanctified One, to be the Guild, and build the New Earth, But this is always to be the religious core of secularity that lasts as long as the universe endures. Anything else is going to be shallow and unserious. This is a bit boastful, but I like to think that you have never seen as secular a man as I am, or that I intend to be, because I am so religious. I was down in Texas recently and stopped by to see my parents, and they got out some old pictures of the family. Now I have a sister who used to sit me down on a stump when I was four years old and make me memorize the New Testament so that I could go and recite it at Sunday School and bring fame to our family. I found a picture that showed the two of us going out the door to Sunday School That was a moment of revelation, I did not even know there was such a picture. That sister of mine decided that I was going to be the Religious. Now she is a terrible woman, she is just mean, and I have never liked her. But she decided I was going to be set aside. Now I suppose the Lord would have found somebody else to set me aside if it had not been my sister. But that has happened to all of us; all of us Religious know that we were set aside. And I recognize this in you because I know myself. We have been set aside to be nothing other in our whole lives but the Religious so that we can really be Secular. These so-called sophisticated suburban people who think they are secular are a joke if they do not know what it means to be the Religious. It is the function of the Religious Order to make that clear. But we are about to outsecular any of them, because we know what it means to be Religious.

The question is: how long are you going to say no in some silly little way or another to being set apart to be the Religious in this incredible time of Sanctification? How long? Now if you think that I am inviting you to join the Symbolic Order, whatever that is, you do not understand what I am talking about. The question is, whatever the form of your participation in this glorious age, this renaissance that will make the last one look like nothing: how long are you going to go around saying, "Oh, my wife won't participate." or "You know, I have a house I would have to sell." or "Maybe I would have to move to another parish sometime.?" How long? How long? Do you really want to come up to the last day and stand before God and give him one of those puny little excuses, when you see with such clarity that it burns the inside of your head out almost that this is the time of Sanctification, this is the time for the Order to be the Secular/Religious Orders. Do you intend to say you had something else to do?

God help us all, there is no escape. With this I am through. We are doomed. I mean it is too bad if you do not want to be the Order that you are here. It is too bad because now you know who you are.

Charles Moore