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THE BAREFOOT JESUS

Today I am going to talk about the barefoot Jesus. When you talk of the shape of the Church to come, you are talking much more deeply than just external structures. You are finally talking about the depth understanding of the People of God themselves. That means that you and I must not only sever ourselves from Christian bigotry completely. We also have to understand how that bigotry came about. I am convinced that the Church of Jesus Christ in the early Hellenic period slipped into abstraction. She has struggled against - that abstractionism for the 2000 years of her history but never really conquered it until this moment. That is one of the reasons why I believe the hour at hand will be seen in years to come as the Church's finest hour, since it was impelled into history by forces that cannot finally be located in temporality.

The event is that the shocking happening which the church talked about as the Christ happening turned into an idea about the Christ happening. The tendency of the Church was to substitute a belief in that happening for the happening itself. Now I have already indicated that I believe the Church has struggled against that throughout 2000 years. She never won until this hour. And when I say won, I mean the fact that the Church universal has become to one degree or another, aware of this fact. That means the victory is at hand. Going through this awareness for the Church at large still lies ahead before all of us.

The key to what has happened in our day is that the Church has become slowly aware that the meaning of Christian faith is rooted in profound empiricism and not in ideas about life. I wrote an article one time called "The Christ of History". If I were going to write again, it would be "The Jesus of History". I wouldn't really call it that, because modern theology stole that term and ruined it. I would say that up to now I have thought mostly of the Christ happening. These days I am thinking of the Jesus event.

I still like to play, as I did in that paper, with the Jesus-Christ and then the Christ-Jesus. This time put the emphasis on the Jesus. This has to do with a deepening awareness of the spirit journey in myself from that happening of profound awareness, which is something of a gateway into the Other World that's in the midst of this world. The Jesus-event is maturation within the Other World, or learning to be at one with the Other World right in the midst of this world every day, every hour, every hour of your existence. But I mean more than that relative to the reason why I am concerned with the Jesus-figure. I believe that herein lies the key to the multi-form yin-yang which we sometimes call the third campaign. The third campaign lies ahead. I have said many times before that our task here is to find the social vehicle for the nurture of those who care, who have become aware in the Awakening and engagement campaigns. But in order to build such a functional vehicle one has the overwhelming task of working through his spiritual bowels the meaning of having recovered from the abstract doctrinal approach or understanding of life to the understanding that's rooted and grounded in what-I call radicality or depth empiricism. To put that another way it means, as we have said together many times, that each and all bodies of those who care must find a way not simply to stick their fist through but to thrust their being through the glorious, but reductionistic poetry that is ingrained in them until they are consumed by universal humanness. This is behind the statement that our colleague made that he no longer feels like an Aussie, but like a human being; or the statement I made that I no longer feel like a man, but I feel like a human being. Somebody later said, why didn't I go the rest of the way. I felt with that audience that I dare not. But with this audience I can. I no longer feel like a Christian, I feel like a human being. Now, mark you, I say that I don't feel like an American. But I want you to understand that I am an American, and I am extremely proud to be an American. I hope that if our Australian colleague were up here he would admit what I know, that he is an Australian. I would

hope that he would also admit that he is proud to be an Australian. What I'm talking about is on the other side of that. I want to bear testimony today that I am a Christian. In one sense, I was born a Christian and I intend to die a Christian. I am proud to be a Christian, to participate in the glorious heritage that ministered to the whole wide world, directly or indirectly. But I don't feel like a Christian; I feel like a human being. Now to come at this, to get it articulated, we cannot go with the rubric of Christ unless we go through the rubric of Jesus. That's why I am interested in the barefoot Jesus.

Most of you know that we went to Israel this year in order to study their comprehensive cooperative. There is no nation in the world that knows more about that than Israel. We had a fine time. I had never been to Israel. I could have gone there before, but I have avoided going to Israel like the plague, for I never felt that I was ready to put my feet in the Holy Land which is the source of many memories which are like realities in my own life. I was reluctant to go to the Holy Land now, for I was not prepared to go. But I was there. Being the Pharisee that I am, I tried to see nothing that was not a part of the mission of why I was there. I do not recommend this kind of phariseism to you. For instance, I passed within 10 kilometers of Bethlehem and never veered off the road. But fortunately, powers beyond my moralistic control sent me to a kibbutz that was at the foot of the Golan Heights. The Golan Heights are on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. And so, of necessity we drove through the famous Jezreel Valley, or Jezreel Plain. What a wonderful experience. For there across one way and then the other, the great armies of ancient history marched. The coastal plain is flat, and down the middle of Israel is a long rough mountain chain running north and south. But there is a break in that chain up along the sea of Galilee that cuts through. So the armies of Mesopotamia would come down to Egypt and the Egyptian army would cut through that valley to get to Mesopotamia. Alexander the Great marched his armies back and forth through this valley. On the south side of it is a famous Biblical town and later mighty fortress built called Megiddo, from which the book of Revelation got the fantastic symbolism of Armageddon. On the far side of the valley, high in the mountains and hard to reach, rests what in ancient days was the little village of Nazareth where the barefoot Jesus grew up. Now the reason that Nazareth was up high in the hills was the same reason that Termini is up high in the hills. For that valley, until close to the last half of this century, was malaria-infested, and the only way anybody had any hope of living in that area was to get up high. Also, in a secondary sense, it was good protection from those armies that moved back and forth through Israel's plain. The plain to the south is very frequently filled with fog and mist, and billowing clouds cover over what is supposed to be the Mount of Transfiguration. It has the strangest mountain shape of any I know in the world save Fujiyama. It looks just like a huge, man-made, evenly smooth, coal mining slag heap. And oftentimes I would judge that you see just the bare top of that mountain sticking out from the clouds. Never was I anyplace in the world where I felt the kind of weirdness that I felt there. This even includes the moors of Scotland which would run a close second for me.

I went up to Nazareth on the way over to Galilee and stopped on top of the hill. I began to reflect, and it seemed to me like the heavens opened and there was a voice. And the term that was in my mind from then on was "barefoot Jesus". I began to understand how, in the midst of this kind of terrain and environment, something like a twelve year old Jesus came to be. I believe that that story of his sitting with the scribes and priests and confounding them was based on some kind of truth. That means that before he was twelve years old, something radical happened to a barefoot boy. And he remained that barefoot boy for twenty years before he did anything about what happened to him when perhaps he was ten years old. Twenty years is a long time to get into being some overwhelming profound awareness. I began to look back through my own being and I began to look back through your own being. For not only are your creative insights at my disposal, everybody's creative insights in this group are at anyone's disposal who wishes to appropriate them. Not only are your mighty deeds for you to rehearse this morning; they are for me to participate in if I dare to. And they are there for everybody in the world to participate in. But even more than that, I participate in the tremendous awareness of the profundity of life which you possess.

And as I stood there and thought and we talked together, two things came to the forefront of my mind. One thing that happened to that barefoot boy was that he became aware there on the edge of the Jezreel valley, of the awesome mystery of life. The clouds became the external manifestation of the awe that he experienced as he became aware of what for him, became the absolute finality of reality. And the clouds enabled him to grasp the fact that this awe was not something that came forth out of his subjectivity, but the awe itself had great, compelling objectivity. I know not how it happened. But then this ten-year-old boy became aware of the fact that this mystery, which was final reality, was his father. Now I do not mean he was drawing some kind of a silly analogy that most of your Sunday School teachers talked about and too many of us grew up with. I mean, he became aware that he was the offspring of final being, of this strange mystery that seemed closer to him than any temporal reality that he was able to experience.

I am trying to say that this young boy literally came to believe that Joseph was not in his father, but that which sired him was the Mystery itself. As a matter of fact, Jesus talked very little about "our Father" but very frequently about "my Father".

Then something else happened to him. I am not so clear how this happened. But I think that in those twenty years he found that you know the mystery in the eyes of another person. That seems to me by far the most important thing about him. You don't intend that; it just happens. And you discover that you can look through eyes, and when you look through eyes you become aware of mystery. And out of this came the awareness that it was not only my Father, but it was your Father. And perhaps, (and this depends on thinking later in his ministry) this became most clear to him as he beheld the hunk of humanity's eyes in human suffering. I think he became particularly concerned with the eyes that have no eyes, the blind. Until he had the immediate experience, not some analogical abstraction, that this which sired me, sired you, not only you, but all, and not only all, but everything. Remember the story that happened later when somebody came to him and said, "your mother and brothers and sisters are outside" and he looked at the crowd and said "What do you mean? These are my brothers and these are my sisters!?" I want to repeat that this wasn't drawing a conclusion from some abstraction called the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. For twenty years he lived simply in relationship to these inseparable awarenesses. That is the barefoot Jesus.

Now the next picture I have is Jesus walking out of the desert and bumping into a man named John Baptist. They became friends. Maybe John was the closest thing to a friend Jesus ever had. And he was baptized by John. There really wasn't anything before that apart from the reflection the Church did later upon the story that had happened.

John had a movement going, and Jesus submitted himself to that movement. Then it is in the movie ("The Gospel According to St. Matthew") that you see the picture that none of you can forget of Jesus starting his stride. He walked down the road flinging over his shoulder, "The Other World is at hand, turn yourselves around and believe this." And he never stopped. He didn't pause to see whether anyone was impacted, and by no means whether there was some kind of follow-up to it. He flung it over his shoulder and moved on for the rest of his life, three very short years. Or were they very long years? And, as another aspect of the drama, as he strode along he would fling over his shoulder, "Come on, follow me." He never stopped. He could care less; if he cared he was no longer about his Father's business. Now the interesting thing is that he looked back and saw two or three, five or six. I don't know how many he asked, maybe a couple of hundred. All the details are not there. Did he expect to get 100 out of a 1000, and then to lose all but 10 out of the 100, and then to discover that only one out of the ten had guts enough to stand? I don't know how that happened.

When he saw the little group behind him he began an exercise called the training of the twelve. This is the next thing beyond the barefoot Jesus. Now take a look at that training of the twelve. He always walked, and as he walked he seemed to be talking always. He was throwing over his shoulder sayings, not teachings, but sayings. What do I mean by that? Well, he had no code to

transmit, no creed to transmit. What he was doing was jarring these people into the awareness of the Other World in the midst of this world, which these people had always known about. He was jarring them into existential decisional awareness. That was his first job of training. It was not to prove that there is another world in the midst of this one, but to jar them into the awareness that here was the deeps of life itself.

The second aspect of his training of the twelve is more astounding to me. It's like he took each one of those men who walked along behind him and he stuck their nose, literally, into the human suffering that had been around them all their lives, that they had taken for granted. I'm talking about myself, who got far too old before I became being-filled aware of the suffering, the incredible suffering of humanity that I have lived with and in the midst of all my life. Like it wasn't enough just to pass a blind man on the way. He halted the troops and stuck their noses into the suffering. It wasn't enough to walk by a lame man; he stopped and stuck their noses in it. It was by no means enough that they walked by the leper's cave. No, he grabbed them all by the ear and dragged them down into the midst of that leprosy until they saw, with their own eyes, with their whole being, the suffering of those who were sired by the same Father.

And later he was to say in his wrathful "woe oration" upon the establishment that not only would they not enter the Other World, but their woe lay in the fact that they spent their lives preventing others from entering the Other World. I remember when John wondered "Is he the one?" and sent his men to inquire. Jesus, with a kind of nonchalant and low-key style, just said, "I have no answer. But you go back and tell my friend John exactly what you saw: the blind see, the lame walk, and the good news being preached to the poor." No abstraction. He merely indicated the reality of the moral issue that they knew. And that was the training of the twelve.

The next part that got played is what I call "the anointed one". It begins by one of the most nauseating things that I can think of. I'm talking about the absolutely ridiculous killing of John. I haven't found the right words to describe the silliness of John's death. A kind of silly brutality, an insane death. The picture of course is Herod's court. And he has some of his buddies in high places sitting down to lunch. Now, Herod was not just a mean old guy. He had a daughter that was pretty and talented, and he was proud of her like you yourself are proud of your children. And so he sat there trying to impress his relative peers. And he thought, "Now I will really give them something; I will show off my daughter." So he asked his daughter to dance. And she was like most daughters who you spend a lot of money on teaching them to play the piano and dancing lessons; when you ask them to perform, they invariably say "no". So Herod, like most of us fathers, decided to bribe her. He said if she would dance he would give her anything she wanted. And I bet he had in mind the prettiest thorbred Arabian stallion or a little villa set aside in the countryside. But the last thing he had in mind was that this performance would demand the head of John the Baptist. I cannot tell you about the vicious old lady who must have been extremely bright, far more intelligent than her husband who sat on the throne. For she saw in John the Baptist, this innocent, non-political, non-revolutionary figure who was just going up and down talking about religion, she saw in him a depth her husband never dreamed of. She saw her own demise. And so she whispered in the ear of her daughter. I hardly know how to account for the fact that her daughter was so enslaved by her mother, but there was something going on. And then the shock on Herod's face. There-were his-peers. So with great reluctance, he gave the sign, and John's head fell.

The next scene of the movie shows Jesus. He heard. And he shed just one tear, just one. At about that time, a man came by and said, "As soon as I bury my father, I am going to come and join you." With a kind of anger that you would not believe, Jesus threw back at him, "Let the dead, bury the dead." And he marched on. And from that time on until the day he died he was an angry man. Immediately, he took this little band of rovers who went with him up into the hillside for the scene of the great transfiguration. He gets up there, and he walks away from them a little bit and he turns around and asks, "What do people say about me?" "Who do they say that I am?" And there is no super-naturalness in this; they say, "Well, they think you are another Elijah." "Others

think you are one of the other great prophets." "And some others think you are really the power behind John the Baptist's ministry." Then came the question. He turned to them and said, "Who do you say I am?" I imagine there was a bit of stuttering. And then they said, "Well, you are the anointed one." And, if you will forgive this, he said, not out loud, but to himself, "Why isn't one of you the anointed one?" But he knew, when they killed John, where the contradiction was. He also knew that if he dared touch that contradiction, he would end up exactly where John did. And he also knew that if that breach were not attacked, there wasn't any hope for the poor and the lame and the blind. Anointed to do what? You are the one anointed to splash your being against that which deters the possibility of profound humanness for everyman, and particularly the poorest of the poor. There is nothing mystical about the anointment. And then if you remember, "He set his face like flint toward Jerusalem, which was the citadel of the powers and the principalities standing in the way of profound humanness. From that day on he was a doubly angry man. From that moment on, I mean he really took on the scribes and the Pharisees and the saducees. And he whipped them to pieces.

And the prime act of his life was standing on the temple grounds and delivering his fantastic speech of "woe to you". And his attack was not on the religious establishment as over against the secular establish meet. Such a dichotomy did not exist in his day. And he wasn't against the establishment for the sake of being against the establishment but because it interfered with the establishment doing what it is called to do.

Jesus took upon himself the symbolism of the anointed one out of his tradition. He was very clear that the reason he rode an ass into Jerusalem was to coagulate the symbols unto himself, to amass the symbolic power that had to be amassed to in any way effectively throw his final life against the established powers. From that day on, he was like a broken record. He was interested in only two things.

The first is illustrated by the story of the fig tree. The fig tree was a powerful symbol. If you remember, he walked up to the tree and said, "You did not produce any fruit." And when you are called to be the People of God and produce no fruit, you wither away and God raises up new vines in the most unsuspecting places. You who should have known about the Other World did not enter into it. But more than that you stood in the way of the poor experiencing what it means to be a human being. Who are you, who are the 15% of the world in this room, who are you identifying with in this strange story?

The second, and he was almost insane-about this, was being humble. He used the children here. Occasionally, when someone would boast he would bring in the little children and say, "Save you are like one -of these, you don't know anything about the Other World."

The anointed one. Anointed for what? To lay down your life at the point of the moral issue of your moment in time. The interesting thing about the anointed one was that Jesus never once said that he was the anointed one. In fact, you and you alone can say that you are the received one, that you are the one loved of God. But you cannot ever say that you are the anointed one. It is for a power far greater than you to say that.

It was all over in Jerusalem when he delivered his final great address, the great "Woe" speech, and the soldiers appeared. Then came that strange scene before the High Priest. "Are you the Christ?" he asks. And Jesus snaps back, "It is you that says it." It's like he said, "You said it; I didn't." The movie really ends here. He's done.

And now you can understand how the Church, in pointing out what life finally is all about over against ultimate reality, said it is anointment. Schweitzer, along about 1906 wrote The Quest for the Historical Jesus. In that his key phrase is that Jesus tried to "force the kingdom". Now, we wouldn't use the word "kingdom". We would use "the Other World". He tried to force the Other

World -into disclosing itself in his time in history. He tried to “force the kingdom” by throwing his own being against the stone wall.

Finally, at every moment in history, I think that the kingdom has to be forced by the anointed one. I have been trying for a long time to get my mind around the Hunter Warrior and The Saint and The Wise One and The General. Someone drew a diagram with these names we’ve used and put the Jesus-figure in the middle. For a long time I wondered what to rename that. Now I know. The anointed one. If you attempt to take the great historical religions of the world, I think you can organize them under the category of “the enlightened one” or “the illuminated one”, as in Buddhism or Hinduism. And then Taoism is a little harder, but it might be “the victorious one” or “the effective one”. Now, when you intensify aware ness and engagement, you have the third category of being, the profound core of human being-ness which is the anointment, to lay down your life on behalf of the mistreated of the time in which you live. That is what the Christ is all about. That is what Jesus is all about. In the overall framework of the play, it all begins with the virgin birth. The Church was trying to say that the way of Jesus is the way it is, period’ The drama ends with the resurrection. Here the Church was trying to say with the resurrection of Jesus, that his resurrected life began with a ten year old boy who intensified his life to his 33rd year and that all may participate in this resurrection. Now, finally, did Jesus after all, force the Other World?

You just take a look at me. I am the answer. Unseemly as it may sound to you, I was sired by the Mystery as a result of Jesus forcing the kingdom. What he did broke loose something that vomited into being one of the most powerful spiritual thrusts history has ever seen, the Christian movement. Christianity is of course not the only spiritual thrust in history, time and time again the kingdom has been and still must be forced if men are to be human. But here I am. And turn around and look at yourselves if you can. And there you are. We are the residue of the life and death of the barefoot Jesus. And, mark well, hour is now come again when the kingdom is being forced across the world and the thing we have learned from the man of Galilee is that the kingdom is not forced with somebody’s life. It’s forced rather with somebody’s death.

You remember that like Jesus, Paul was struck down with an indescribable awareness. Immediately after that, Paul disappeared for three whole years. Nobody knew where he was or whether he was still alive. He too, was three years out in a desert all by himself, where whatever he was after happened to him. He suddenly showed up again. And he had a word. For three years he stepped back from this story of Jesus I have just told you and he looked at it and tried to stick his fist through the meaning of it all. And finally it dawned on him. And he came back and built the Church. What he told them was this: “I’ve got it, I’ve got it, I’ve got it. ~ In this happening God was reconciling the world unto himself. In the midst of all this, the Mystery decided to show himself to all mankind so that there might be, once again, human beings.” Now, I can also offer that statement of—Paul’s. It was such a profoundly true statement, and it was the vulnerable point in Christendom which allowed abstractionists to take over, so that we were asked to subscribe to an idea that God was in Christ reconciling man unto himself, rather than looking through what Paul said about what happened to a barefoot Jesus. RS-1, God bless it well, is the beginning place into the participation of the profound awareness of profound anointment of Jesus that we call our Lord. Could it be, could it be that what you were telling me this morning, what you were describing to us as a body, was that there could be in our day, for the sake of all mankind, a corporate Jesus? Who do you say that we are? Who do you say that we are? All this razzle-dazzle about doing social demonstrations and town meetings has no meaning unless we get said, in the profound deeps, what we are really about.