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SERVICE

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In a time when any self-respecting spirit man ought to be consumed with the death urge I have the life urge. The most direct and immediate intuition about this is that it is an omen that things are not well. But for the life of me I'm not capable of spotting quite where things are not well. I can rehearse by the hundreds things that are not well, but the hundreds or thousands of things that are not well is never what a spirit man means by an omen that things are not well. I've said about this summer that what we intended to happen didn't happen, but something far more important than what we intended to happen, happened. Something that I was not capable of anticipating happened. The most shocking thing about the time I was away is that I sensed that what happened this summer was happening all over the world and I wondered why I had been so blind.

This has to do with the whole matter of eliciting transparency. I told some of my colleagues in the division that I am in that the only place after we got to Australia that we saw that we did not have to go that we planned to go to was New Zealand. I was concerned on the trip to move into wherever something had to be done that wasn't being done, or was being done wrongly and see what could be done to get things moving. You will hardly believe this, but we have not run a course in New Zealand. That's been a sore spot in me; our Australian colleagues kept promising to go there, and so we kept away. Now they've persuaded me that in October they've got courses set up there. But Len Dressler, the man I was with, had not been to New Zealand so we put down in Auckland. The story he told about going to sleep at the Pacific Show in Tokyo is very interesting. Since he was going into the southern part of that area of the Planet, I was anxious that he get a feel after the Pacific, so, when I saw that show in which they had advertized the Hawaiian, the Tahitian, the Tongan, the Samoan, the Fijian, singing and dancing, I jumped, stupidly, to go. What it turned out to be was a girlie show and that's why I'm ashamed to have him confess for me that I went to sleep. He is apparently young enough to have no shame, but at my age when those things happen, it's embarrassing.

Auckland has one of the greatest museums of Pacifica. It's second to the Bishop's museum in your land. It's tremendous. The first time I experienced it I experienced what Thomas Aquinas was pleased to call the rapture, and which some pre-millenarians Shinn has been associated with in the past did not call the rapture when they used the name rapture theologically. So I hastened Len out to that museum in a taxi, always the most expensive way of transportation we took. The museum was out of the city and it looked like taxis would be hard to get, So my colleague thought the safest thing to do would be to have the taxi wait. I was prepared for about three hours in there, and being a cheapskate, that just killed me. So Len asked me how long I'd thought we'd be there. It pained me to lie and say I thought we'd be there just an hour. Well, I went into the place and we were out in about 35 minutes. It was nothing to me. It did not speak to me. We just hastened through, and he was pleased to hasten a bit.

It was there that I became aware more clearly than ever before that in dealing with spiritual reality, it's not the montage that is internalized that holds together the irrational deeps in your spirithood. It's the more immediate context out of which you live that plays the fundamental role in the process of creating spiritual reality or experiencing the transcendency. When I had gone to the museum before, I was passionately consumed with getting on top of what made that Pacific culture tick. In the midst of that museum as the external occasion and the interior context I took to it, something happened that made transparent the given objective reality that was over against me.

On this trip I did not have that context. I was passionately consumed only with the problem of how the movement could become a reality in that part of the world. Now that's a crucial insight for me. I found that in a strange kind of way on the whole trip, I was reaching out almost unconsciously for new awarenesses of the deeps of spirituality. Underneath--how shall I put it--underneath, this was the worst trip I was ever on. It was one just horrifying decision after another that had to be made almost on the spot, and those who know me know the last thing I ever want to face is a decision. I am capable of fleeing from decision with a kind of subtlety that would make most people look like amateurs. It was a horrifying trip. It seemed like my whole being was consumed with the little petty externalities of life.

But in that experience I became aware that probably with a passion I'd never possessed before I wanted to grab hold of the deeps of the spiritual dimension of life, and Auckland rocked me into that kind of awareness. But when I became aware of that, I became aware that on this trip that was what I was bumping into in other people. That may not shock you, but it simply shocked me. Somebody asked me a day or so ago what was happening in the world, and immediately I had my answer to that. As for what was happening to the world in terms of what I encountered on the trip(which is the question we are always after on such occasions) my answer was ready like that. But I think I took a couple of minutes before I opened my mouth because what I was going to say did not sound right. If I dared to trust my sensitivities, my intuitive capacities, I would say that what is happening in the world is not a concern for social issues at all. Now you've got to hear what I'm talking about. Of course they are concerned with social issues. But we're after the concern down underneath the concern.

It seems like everywhere I went people were reaching out after the deeps of the spiritual dimension of life. How can I get that said another way? Consciousness is becoming more intense in mankind at large. The spiritual aspect of life is the only solution to the great social and personal problems that exist in our world today. That has shifted or turned just a little bit my insight into the great social upheavals of our time. I am sure that some of you--particularly some of you younger ones--have been aware of this for some time. It became clearer than ever before that the youth revolution, the protest of the emerging adults in this world, was nothing else, is nothing else than a reach, a demand, for a new sense of spirituality. You see it manifest its protesting against the social institution of education, the social institution of polity, of family and of many others. But down underneath it's a scream after the spiritual. I think this is true of the new women of this world and the revolution that they are occasioning. I think I am clearer than ever before that this is what is underneath the black revolution. And I am sure that the screams that are coming out of the non-western world are screams after a new kind of authenticity relative to humanness.

The other day Len Dressler, in returning from Southeast Asia with me, began to spell out that the externality of the civilization that the Western world has created has utterly conquered the world. If any of you are feeling romantic in that direction, you just give up your sentimentality. The West has utterly conquered, just period. I remember a woman in India around what must have been six or eight years ago. This Indian woman tried to get through my skull that the Indians had to be proud of the period that the British were there, because, as she said, 'That's got nothing to do with the British. That is who we are if we last for another forty thousand years of history.'

You know something, I think I was a little too naive to understand what she was pointing to. Len put it in stronger terms: the West has conquered. But the trouble is that in conquering, the West has also taken its sickness, and its sickness is its loss of a soul. I like to fool around with the psychologists of the last part of the last century and in this century, who in their reduced understanding of what it means to be a self, with a great deal of glee said that the soul was gone, that the soul was simply an invention of a magical understanding of life. My God, how mistaken could they have been. No, you can get rid of that word 'soul,' but the reality that it held in western civilization had died in western civilization. That's why that kind of word was useless. It's almost as if the revolutions that are going on in this world are reaching out for a recovery of a term that would indicate that sense of reality that the term in western civilization 'soul' indicated before. This is what I mean when I say there's a reaching under every aware person for this dimension of spirituality. If you begin to get a hold of the problem of turning matter into spirit it's almost as if my interior context, which was deeply influenced by what I experienced this summer, met a kind of an externality, and left me quite a different kind of a human being than I was before I went away.

In the midst of this one of the most shocking things I think I've ever experienced. cam in a dramatic way. Anybody who is a part of our group and awake is well aware that every Monday, Wednesday and Friday you haven't got the slightest idea of what we're about, whereas on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday sometimes you have some little inkling of what we're about. One of the sort of amusing things--I mean this very gently--is when some new person comes around and after about three months or six months or nine months comes in with his bags packed ready to leave, and says, 'I'm going to leave because I don't know at all what we are about.' And you can imagine the grin that you have down inside, because he's telling you the story of your life. His problem is that he isn't spiritually mature enough to have to face the fact that on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday you haven't got the slightest idea what that reality unsynonymous with myself is which you mean to indicate with the verbal sign G. O. D. But that comes if one can dare to keep his suitcase unpacked in this kind of a case.

Anyway, what happened to me on this trip is that continuing experience. It's sort of like what I think war is for a group of young men. I don't mean it in terms of the subjective aspects of it. What war does is to take the whole of your life, and the whole of the life of creation. This is why man cannot be a self without war. Now war has many many faces. it is not necessarily a matter of using guns to blow anyone else's belly out. As a matter of fact in the Polynesian culture they couldn't exist without war. And one of the reasons why they are nonentities today is that we took WAR away from them. I mean the kind of war where they butchered one another. We took that away from them, and did not give something to put in its place.

What I'm trying to say is that self-consciousness is impossible without unlimited tension at the bottom of humanity. This is what you mean by the Ur images. And you are pretty well aware of that in your own experience when you are able to overcome the sentimentalism in you and really look at that. That doesn't mean that you and I like tension. Good Lord, that's why Slicker is such a tremendous colleague. He seems to me to cause tension all of the time, and yet most of us would never have grown the little bit that we have grown if we didn't have that kind of tension. Those of you who know him know he's got a scheme of creating tension that I think is the most ingenious that I've ever seen. He's like a donkey that sits down in the road and you can't budge him. If Slicker doesn't understand something, I mean, he sits and you can tug and push. I've seen eight or ten of his colleagues trying to get

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him up off the road, and none of them succeeded. That's what I mean by war, tension. Some people from the outside misunderstand that, but some of you old ones won't. Anyway, war takes the whole of life all of a sudden and throws it at YOU, your intention with humanness itself, I suppose.

On this trip, it was almost as if that whole dimension of self-doubt suddenly came together in one white hot ball, and entered into my being. It reminds me of when I was in the eighth grade. One of those lightning balls--I don't know what they are, balls of light in a thunderstorm--came in an open window of our schoolroom and EXPLODED, right up before us. What I'm ready to talk about is that patch of cloud that I spoke of this summer, in which there is always within a spirit man a patch of meaninglessness, a patch of no vision whatsoever and a patch of apostasy. And there come times in life when that little patch becomes something like the King ranch in your being and jars you into the awareness that that bit of apostasy is always there in a man who has gazed into the heart of the center of existence itself.

What I am trying to say to you is that on the trip there came experiences, one or two or three--and this is not an intellectual matter that you are talking about--experiences, horrible, racking experiences in which you screamed out, 'What in the world is our group all about? What right have we got to be doing what we don't know what we're doing, not only overseas, but anywhere?' And there is NO answer waiting.

Now you put those two things together, that the world and yourself as a part of-- (Should I mention that when you're dealing with turning matter into spirit, you don't seem to know the difference between every man and yourself, or do you know that?) When you have that experience of the world, opening itself up to the spiritual depths of its own interior being; and at the same time the experience of 'haven't got the foggiest idea what you're about'; something's got to give. And what gave was that hiddenness, out of the cracks of which came the word service.

I don't know whether those of you who do not belong to my generation have the deep hostility for the word service that any sensitive person my age has to have. For it was the concept of service, perhaps more than any other concept, that manifested for people of our age the deep perversion of the gospel, and the deep, deep sickness of the glorious bourgeois world. I suppose that word, along with the word love, became the overt sign of the horrifying sickness of our world. By the time most of you came along it was probably other words. That's one of the words you put out on a clothes-line to air out for a hundred years. Yet when I was in the midst of this kind of a struggle, I had no other word than service.

In a world in which you sensed that mankind was self-consciously reaching for spirituality, and in a moment in which you didn't have the slightest idea what you were about, emerged the word service. Obviously (to most of you obviously) this immediately threw me back to our efforts at trying to define ourselves as a comprehensive historical religious order, in the sense that we are a teaching order, we are a contemplative order and we are a serving order. I one time said that we will always be primarily a teaching order, though it's been clear to many of us that we have been all three; and that in one sense all orders, whether they be fundamentally teaching, serving or contemplative orders, are all three of them. Anyway, I said that we would always be primarily a teaching order. I'm beginning to doubt that, and it's not that we're becoming more and more a contemplative order; it seems to me perhaps we are becoming more and more a serving order.

This, however, I suspect could not have happened to me as long as serving had to do with building the New Social Vehicle, or any form of social activism. I do not think I could have said it. Only when you had eyes to behold that every man who is reaching out with awareness in our day is reaching after clarity and life in the spiritual depths, do I think that word could have emerged out of the cracks in the concealing rocks within my soul, if I may use that word.

Then what do I mean by service? I tried, in the second go-round on the journey to the center (and again I didn't get finished. this summer, did I?) to try to describe the life of the man who has returned from the awareness of the center. I wish I had a lot more time. I would want to spell out that every man in principle has been to the center long before. This is why when you were studying Teresa, though she spoke of moving from one castle to the other, every time you got in one castle you were aware that you had already been there. The point of: it is that she had to have reached the end before she could even write it. But you discovered that before you could understand the first three words she wrote you had to be at the seventh castle also, so that the journey to the center is not the journey to the center ever. It's the second journey to the center. The consciousness of the consciousness to be human is to have taken the journey to the center.

In the lecture in the summer I tried to describe the life of the one who had returned from what you might call the second journey, or the consciousness of the journey to the very core of what it means to be a human being. One thing I'm clear of is that he is never at home in this world. If I could sing, I would sing that old Gospel song that somebody dug up the words for recently:

I am a stranger here, within a foreign land;
My home is far away, upon a golden strand;
Ambassador to be, to realms beyond the sea;
I'm here on business, for my King.

This is the message that I bring;
A message angels fain would sing;
O be ye reconciled, thus saith my Lord and King;
O be ye reconciled to God.

What it means to serve man is to enable every man to take the second journey to the center, that he may be self-consciously fully human--which is to say, that he may be fully human. That's service.

Then there's a kind of weariedness when you see that, if you become aware of it. It is only that awareness that has ever or will ever build a new social vehicle. My young and dear colleague, Gautama of Darwin, whom I criticized severely, wrote as the last words in his little paper, 'Remember, the New Religious Mode IS the New Social Vehicle.' And so it's always been, and so it ever will be. For what service means in what I'm talking about is enabling men to be human. And one's life-long task is to express that humanness in social forms. He has no other task. But, you see, the weariedness in what I mean by service is to enable that to perpetually go on in let's say other people. For service as I mean it is special election. You and I are oddballs, and this is one of the things we find extremely difficult to put up with. We like to think that we are as other people. We're not. This is why I am greatly perturbed about the Roman Catholic Church giving up the sign of celibacy. That was the external sign that they had to themselves that they were oddballs; and you and I stood around and laughed at that, and called them effeminate. The irony of that is that that was what that sign was to do. I still believe there are other signs. We've suggested for a long time that we all cut off our right arms

and be called lefties. Then people would laugh at you: anybody stupid enough to cut off a right arm! We're the set apart, we are the ones who are outside the camp, as the New Testament puts it.

Service is a divine election. Being a clergyman and having to sweat through the horror of being a clergyman in our time has led me back to see very clearly that a clergyman has to be set apart. He always was, he always will be, and he is set apart. To be called to be a cleric is something quite, quite different than to be called to be a lawyer, a doctor, a teacher. But the problem is what we have defined the religious to be, or the cleric. Or it may be that the lawyer, the doctor and the teacher is the new religious, is the cleric. Isn't that what we probably really meant when we said that a lawyer who is a man of faith is not a lawyer while he's practicing law; he's the Church. We are called to serve. We are divinely elected.

From the human point of view, this means that we are set aside to do the most absurd of all things; that is to lay down our life. In the midst of the consuming self-doubt that I experienced this summer, the only thing that keeps me from sheer disappearance was to come back again and again and again and again to the idea, if you please (for when you're in the midst of those kinds of crises you hang onto anything—tables, chairs, even ideas), the idea that I was nothing.

You know, it's rather interesting. In Faustus when the sword broke and he picked it up by the blade and the cross, the devil flew. He fled. When I would pick up the halo, the brass zero, the devil would flee. That I am nothing. The demand upon me is to pour my life intentionally down the drain, the sewer. I'd like to say to you that if you do not grasp this quality in what I mean by the word 'service,' or this demand upon your life to serve, you haven't grasped what I mean by service. There is no way under God's heaven to serve mankind in this kind of radicality by anyone who is not a dead man. The funny thing about this experience of being a dead man is that every time you turn your back on your cadaver, that cadaver is raised from the dead and has to die all over again. Have you noticed that?

If somebody asks me now what we are all about, I say to people that we are those who are called to serve mankind.