

THE ORDER AND THE WORD

Collegium 3/12/69

--Joe W. Matthews

This March we have to draw together what we do know a Religious Order is out of our experimentation, building, and reflection. I suspect the men of the religious houses are pretty well aware that I do not care what they did out there, save as it applies to this area. You and I dare not ever move an inch save we ground what we are doing radically in radical humanness. We are not going to look at the details of what we know about an historical order, only the context.

I must begin with the first time I ever got out of this country, about two years ago. I do not know why, I don't seem to be able to get beyond that; I think it was on the way home as we taught courses when I ever got out of this country actually. I knew something-- that the Lord had been talking to us for a long time; and the first thing which struck me was discontinuity.

I said to this group when we returned from India and Australia, and I will repeat it here again, that anyone who is going to be seriously human may have to become a member of our Order; and then I said, I don't mean our Order, but I mean our Order. They don't have to be a member of us, but they have to be a member of us--that was my beginning on what an historical order is. The first thing was radical discontinuity; you couldn't even begin to budge into what I mean by an historical order until that just becomes a part of every fibre of our being...that we become discontinuous people. It is not an idea; it has to do with life itself. It is my life, not my thought.

Though it took me a long time to see, I knew this meant that never again could we dare be concerned with organization. I would like to spell that out in detail, but I won't; but I sure mean more than who is vice-president, secretary, and treasurer.

In order to avoid that, formulation does that for me. Whatever else I mean by formulation, I mean that which maintains radical discontinuity within it to be a sign. Within that context, I want to call to mind that the historical order is nothing. I don't mean that "nothing" as a moral or ethical category; I mean it ontologically, and it is simply that one in history which names the Name. Now, that's the function for me of the people of God, and that is radical discontinuity. An historical order for me has to do with that; but to get that in its proper place (and I don't want to deal with the established Church right now) you have to begin with the fact that you cannot raise this question, or the question of an historical order, unless you see something like a human awakening within history. That, you and I have nothing whatsoever to do with; that is the showed-upness of our situation. Nobody ever saw a human awakening; you only see the effects of it. I am amazed at the people who wrote the New Testament when they said that the spirit is like the

wind. "You don't know whence it came, or where the hell it is going; you can't see it. All you can see is the leaves on the tree rustling. You can see youth around this country breaking all hell loose; you can see women marching to the front of the battle for the first time; you can see the black man on the move; you can see those we've subjugated for centuries across the world rise up. And these are the leaves on the trees that point to a "blowing in the wind."

Then, out of that comes the spirit of movement, and the Spirit Movement is closer to this than it is to concretion. Yet, it is concretion, for it is giving form. I like to think that that wind, which you and I never saw, can talk; and it is saying one thing-- "give me form, give me form, give me form." Then it puts in a footnote: "any form you give me I'll not finally be contained in, remember that; but give me form, give me form! I do not surrender my invisibility, I do not surrender my own sovereignty, you'll not know where I'll blow next and you'll not know where the leaves will tremble again; but give me form, give me form, give me form!"

Now an historical order is that which has meaning only in relationship to this--this, which you never saw, is the only "is-ness; this is nothing, and this is the nothing of nothing...discontinuity, or formulation. The job of formulation here in the broad sense is naming the Name. I do not want to yet hit the establishment; I've got another thing you've got to bear in mind.

In our day I have become aware that for the first time in history there is a world-wide language. I mean, there is a world-wide symbolic network which has been established. I secondarily mean (and this is utterly related to that), that the English language has become global. You go anywhere and you can communicate. Can you remember how long one had to do hand signs in Africa before you learned to talk? Not any more! You can communicate anywhere because the British people took English across the world. Instead of trying to escape our assinine pluralism, weeping over that, thank God, it could have been German; it could have been Swahili; it just happened to be English!

Now, then, related to that--the depths of the communications systems have made this world one. The most important thing far beyond the capitalistic missionary movement or the western conquest of the world, is the Christian conquest of the world. The Christian Church? It could have been the "hoonky woonky doodey," but it happened to be the Christian Church, that gave the depth universal symbolism to this world; and there is never going to be any turning back. Nothing religious about this, nothing pious, nothing having anything to do with petty doctrines about a God and man in Jesus Christ in any literal understanding of that. It gave a deep

symbolic network in the depths of humanness, and none of us can ever turn the clock back...^{if} anything religious about it: in fact, let us put it just the other way--it was the most sinful thing that happened in the world!

You are *fooling with* the language of symbol systems when you fool with naming the Name. The people of God are simply those who RADICALIZE everything. That is where you've got to begin. I put it this way--that the people of God know exactly what's going on in this world; plus, they have a secret. They know that this is the divine activity. I say they know everything--they do not know more than anyone else in principle knows, but they know they have a secret. They know it is God. That's why they are nothing, they've got a secret and it doesn't even belong to them. That's why they are nothing.

Now, you have to start with God, and the way you start is something like this: there is an historical goingonness, and this is the "blowing in the wind." You and I have little guides about these trembling leaves: one is inclusive, another is futuristic, and another intentional. Any fool who is aware that the leaves tremble knows this is the way they are trembling. In another age they put this another way; and if somebody wants to describe this another way, you have no need to get upset. We just say, yeah! yeah! If he was not clear, we might push him a little, that is to say, we are not playing games with this. But our souls are not tied to it! There is a goingonness in the world, and that is relative to nothing. I mean that's just the thereness. There isn't a fool here who can talk finally about the category "why" in relationship to the black revolution, or to the student revolt, or to the many others. I mean they are just there. It's relative to nothing.

Now, there is a wierd people in history who come in and say this isn't a goingonness; it's THE goingonness. Now here you can use any terminology you wish to use (and you and I have to have a million of them, it seems to me) that can replace that article "the." This goingonness is the ultimate, it is the final, it is the "what life is all about" goingonness. It is the goingonness beyond which there is no going-on-ness. You use your own language, our fathers had millions of them. Everyone on the street, whether he is aware of it or not, carries within his belly a category for the beyond which there is not--every guy you meet. The question is trying to find out what the trigger is to release that.

That is what the word "God" means. The reason you cannot get rid of that word in the culture of which you are a part, is that that word draws together all these terminologies down in your belly that say "beyond which there is not." So this community comes into the midst of the trembling leaves that come from the blowing of the wind and says "GOD," yet adds nothing. Yet, it radically revolutionizes the relationship; for what that means is that no longer can any person take that trembling of the leaves from the blowing in the wind un-seriously. That is to say, obviously, they go to hell! I mean, they live their life for nothing. This they know; this is a secret in the heart of every man--that when he is over against the "beyond which there is not", should he fail to live his life out of that relationship, his life would be nothing; he would go to hell. If that were not true, there would be no such thing as evangelism, nor such a thing as revolution.

Let's move on to the fantastic WORD Mark you, you and I know that that Word is an accident in history because it could have been a billion other terms; it could have been "gook;" and when "gook" gets into history, it gets into history! You've no way to talk about what I'm going to talk about now in Buddhism, Hinduism, Communism, or any other "ism" except through the Word. "gook." This has to do with symbolism and language.

What is this? There is an existential happening. I would really like to replace the word "existential" here, with the word "personal;" but I do not mean by "personal" the individual--yet, I mean the individual. Conversion takes place in a family (and some of you ought to be able to bear witness to that), and conversion can take place in a group like us (and we ought to be able to witness to it.) This is relative to nothing, but mark you, relative to that Mystery, the beyond which there is not, God. The trinitarian formula is not some abstract joke, it is formed out of the guts of life. The only radical happening you can point to would be in terms of that beyond which there is no. Nothing pious about that.

One can have all sorts of terms about this. The New Testament has so many that I don't see how we have reduced it into some silly doctrine. Why, a man is born all over again! I mean, you get born on and it's like once you were nothing and now here you are in history! Take any phrase you want--this is the RADICAL happening, as this is the radical goingness in life, whatever symbolism you use. Here is a people in history who say this happening--in which you decide to live your life in relationship to the final goingness, or to God, is the only radical happening: getting married? having children? compared to this, nothing! There is only ONE radical happening in your life, and that is the happening in which you choose to obey God. There is nothing pious about that.

Then, we must talk of the Holy Spirit. I used to get burned up over that word "holy." I used to just want to call it "spirit." But not any more. The HOLY spirit--if they hadn't tacked that onto the front of it I feel I would have wandered off into all kinds of things. Our fathers helped us here. They should have also said the HOLY Christ, the HOLY God. This is the radical spirit, and this has to do with posture and with style. This is a posture, a style of life relative to the above--that is, relative to that holy posture, the holy stance, the holy style, the holy spirit. I sort of like that: they reach out there into the final Mystery and pull it into themselves. The only way that wind you have never seen and you never will, and have no control over, becomes a part of your own guts is through that posture which comes out of that particular. It comes and say, this is the style and there is no other. So these strange people in history, "the have-nothings," go around and say: "this is the Holy Spirit;" and, my God, within a person all hell breaks loose! This always comes as an indicative and an imperative.

The People of God simply point to a thereness which is a radical corporateness built upon the fact that man is sociality itself. There is a radical corporateness beyond any other kind of corporateness, relative to the Mystery That is the one thing important--that Final Mystery. Our fathers of the New Testament knew that; and all the Jesusolatry, and reduction of the trinity to the Christ pole is idolatry. We are the ones who name the Name. We are the ones who enable that person to pull out of his "gut" his little secret symbols for the ultimate, for the beyond which there is no. We say, this is God.

This statement comes as a fantastic judgement. It can come no other way. It can come no other way. It comes as a fantastic scandal, and that is due to our hiding our actuality in our illusions.

I find myself going to the painting by Van Gogh, "The Starry Heavens." The historical order is simply like those swirling balls of fire, swinging so fast and so white hot that it looks like those. There must be historical orders who are the manifestation of that swirling, that the total people of God can catch new visions, experience new judgments, and be given new possibilities of being God's people. Thereby, all men everywhere are given afresh the possibility of not just going through life, but living the fantastic life God has give to us all. That's the setting for me, whatever else it is in the historical order.