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#5299

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T89

SPIRIT CONTEXT
FOR THE INTRODUCTION TO THE TACTICAL MODEL OF THE LOCAL CONGREGATION

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

December 7th of 1941 was a signal day in my life. I was just barely 30 years old. In less than a month Lyn and I were going to be married. On that day I was seized by God. I don't suppose that then I understood that I was seized by God, but I knew I was seized. I immediately called Lyn and got her approval, and then took off for Washington to start the processes to become a chaplain in the army.

I've told some of you before about how I happen to understand myself as a war baby. It came about in three stages. I made three landings on island fortresses in the Pacific. The first one was in the Marshall Islands, though our force was not committed until Eniwetok. The night before we were going to storm the beach, I got my troops together and talked to them, and the subject I talked on was what in the world are we doing sitting in this lagoon out here in the Pacific getting ready to storm that beach in the morning?

Now if you listen real carefully, you can begin to see that step by step I was moving toward asking the life or death question. I wonder if that was the first time that I became self-aware of my concretion in the vicissitudes of history. I wonder. Obviously I was not talking to the men. I was talking to myself. The next morning I went in on the third wave. A chaplain belongs in the third wave like he needs a hole in the head. I never went in on the third wave again. But it was good for me. For the first time in my life, I understood what fear was. I don't mean fear. I mean fear. Some of you think I was a coward on April 5th. You're right. I couldn't even control my voice for several days. But I learned fear. And I wonder if that was not the first time in my life that I became aware of the fragileness of my contingency. I wonder. Before that time I had never spoken on fear. I didn't know what it was. But I knew then, and the night before we hit the beaches at Saipan, the second storming, what I talked upon was fear. I wasn't bright enough to call it ontological fear in those days. But that's what it was. And that was the second step toward my descent into deeps from which to this moment I've never recovered.

The third time was at Okinawa. It was on Easter morning, as the sun was coming up, that we went ashore. Not too many of my old men were left any more. Many of them had been killed, and the number that was sent home mentally ill was rather shocking to me. As you are about to make a landing of that sort, a strange kind of fate takes over. You figure, my God, you could get through that twice, but nobody could make it three times. So there was a kind of resignation, I suppose, on the part of those of us who had been there. I guess I was there for over three years by the time we hit there. One of the great ironies of it is that we expected to be simply slaughtered. We knew that that was the only island in the Pacific where there were high concentrations of artillery. But we were not opposed. We walked in standing up, on Easter morning.

The night before, things had really broken loose, as never happened to me hitherto. Now I like artichokes. And I used that as an illustration of peeling the artichoke until you get to the heart of the matter. And it had to do with what I believe. I began to strip aside what the hell I believed that I could do without. And when I got down to the core, there were just two things. You see, at that time I had picked up my men after a Banzai attack. I had pulled a dead baby whose teeth was clenched around the bosom of a screaming mother who was almost starved. Her bosom was as flat as my hand and hanging down, and the baby's dead teeth clenched on it. And I had to pull the baby off of her and listen to her scream, not so much from the physical pain, but the spiritual pain. Oh, my Lord, I could go on and on and on.

The two things I finally perceived that I could not avoid was that I was over against a reality where the categories of good and evil had no relevance what so ever, and that you finally had to decide whether you were going to live in that kind of world or whether you weren't. I think that's the first time in my life that I really knew what I've meant all the years when I'd use the verbal sign G-O-D. I wasn't very clear, but I saw that; and I suppose in that insight I went through-- to use my later poetry--through the veil, and from there have never returned.

The second thing was that some way or another--and I told my men that I did not know how at that time--but some way or another this happening that we call Jesus Christ had to do with a person being able to say yes to the givenness of life beyond the categories of good and evil. And upon that faith, the next morning I went ashore.

Oh, the Lord was sneaky. I didn't know what I was doing on December 7th in 1941. The Lord was sneaky. That's what he was after. I could hardly wait until I got home, and before I saw anybody save Lyn I started a journey from theological school to university to theological school to university all over this country to find just the place where this new desperate passion that had been stirred in me could be thought through to the bottom. Well, as most of you know (I'm sorry Richard isn't with us any more) when I had my talk with Richard, I knew that was the place, period, where I'd begin. And that was the beginning of RS-1. For that was the first step. That was the first step that had to be taken. RS-1 in principle could have a billion faces, and throughout history it has had a billion faces, to be sure. But it was RS-1, it had to be done. There's no question. It had to be done.

There was another side to this coin, too. You can't live as close as war forces you to live close to men and not develop a kind of concern--not sentimentality-- a kind of concern for that individual and that individual and that individual and that individual. So that my scream for RS-1, where I was able to articulate to myself what it meant to say yes in this kind of a world, was on behalf of those men who suffered as I suffered in being thrown into the depths of what it means to be a human being. I decided that I would not be a local pastor anymore, but I would prepare myself to teach in colleges. What I was going to teach, no matter what they called it, was what would come to be RS-1. I suppose I've never taught anything else but just RS-1 in many forms and many shapes. For I was after that individual, that individual, that individual. And yet I am quite clear in my mind that I never left the local congregation--this isn't just sentiment, for I became clear of the inadequacy of the church years before that. But in being interested in that individual, you had to be concerned only with the grass roots, only with the grass roots. And it wasn't long until I became lucid about the fact that if you were going to be concerned for that individual, you had to have a grass roots structure that was already there. You didn't have time to create a new grass roots structure. You had to find one that was there. And the church was there. I suppose it was in Colgate still in the '40's when I first used the illustration that if you didn't use the local congregation as your vehicle, you had to capture the volunteer fire department or the Kiwanis Club. You had no choice. If you were concerned for that individual in the dimension of what I poetically point to with RS-1, you had no choice but to capture the local congregation.

When those of us who are older here began to get together, I sometimes think that what we got together around was the local congregation. To be sure, we gathered together because each one of us had experienced in our own ways what I've described had happened to me during the war. To be sure, we gathered together around that common impingement of life, but we also gathered together around the local congregation. I am sure that those of us who gathered early commonly loved the local congregation.

Not that we could have put it that way in those days at all. We didn't even understand perhaps that love wasn't some kind of feeling that you had. It was a depth decisional matter or reality.

Tonight for me is a symbol of paying off, in some way or another, a long outstanding debt to the local congregation. In the last hour I've asked two or three people if we were on the right track. And what I meant by that was in detail and concretion. There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that in the long sweep of history we are on the right track.

My mind has recently gone back to the step by step by step journey that we've taken toward this hour. Almost immediately when we turned to being head on concerned with the state of the church in our day, we began the PMC's (I don't suppose I'll ever really be able to call them PLC's. My being is attached to "PMC"). It soon became clear as you worked with the clergy, that save they had a picture of what they were doing in relationship to the globe, they couldn't long endure. Then it became clear that save they had a way to be concretely nurtured in the spirit dimension that they could not long endure. Then it became clear to me, that save you spelled out in great detail the tactics--not the goals, but the tactics--to be used, that they could not long endure in renewing the local congregation.

This last phase happened to me, as you remember, when I went to Upsaala and discovered the three gaps in the conference. The first is the gap between the theological insight and the capacity to articulate that insight. Those insights were relevantly in the framework of the post-modern world. The second gap is the gap between the princes of Christendom with their ecumenical experiences and the fat lady in the pew. The third gap is the gap between their social strategies and the tactics whereby they were carried out.

I suppose it was there, at that moment, that it became clear to me that what we had been talking about, namely Religious Houses around this country, had to come off. And they came off in a big hurry, didn't they, after two years of working together on the New Religious Mode. For me, in many ways, the first concrete step toward practically re-entering the local congregation was getting the Religious Houses going. You might as well stay home if you didn't have some kind of machinery such as that. You might as well not try to do this kind of job.

You didn't, however, move very far in your first reflection upon the "how to" of renewing sociologically the local congregation, without seeing all the places you had to move at once. You had to move into the youth culture; and if you didn't, you couldn't do the job. That's just one of the many. And it came early clear that if you didn't start the permeation processes, you could never do this job, even though Permeation, as you well know--and I find a little humor in it; I'm sure you in Permeation don't--you went so damn much faster than I expected you to, that you had to be turned off a little bit to let the rest of us catch up. Without the possibility of that move, you couldn't do the job with the local congregation. You might as well not even try. And you name one thing after another that just has got to be done in order to do this kind of task.

I sometimes have smiled a little bit at Derrough and others who were pressing real hard for a priority chart relative to our goals. I smile a bit because every revolutionary already has his priorities all set, and all the people in the world aren't going to do much there. The problem isn't that. The problem is the priorities in the tactics. That's where the problem is for a revolutionary. To be sure, the 30 of us who were here at Christmastime, very simply as a matter of fact, got up an image of our priorities. You remember that? No problem at all at that point.

The real task is getting the tactics up. And that's where our sweat is now, building the tactical model--of the local church.

As we've been working on the tactical model of the local church, we're developing a "dramaturgical" chart showing all the main tactics of the congregation, cadre, and parish on one page, in which the size of the box of a particular tactic shows the weight of that tactic. The lines that delineate the specific tactics have to do with the weight of the tactics in terms of their importance, not in the long range sweep of the church, but their impactful significance.

Behind the tactical chart is the theoretical model of the local church, made up of the dynamic of the cadre, the congregation, and the parish. The tactics have nothing whatsoever to do with that. If you want to talk about strategic objectives or goals, or disclosed intent, you have to say that the theoretical model is what you're out to create. You are not out to "create" any of the tactics. They are the instruments, the means, the "tactics" whereby you accomplish that. Therefore, you're non-chalant about the tactical model, except in so far as--as I like to put it--a revolutionary is always found dead in his tactics, and never found dead in his goals. Want me to repeat that? A revolutionary is never found dead in his goals or his objectives. He is always found dead in his tactics.

Let me try to explain that. I'll go back to the war. When I was in Saipan, a banzai attack took place when they finally got trapped at one end of the island. The island was built with hills in the middle and then a stretch of beach, and the banzai attack came down that beach. They came out of the hills where they were hiding and went down to the beach. And they just swept through our forces. Fortunately that night I was up in the hills. But a large group of our men were down there on that plain, and the Japanese came down. It was horrible. They ran right through our troops. They went through the troops and the back up and got back to the back up back up--that was the quartermaster's corps--before they were all killed; and of course every one of them was killed. The next morning when I went down there, every time I took a step I was going over a dead body, Japanese or American--the ground was just literally covered. I was looking for my men, and I found one of them who was a captain. After I found him I retraced his steps. I first found his carbine dropped. Then I found his .45 a few steps on, dropped; and then when I found him, he was holding his knife in his hand, and of course he was dead. That's what I mean. He wasn't found dead in any damned objectives, or in any war goal. He was found dead in his tactics. That's what it means to be a revolutionary.

The tactical model of the local church is unimportant, except that's where you're to be found dead--and, you know, that makes it relatively significant.