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SAINTS IN THIS WORLD

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

There is nothing I can give you
which you have not;
But there is much, very much that
while I cannot give it, you can take.

No heaven can come to us unless our hearts
find rest in today. Take heaven!
No peace lies in the future which is not hidden
in this present instant. Take peace!

The gloom of the world is but a shadow
Behind it, yet within reach, is joy.
There is radiance and glory in the darkness, could we but see,
And to see, we have only to look, I beseech you to look.

Life is so generous a giver, but we, judging its gifts by
their covering, cast them away as ugly, or heavy, or hard.
Remove the covering, and you will find beneath it
a living splendor, woven of love, by wisdom, with power.

Welcome it, grasp it and you touch the angel's hand
that brings it to you. Everything we call a trial, a sorrow
Or a duty, believe me, that angel's hand is there, the gift is there,
and the wonder of an overshadowing presence
Our joys too, be not content with them as joys.
They too, conceal livening gifts.

And so this time I greet you,
Not quite as the world sends greetings but with
profound esteem and with the prayer that for you
now and forever, the day breaks, and the shadows flee.

a Christmas card by Fra Giovanni, 1513 A.D.

In thinking about the Church, the last chapter of First Peter, a fantastic unbelievable book on the church by Segundo, a Roman Catholic, and Bishop Robinson's book, The Difference in Being a Christian Today, have been of particular help to me in the last couple of weeks (though what I have been thinking, along with you, has been going on for a long time). About the time I think in my mind that I have relatively solved what I would mean by "The Great Turn," the bottom falls out and I find I am on a much deeper level.

The profundity of that little image seems to me, these days, to be bottomless. The Great Turn, going to the World, is a much deeper happening than I had dreams of a few months or even a year ago.

The Established Church is having some severe pains today in the midst of growing awarenesses due to the sense of itself as on the edge of utter collapse. When we visited a Bishop a short time ago, the way he received us was absolutely out of this world. Those Texans, being scared to death of the hierarchy, thought sure this guy would take us to pieces if we ever dared enter into the arena of San Antonio. However, he received us extremely well. He said he was really interested in our work, and would declare to his whole church that he approved of what we were doing. We talked of several things, particularly the spirit of the holy life. What he got across to me was that he knew the Church is renewed. He knew the renewal forces in the church had won; that the Church could no longer be what it was.

Now I think most of the princes of the Established Church have a deep sense of release at being able to announce that to themselves; and this gives them a fresh sense of hope. But hidden in this is a sense after the fact that in this moment when things look gloriously possible for the church, the whole thing is collapsing. And the pain of this is that this whole thing that is collapsing is their existence. They feel they are presiding over the demise of religion. I believe it has only been in the last few weeks that I have understood something of what Bonhoeffer meant when he talked about religionless Christianity, or when he suggested that religion is gone.

Sometime after the New Testament, the Church began to sense after itself as an organized entity which had social structures like other social bodies, a total ideology, and a membership. It was, therefore, in competition with a category we mean by "the World." This sense of competition has had various forms. With Luther and the reformers there was a polar sense of the World-of-the-church and the World-of-the-World. With the Roman Catholics there was the architectonic World-of-the-World and the World-of-the-Church. The move was to make them synonomous. This is where you got all the psychologism most of you were reared in. Behind that idea of unity was still the idea of two worlds, but now one. The ones in the Church who, in many ways, felt themselves overwhelmingly as minorities, saw a radical discontinuity. There were just two worlds: one was the World-of-the-World, one was the World-of-the-Church, and you had to decide which one of the two you were going to live in. It went even farther than this. The Church did not grasp itself as being quite in the World; it was as if the worldly was in the Church. Obviously, the World-of-the-World was something less than the World-of-the-Church. You then got the realm of evil and naughty worldliness. Then you got "pious people," piety being fundamentally defined as to whether or not you joined an organization.

I say that is not the New Testament. The Church is not religion, the Church is not religious organization. This does not mean that whatever the Church is, there is not organization or structures connected with it. The fact is, humanness requires structures. But the Church is not an organization. Barth was trying to get at this when he made a radical dichotomy between the gospel and religion. If you put that into sociological categories, you get what I am trying to say. The Christ happening is not a religious happening,

but baptism is. It is that kind of knife I want to bring down through this. The Church grasped herself at the Center, with the World out on the perimeter.

When I say that the demise of religion is at hand, I do not mean the collapse of the Roman Catholic Church, or the collapse of the Methodist Church, or the Presbyterian. I mean there is a collapse of this whole picture I have painted. To make this sound as strongly as I can, there is the sociological collapse of what has been built up over two-thousand years. The princes of the Church see the collapse. But we know it is going to be a metamorphosis because the Church is backed toward the gates of Hell. There will be a metamorphosis; out of the ashes, there will come a new body.

At the time of the Reformation (which was a cataclysmic moment), there was the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. You will never understand the Reformation if you do not understand the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation. In our moment in history there was something like the Co-Reformation; what I am trying to say is that the Romans and the Protestants are in the same boat. It is no longer an issue as to whether it is Roman, or Protestant, or sectarian, or anything else. All of them, though they have their particular form of what I described, were riding in that same boat.

When I look back at the New Testament, in John and in the Synoptic Gospels, I am more and more impressed that Jesus came into the World; no, I will put it even better: he came out of the World not out of the Church. He came into the World, not into the Church. He was dealing with radical humanness and not some religious organization you signed your name to.

Paul has been intriguing me. He deals with that massive monolith of Judiasm. Now, Saul was in that; but Paul was not in that monolith. Without denying the extreme value of that, he said no to it. Now, this Co-Reformation we are in today is in precisely the same kind of situation. I also believe that down the road four hundred or even two thousand years that will be said again as this fresh air perhaps solidifies into becoming synonymous with the structures themselves.

The Church came out of the World and its only function is to go into the World. And I do mean to the World--not into the World, in the first instance, as the Church, but into the World up to the hilt.

Now, I am not to deny that there are going to be structures, but the kind of structures which will begin to emerge will be of quite a different nature from those which now have consumed and hidden the Gospel or the Christ happening. The Christ happening has to do with humanness; it does not have one single thing to do with dogma. This does not mean dogma does not have its place; but the moment the Christ happening becomes some concept to be communicated, you are back with that organized-from-the-center concept, which finally dichotomizes the World into two worlds. What I am trying to say is, that for the People of God there is only one World. This means that transparency is the only adequate image with which to work in this arena.

Now the man of the World knows about Nothingness. He knows about Awareness. He knows about Freedom. I do not need to remind you that the people who, in our minds, were purely secular people, were the ones who first learned this. I thank God that due to this unbelievable Established Church which continued through history, I was given the grace to name the Name, and in naming the Name found these awarenesses made transparent in such a fashion that the Nothingness, the Consciousness, and the Freedom became other than these realities, while they remained the same. Being here with God the Creator, the man of the World knows about love, yet he may not be able to name the Name.

I checked back in my own history relative to Universal Benevolence. Because Universal Benevolence is not an abstraction but a concretion, it always has to do with the concrete expending of one's imaginal capacity. I can remember some incidents; and perhaps if I tried hard, I could remember many through which my care, my concern suddenly expanded. As I tried to recapture that, the one thing I was aware of was a strange kind of awe, though I knew not the name of the reality behind the awe.

I tried to look back in my history (this was easier for me because I have been thinking of it more) and I thought of the Dark Night of the Soul. Though I had no road map, and named not the Name, yet I have known the awe, the humiliation, the weakness, and the suffering.

The other night I felt that my whole universe had collapsed. We are banking a lot on Mayor Daley coming to 5th City on Saturday, and the news was that he might not come, after we had done so much work: the humiliation, the weakness. I remember that, in trying to put on pressure to get him, we discovered we had been working with his boys and not his men. You would think that at sixty years of age I would get over being a naive child. But I got trapped into having to confess that I have been naive. I do not know whether that pains you, but it sure pains me. The question came to me: Now what is happiness? What is bliss? I decided, "My life is happiness!" That is what I said!

In addition to my sweating that through, I have also been given the wonder which is beyond my capacity to give the praise that is due, of being able to name the Name, and say in the midst of that, "Abba, Father".

At this moment in history there is a juncture between what is going on in this World-World and the World of Jesus Christ. Jesus is not first the Lord of the Church; he is the Lord of the World. He came from the World, went into the World, and laid down his life for the World. Therefore, the Church--his people--are the ones who know that all of this is what human existence is. We know that all this is the relationship to the Mystery, to God. We are the ones who know. And our only function, finally, is, in the midst of the world, to share the gifts that have been given to us by doing our role and being our role in the World.

Now, this has brought us full circle on the Bug Model. The Bug Model was imaged first in Austin--Witnessing Love, Justing Love, Presencing Love. We grasped that unless you were on the front lines--that means in

the world--and became battle-scarred in the midst of it, you had no reason for leaving your scatteredness to go into gatheredness where you exercised the activities of Worship, Study, and Discipline. Now we have gone the full turn, only I have to confess something to you. I suppose I was clear in abstract models, but in the concretion, I was still operating out of: "I first belong to a certain World here, and I take that World out to this World, get beat up, go back to this World again and go through the exercises." I am trying to say No to that. The Man of Faith is born in the World and the Man of Faith must die in the World. We are not talking about geography. We are talking about the one temporal reality.

You cannot work on the Ecumenical Parish because the Ecumenical Parish is operating out of that image of two worlds, which is now collapsing--before some of you die, it will be collapsed. I wonder if you have thought of that. You are going to be building Ecumenical Parishes, but you are going to have to do a flip with that category. This is why the day somebody here stumbled on the Guild dynamic, we found ourselves on "bull's eye." I have a hard time, yet, when I say Local Church without meaning "that congregation." I have to confess to you that I must take six "double-takes" before I do not just unconsciously assume that when you say the Local Church you mean that place where we congregate, where we gather together, rather than that World. The parish is the World, the World, the one World.

Now, in the dynamics of Cadre, Congregation, and Parish is the new form of the church. In the new form of the church emerging in history, that which is the primary dynamic is the Guild. The Church is the servant of the World; she is not propogating another world from this World. She is serving this World which is directly in relationship and under the sov reignty of God. Somebody has raised the question: "If you do the Guild, are you forsaking the Church?" That is exactly what I am pointing to: the warredness. "Are you forsaking the Congregation?" No, the Church is the Congregation and the Guild and the Cadre dynamic--all three. Where one is not there, nothing else exists either. The sickness of the Church has been much deeper it seems to me than we even wanted to know about.

The Guild is the primary dynamic. The Guild is the means whereby you minister to suffering humanity as a sign of the Name you know. That action is going to drive you into coming together for symbolic enactment, for endless training, and for spiritual nurture. In the Local Church Experiment the Congregation was the first set of tactics; the next set of tactics was the Parish, and the third was the Cadre. The Local Church Experiment has to go on. But the Guild is the Local Church Experiment. That does not mean we give up one ounce of what we have already been doing about renewing the Congregation. I trust that tomorrow the universe will be dumped on all of us. Then we must, in another year or two or three, look forward to having a third thing dumped on us. That is the formulation of the new clergy dynamic which is not over against laity: a new religious dynamic. I wonder what that is going to look like? George Holcombe has already discovered that you will not be two feet down the road in building that Guild dynamic before they are going to be screaming, "I want to know about the Other World!"

The Guild means that the Church not only grasps itself as eternally in the World; it understands that it has to work with the World. The way this is manifest is that God's People is not made up simply of the Intentional Church, but of the Latent Church, and of the Creational Church. By the Creational Church I mean that everyone in this world is under the sovereignty of God. Paul, in his first chapter of Romans, knows something of this relationship to the Mystery.

I have been excited with that category "Cell". A guild has a cell in it, more or less visible or invisible, which works arm in arm with the Latent Church, with the ones who care, and arm in arm with the ones who do not know much of anything and do not care very far out in front of themselves. There will come to be gatherings in the midst of the world which are gatherings of the church dynamic, where believers in the category of "organized religion" and unbelievers march hand in hand toward creating a new world. These are the Guilds. I do not quite know what this is going to look like, but I am insisting that in the old image of organization, "going to church" was going to the Congregation. I do not suppose we will talk about going to Church anymore, but we can use that language here. "Going to Church" will be going to a Guild meeting. Going to Church will be going to a Cadre meeting, or going to a retreat. It has strangely happened that LENS (Living Effectively in the New Society) can be seen as the new form of evangelism. It has been clear to me for sometime that evangelism (which is not getting somebody to join the church) is the presence of the sanctified life.

This brings us, brings me to the last thing I want to say: "The time of Saints is here again." The saints are born of the secular, not of the religious. They come out of the World. Their saintliness is in the World; it seems other-worldly. The difference is in humanness: intensified humanness. I should think that all saints are laymen, not clergy. That puts a weight on those of us who are ordained. For a long time I have been struggling to become a layman in order that I might be a saint, for only a layman can be the saint. We get all mixed up with these categories, because at one time the word "layman" was a tremendous word.

On the house in Bombay is the sign "Bombay House"; right below it is "The Institute of Cultural Affairs"; the day after tomorrow above that will be "The Ecumenical Institute". I am a member of a religious order. But I work differently here and there. About a quarter-of-five every morning I go to work. I look upon myself as a staff member of the Ecumenical Institute and a staff member of the Institute of Cultural Affairs. And I make most of you laymen sick with the amount of secular work I get done day after day. I am trying to say that if you are not wholly a part of this world, then you can be this, that, or the other thing, but you are not going to be a saint.

Now a saint, mark you, is not something that has anything to do with the "imperative." If you are sitting there thinking, "Well, maybe I'll try to be a saint," forget it. Sainthood happens. There is no way in the wide world to make it, because it is an indicative category; it is

not an imperative. If you are trying to be something you call a "saint", then you can be sure that is not what I am talking about. That has stumbled over its own feet at least forty-thousand times in the history of the Christian Church, to say nothing of other organizations. It is an indicative. When somebody reads one of those frames of the "Hunter Warrior", or out of the red book, "The Saint", you find yourself saying, unconsciously, "How do I know that's what I'd say 'yes' to?" And you are trapped. If you were not a saint, you would not know the description of a saint, now would you? About the time you get that far (all unconsciously) you begin to think of somebody else like your saintly mother.

There are horrendous problems to embracing the indicative of sainthood. One is your moralism: "I am something pretty good." The other has to do with ontology; but actually, it is the fear of sacrilege: "I am the son of God." Wouldn't you like to be back in the early Church when they knew they were sons of God, and would stand up and say they were sons of God before the assembled body.

Sainthood is indicative. It is to live over against the Mystery, in white-hot consciousness as a free man having taken upon himself the burden of universal love, to the point of the final expenditure of existence, and naming the situation as it is, "bliss." It is that simple. It is all given. It is by the Grace of God.

There are many kinds of saints. There is a saint in every man. I went to see an artist in Bali. When I asked what he was trying to say, he said, "I see a giant in every man, but out of most of them only pigmies come. I am trying to get that giant out of every man." There is a saint in every man, because you are a man. Sainthood is nothing more than living your humanness to the core.

Then there is the saint who takes upon himself the responsibility of being what he is. I happen to believe that takes two things: intentionality and corporateness. I can only say that because that is what humanness is: the decision that you are going to be a saint.

Right now our world does not need heroes; it does not need wise men. What it needs is saints. Finally, saints are only dead people, because it is the last five minutes that count. You will see some people you did not think anything could shatter, suddenly wilt. They had not given up the luxury of hurt and despair and hostility; they only appeared to.

Within the early church they called themselves "saints." "We are the saints." It is exactly what the world needs: In the midst of the World, saints. Finally, to be sure, there is only one saint and that is the eschatological hero.

This quarter, you know your own life has been different. You know that when you get together in the larger community, everyone else has gone through exactly what you have gone through. You know that is true, but you allow yourself to believe it because as long as you do not believe it you think that you have an excuse. But you have gone through it this

time. Imagine being skinned, but the hide is kept whole and still hanging together; and you decide you want to get back into that skin. You look inside and say, "My God, it is so empty in there." And you know good and well that you have got to fill it. You want to escape, but you cannot because you already have it on. You have been putting on the skin of the religious, the saint. This has to do with becoming a Religious. And I need not tell anyone this, it will be for life. There are great pains in this. For one thing, you never feel like a revolutionary ever again (and you know the fun we had being revolutionaries). The reason why you do not feel like a revolutionary anymore is because you have become the perpetual revolutionary, or the transparent revolutionary; it is never done. There is the edge of your spirit struggle.

When I was a tiny boy, I used to "brow-beat" my two younger sisters. Though, we were not "Church people" in our house, I had a little box and, after getting them to sit down, I would stand up on it, and I would preach. You would be interested that my favorite text was the nineteenth and twentieth chapters of the book of Exodus. Isn't that funny? I believe that a part of putting on the skin of the saint, of the religious is that you become aware long before you ever knew there was such a thing as a saint or a religious. This is what Jeremiah was talking about: "In my mother's womb..." Supposing you had just ten minutes to write out a paragraph about that moment in your life, as you look back from here. Remember when St. Augustine wrote about stealing green apples and feeling like such a sinner when he was ten years old. He wrote that when he was forty. I am sure that when he was back there stealing those green apples, he did not feel sinful at all. But he did when he was forty. If you wrote out where you first remember, whether you knew it or not, that you were called to be a religious, I wonder what you would come up with?

These years ahead you are going to find the burden more, more, more. Unless you become a saint, you will not stand the burden of priorship. I mean, you decide that inside yourself. Secondly, if you do not become the saints at this moment in history, whatever you are doing and whatever you are saying will finally not be worth your life at all.

Joseph W. Mathews