

### TRANSPODANE CHRISTIANITY

I have felt with passion that Vatican II was the most important happening of this century. People have laughed when I made that statement, because I could never exactly explain what I meant. In Michael Harrington's book on the '60s, Fragments of the 20th Century, he said, roughly, that Pope John meant well with Vatican II, but in actuality, he presided over the demise of the Roman Catholic Church. Harrington could not see this, but what he pointed to as demise is exactly what for me symbolizes the greatest happening of this century. And, in the broad, you and I have had the honor of participating in that happening.

With extreme caution, I told a group of people today that I was proud to have gone through what we have gone through in the last fifty years, and to have become the Religious vocationally, in a profound sense. At the same time, I have avoided the pitfall of becoming "religious." I have grown fearful of such prose, for that statement is in the words of a child. If indeed, we have succeeded in becoming Religious without becoming "religious," then it is by the grace of God. We want Him to understand we are aware of that. Therefore, in saying I am "proud," I have diverted in order to avoid the divine wrath that would keep me from "getting to Heaven."

I use the word "proud" as the Appalachian mountaineer does when he says, "I'm mighty proud to be here." I am proud to have lived so long as to be part of this historical moment. For if it is true--that we have avoided becoming "religious"--we might authentically be part of this moment. Only one who has grasped himself as Religious, with some degree of authenticity, can be prepared for this at-handness which is creeping upon this universe and into our lives. We have lived to behold many "unanticipateds" come into being. But the new face which is emerging defies description.

I think the state of our spirit being, at this moment, is preparing us for this hour. I have thought much about our present state. It comes to me in terms of strange kinds of silences. Since last fall, I have had quiet and intense trouble coming to terms with the fact that the Dark Night of the Soul never passes away. It is here for aye. This awareness brings into my being a Stillness, on this side of which is Silence. Through the years, many people in our Order have pressed for us to create exercises in Silence and Stillness. Many times, our Daily Office has been criticized for its lack of Silence. I have been very, very afraid in that area. For what the Quakers mean by stillness and silence, as I have grasped it is not what I am talking about. Nor is it some form of devotional piety where one sits around and does not talk. Silence has nothing to do with noise or un-noise on an immediate psychological level. There is no way on earth in which Stillness or Silence can be manipulated.

We have unbelievable exercises in the Solitaries and the Corporates. Sometimes I have pressed myself as to why we have not experimented under the rubric

of Being under Intensified Knowing, or Intensified Doing and Intensified Being or Being in Being itself. I am not sure if there ever can be answers in that area or not. I know that Silence somehow fits under those rubrics but perhaps there is no such exercise. Even to consider such exercises has made me afraid, because I--as some of you--have sensed the profundity of this dimension of humanness. I was afraid we might be pushed beyond recovery if we stayed too close to this fire.

When I toyed with Silence in the past, perhaps I did not grasp what is now becoming clearer. The other day, I was having lunch with several of our colleagues and we got to talking about one of our colleagues who has left us, and suddenly, I was aware that I was experiencing Stillness. There was noise outside and inside the room; but there was Stillness. And there was quietness. This has happened to me several times recently. And what I have begun to see is what our fathers--and probably the fathers of many cultures--have intimately known: that the sea of being is located precisely in that exercise of humanness which has to do with the quiet, intense struggle to believe what is impossible, but unavoidable to believe--that the Dark Night of the Soul, once one has experienced it, is there for the rest of one's life.

I came close to this, but did not really shoot at the heart of the matter when I gave the Being lecture in the Great Hall at the West Side, when I spoke of the cloud of apostasy that is ever with you, once you have gone to the center. It is the desert one carries with him forever. It is the darkness one carries with him forever. It used to be called "hellfire"--the burning one carries with him forever. All of this is talked about in the "King's Business," isn't it? I suspect that he who speaks of Problemlessness, he who speaks of Ontological Joy, he who speaks of Certitude where there is no certitude, and he who speaks of the most unbelievable of all states--Endlessness--knows naught of these unless he knows of Silence.

What I am trying to say has to do with the Silence all of us have been experiencing these past few months. It has to do with the Dark Night--the intense struggle of coming to terms with the fact that God finally controls. The Dark Night does not have to do with humanness; it is humanness. And that is preparing us--without any solicitation on our part--for the emergence of 'this present 'at-handness.'

The other dimension of our spirit state is what I call a vacuum. These past few months, I have been floating in a vacuum, though in one sense, going a million miles an hour. I have to go back to Summer '71. When we began to fool seriously with the social dimension of life, we fell through the social into the spiritual. We fell into the Other World. I know now what I did not know then: there is no way any man has or ever will discover the Other World in the midst of this world unless, by some stroke of fate, he is forced to take with intense seriousness, the social aspect of life. That is why I say no clergyman can ever become a Religious. Only a layman can become a Religious, and that puts a double burden on those of us who had the hands of the Establishment laid on our head, conferring the title, "Minister." In some way or another, we clergy have to discover what it means to be secular men. In that sense, perhaps my "pride" at becoming the Religious--without becoming "religious"--can be understood. Laymen perhaps cannot understand how important it is that I have avoided the pitfall of becoming "religious." We have God to thank for allowing us to

fall into the Other World--leaning and crying on one another's shoulders. We began carving out highways and pathways through the Other World that let us keep our sanity, so that we might return with unbelievable treasures to share with all of mankind. That is why we are clawing with broken fingernails to find our way back to the social. Until we find our way back, we run the risk of tragedy beyond any tragedy: drowning in the realm of the Spirit. This all has caused the vacuum. I see it in your faces because it is in your Being. But it is a sign that He is with us yet. When the vacuum goes away, you will not be around to know it in yourself for you will have drowned in the Spirit. So I am grateful for the profound vacuum I have lived with since Fall. I believe it is a sign we are preparing for the Faceless Coming that is at hand.

About the Faceless Coming. Some will call it this, and some will call it that, and still others will name it otherwise. Some will say it is a new religion and they will be wrong. Others will say it is what we have called it in the past, the New Religious Mode, but when it shows its face it can no longer have that name, for that would be escaping a horrifying burden.

Today, in working with a group, I began to go back through my life as a bigot, as a man of unbelievable prejudice. The first prejudice I became aware of was religious prejudice. I grew up prejudiced against the Roman Catholic Church, and not only against the Roman Catholic Church but against the Lutheran Church, and any other church that than the Methodist Church. The further one was from looking like what I was bred to be, the deeper was my prejudice against him. I do not mean to boast now, but thank God that prejudice has been cured in my heart. I love the Roman Catholic Church and I would like to stand on a mountaintop and shout that fact to the world--along with my love for the Lutherans, and the Presbyterians, and the Disciples and the Baptists.

That was not my only prejudice. I was bred to be prejudiced against the Jews. I do not know if that prejudice was religious--it certainly was not racial--I do not know what it was, but I was prejudiced. I became most deeply aware of it when I taught at Colgate University, where some of New York's finest young Jewish men studied. It was no virtue of mine, but World War II, that made a Jew out of me. I was able to cope with my prejudice when I saw that I was a whole lot better Jew than any of those students were, and I mean that. Thank God, deep healing has taken place there.

Then, I became aware of my prejudice against Blacks, and I would not dare to say that I have been healed in that area by a long shot. But I witness to God's glory for the ten years I spent in the ghetto. I became an absolutely Different human being because I lived there and I thank God for stumbling me into that place. As I look back, I would not have been any place else on earth than in 5th City. Sometimes I become aware of a yearning of mine never to have set foot outside its boundaries.

Later than any other prejudice, I became aware of my cultural prejudice, my understanding that somehow the Western world defined civilization and the rest of the world could only be civilized when it measured up to our understanding of civilization. I am ashamed to admit to you how old I was before I became aware of that, but, mark you, that was bred into me as deeply as religious prejudice was bred into me. I always refer to my Gatlinburg Experience in 1964 or 1965 as my turning point. Third world peoples were gathered in that

Tennessee mountain town and I had been brought in to speak. That is where I met some of the great leaders of our Movement from around the world. One of them was a relatively young Chinese man named Yap Kim How, who later became the Bishop who opened up Asia for us. I asked Yap Kim How where he was from and he said, "Kuala Lumpur." I asked him three times to repeat the name. I was too humiliated to say any more, for I had not the foggiest notion of where Kuala Lumpur was, and I was at least fifty-five years old. I immediately went to a map. I figured that since the man was Chinese, Kuala Lumpur must be in the East, so I bypassed Latin America and Africa. Then, I stumbled on to Malaysia of all places and discovered its capital, Kuala Lumpur. So when we say we are becoming Global, it means by God's grace I am overcoming what I believe was my second deepest bigotry.

The deepest bigotry I have is my Christian bigotry, beginning with the intentional move toward response to the Faceless emerging. It is the retention of two thousand years of Christian bigotry that is in the depths of my being. If, by God's grace, we had not stumbled onto the image of the Contentless Christ, it would have been absolutely impossible for me to have seen this deepest of all my prejudices. What I mean is, not only have I grasped that contentless happening as that without which consciousness or consciousness of consciousness cannot finally take place in a person; but I have found myself a defender of creeds, a defender of liturgy, of ecclesiology and of theology-- and I mean Christian.

Only God can open the eyes of a bigot, and I believe my eyes are finally being opened, giving me an opportunity to repent for two thousand years of the most fanatical form of prejudice there is.

It was an incomparable moment when 19th Century man created the images of ideology and relativity. Whether the Church knew it or not, the creation of those two images spelled doom for the Church. When man invented ideology as a mindset, the two thousand years of the Church was gone. Doomed. All the "fallen out" clergy in this room were "felled out" by those two images; not that they knew it, but they are knowing it now. This doom for the Church is like the doom of the two-story universe which went away for ever and ever and ever, as the lecture goes. And that doom is now becoming not only an intellectual reality, but also a sociological reality. To put it specifically, when man invented ideology and relativity, the sociological dimension of the Church was finished. Our eternal friend, John XXIII, presided over the sociological dissolution of the Church; Hans Kung did likewise in giving permission to live in this world of ideology and relativity.

However, do not be confused. It is not as if, one bright and shiny day, ideology and relativity will disappear and we can start anew to build the two thousand year Church. No, in this post modern world, we have to live with that fact. But God still rules and His people must ever march. Therefore, he has given us the gift of Transpodane Christianity. I spent a long time in the dictionary looking for that word. It came out of the Middle Ages, when the Po River divided the civilized world from the Barbarians. They called the land of the Barbarians "transpodane," meaning "on the other side." I am a Con-Transpodane man, a man on the other side. And what is happening to Christianity is that it is becoming Transparentized--Transparentized Christianity. The word "transpodane" actually means "transpodicious," which means transparent. Christianity, in going through ideology and relativity, is finding the New Essentialism. We know a great deal about this, for we know its method. Where

we have the Contentless Christ spelled out in detail is in the most secular course we teach: RS-I.

The second thing we must ask of after the Transparentized Christ is Transparentized God. This, too, has happened, in the Other World chart. The third thing that is happening is the Transparentized Spirit. Our Sanctification Course, or our work with the Holy Life, is that precisely. One job remains in this scheme--God, Christ, Holy Spirit--and that is the Church. What is emerging on the distant horizon--without a face--is the Transparentization of the People of God, the leaven which will produce the new sociological vehicle which will enable men once again to live.

God is preparing us with the most subtle spiritual experiences we have ever had. He is preparing us for the most profound repentance we have ever had to make. And what is most difficult is that we not only have to repent for ourselves, we have to repent for millions of people--two thousand years worth. Do not be confused, however. I am not saying that a man in the Middle Ages ought to say what I am saying. I stand in the 20th Century responsible for everything that has ever happened in the Church. Without letting us in on the secret, God is slowly disclosing to us the form of the face that is, as yet, No Face. Oh, that we should have lived to see such a day!

--Joseph W. Mathews