

THIS IS THE TIME OF SANCTIFICATION

1. Every movement in history has been a movement of a recovery of justification. And I do not mean simply a movement in the church. I mean any movement in history. Whatever term you use, an enlightenment, a recovery of humanness, a breakthrough in consciousness it always begins with what has been stated in Christian terms by the word justification.
2. Then as a movement matures, it comes to sanctification. But when you use a term like that, if you are like I am, you find it hard to shake off the idea that justification is a doctrine. Justification is a term that points to a happening that is humanness. As we grasp it, there is not such a thing as being present to humanness save through the gate of justification. There is only one door, and that is the Christ happening. There are not two doors. Anybody who attempts to climb over the wall or come in any other door is obviously a thief; that is, he is a phony, a conscious or unconscious phony.
3. And the Christ happening also is the only gate to sanctification. Sanctification is a state of being. It is a dynamic of humanness without which humanness is not humanness. You would like to say, because of the relationships of justification and sanctification, that there is a kind of sequence. That is true, I believe. There is not such a thing as sanctification save on the other side of justification, but I do not like the words "in sequence," for you can reverse it. Save there is sanctification, as a dynamic of humanness, there cannot be the dynamic of justification. This is your age-old problem which, in our day, is to be found in the term "existence precedes essence." Then you have to say man's essence is that existence precedes essence, so that essence precedes existence. And I would judge that one way of talking about the great drama of mankind is absolutely to be found in this interplay of justification and sanctification. Sanctification is that from which justification proceeds, which leads one to sanctification from which justification proceeded, which leads one to sanctification, and so on.
4. Bergson dealt with this dynamic in his Two Sources of Religion and Morality. I have used it and quoted from it many times, but it wasn't until this hour in history that I found I really read this book. He talks about the journey of man or the dynamic of history, in terms of the mystical breakthrough. I always changed that word to prophetic because I was afraid of mysticism. As a matter of fact, those of you who worked carefully with the great resurgence of theology in our day know that one of the handle points was to say no to mysticism. Almost everything that Barth wrote, and Bultmann too, was fighting against the decadent, mystical understanding of life.
5. Anyway Bergson speaks of the rhythm of the prophetic or mystical breakthrough. In secular language today, we would call it an implosion in consciousness. And then he talks about the cooling off of the white hot lava, a cooling off that holds history together until the next breaking point. Then out the prophetic comes again. Bergson was caught in the Age of Progress, so he always saw his breaklooses going up and up. I am not sure I agree with that figure. For instance, he would use as an illustration of the breakloose, the great Exodus happening as described up to the nineteenth chapter of the book of Exodus. Then the rest of the book is an example of where that breakthrough solidifies into law, into the structures of society, which maintain the community until the next breakloose comes. You have a breakloose that says no to the crust of lava, the structures of existence, and then that breakthrough necessarily has to manifest itself in the structures of society. This is revolution, radical revolution. This is why at this moment, you and I are concerned with such things as morality. Only we have to say no to morality in order to be moral people. But we are building.
6. This is why figures like 40 years or a thousand years are most appropriate now, because we are in this implosion. This is Tillich's sense of kairotic time. In that book on Theology of Culture and also in the collection of sermons, The New Being, he worked on this. There is a kairotic moment in history, and yet if every moment is kairotic, there would not be any kairotic moment. Now you and I know that, for a man of the spirit, every moment is kairotic. And yet, we also know if every moment was kairotic, there wouldn't be any kairotic moment. This is, in a way, a part of the pain: it means that you and I are always only a little way from the schizo, and we must never forget it. Only the wild people in history know anything about the kairotic, really. There have to be these people. They are the odd one, the ones that are creatively thrown out of the solidification of the structures of society. Anyway, the kairotic moment is the experience of living between the times. This is when you reculture culture, and Tillich is pretty clear on this, though I never heard him spell it out the way I would have liked to.
7. In our Movement history, it was when we dealt with that moment in which we say that knowing was not divorceable from doing, and doing was not divorceable from knowing, that occasioned the bottom falling out which disclosed for us the rubric of being. And, by the way, you remember in our history this doing time was very short. We had been in existence quite a few years mainly on the knowing pole, before the doing period, which started in 1964 in Fifth City and lasted just 4 years. Then the implosion came. It was the intensification of the knowing and the doing. Remember the religious emphasis in 1968? Then came an implosion in the implosion, and the bottom was kicked out of being itself. We have been in that implosion ever since.
8. It is an interesting thing, there is whitehot spirit in the cooling off of the lava. That whitehot spirit is the implosion into being which is the intensification of knowing and doing. Categories like chastity would help you get hold of that. Anyway, in the broad historical picture, or the broad attempt to understand philosophically the dynamics of the journey of man, sanctification is that

solidification. That word, solidification, worries me, because I do not think that you experience it as solidification save you pull back from it. But what you do, so to speak, is to box up what cannot be boxed up.

9. You remember in the New Testament where it says you work out your salvation? It is as though justification is passive. That is, something happens to you. Then you spend in principle, the rest of your life working out that which happens to you. Now in the great debates of faith and works, that working out was interpreted as the way to salvation. No, no! The New Testament is this salvation working itself out, in every fiber of your doing and knowing and being. I think what both philosophers, in their way, and theologians, in their way, have been trying to clarify is how this working out is not the same state of being as the state of justification.

10. For example it is possible to be utterly solitary in justification. I do not mean that it ever happens outside of community at all, but it is utterly solitary. But sanctification is the making manifest of that solitariness.

11. When you think about RSI, we have said many times, RSI is not a course at all; that is, it is not an articulation of a state of being. Now we are at a different stage in which, actually, we need a new course, that is not a course which has to do with sanctification. I have always wanted it to be a forty-year course, rather than just some fad course. Now I think that the rubric of sanctification has made it such. Sanctification is the framework of those three inner lectures. When you were in college and certainly when I was in college, though it was not as conscious then, was the moment in history of justification. There was the collapse of a world and the breakthrough of the deeps of humanness. Now, I think that all over the world, perhaps not so much in the church, as out with the men of the street, people are experiencing sanctification. The course we have created is not out to create sanctification, but to name it. That is all RSI did. It was to name justification and therefore enable people to be present to the realities that were within and without in such a fashion that intentionality could be let loose. And so it is in the new course, relative to sanctification, we are naming what is happening in our time.

12. In any time, you always have sentinel bodies that represent the masses of mankind. It would be interesting for you and for me to begin to try to get clarity on precisely where the sentinel bodies are. Back in earlier days, the college campuses were the barometers of the time in which we live. I do not think they are now. In fact today, I am not even sure that the sentinel bodies are discernible. That, of course, is not a true statement. What that means is that you don't have eyes to behold precisely. They are manifest all right, but they are probably not going to be what comes to your mind or to my mind immediately. I

13. Now I want to turn and look headon at that dynamic that we call Sanctification. And as we do so, we have first to remember that we are doing this for the postmodern world and that you therefore have a different twist. You have to remember that you are dealing on the ontological level and not the moral. As you look back, frequently it looks as if our fathers of the faith were dealing with the moral. Now I want to be very kind to them. If I were standing where they were standing, I am not so sure that they were only dealing in the moral. Perhaps we could take a Psalm, or Flew's book on perfection or samples from several different writers on the holy life and see if you could work backwards how they penetrated through the moral to the ontological. Maybe what we are saying by this is that by the time what the church pointed to with sanctification got down to us, it was thoroughly moralized. Anyway, sanctification has nothing whatsoever to do with your moral life, only with the ontological deeps of it.

14. The second thing that we have to remember is that, although I am going to use the language of virtue to try to get hold of sanctification, in our day we do not think of virtues as interior habit patterns. We think of virtues as objective relations. That is quite a turn in our time. Which is to say that it appears that our Fathers may have been dealing with subjective qualities. Whether they were or not, some of you emerging theologians have to dig that out and footnote it. But in our day we grasp sanctification as something utterly objective. Sanctification to use language that we are clear about, has to do with the decisional dimension, the relational dimension in which the decisional aspect of humanness has become manifest.

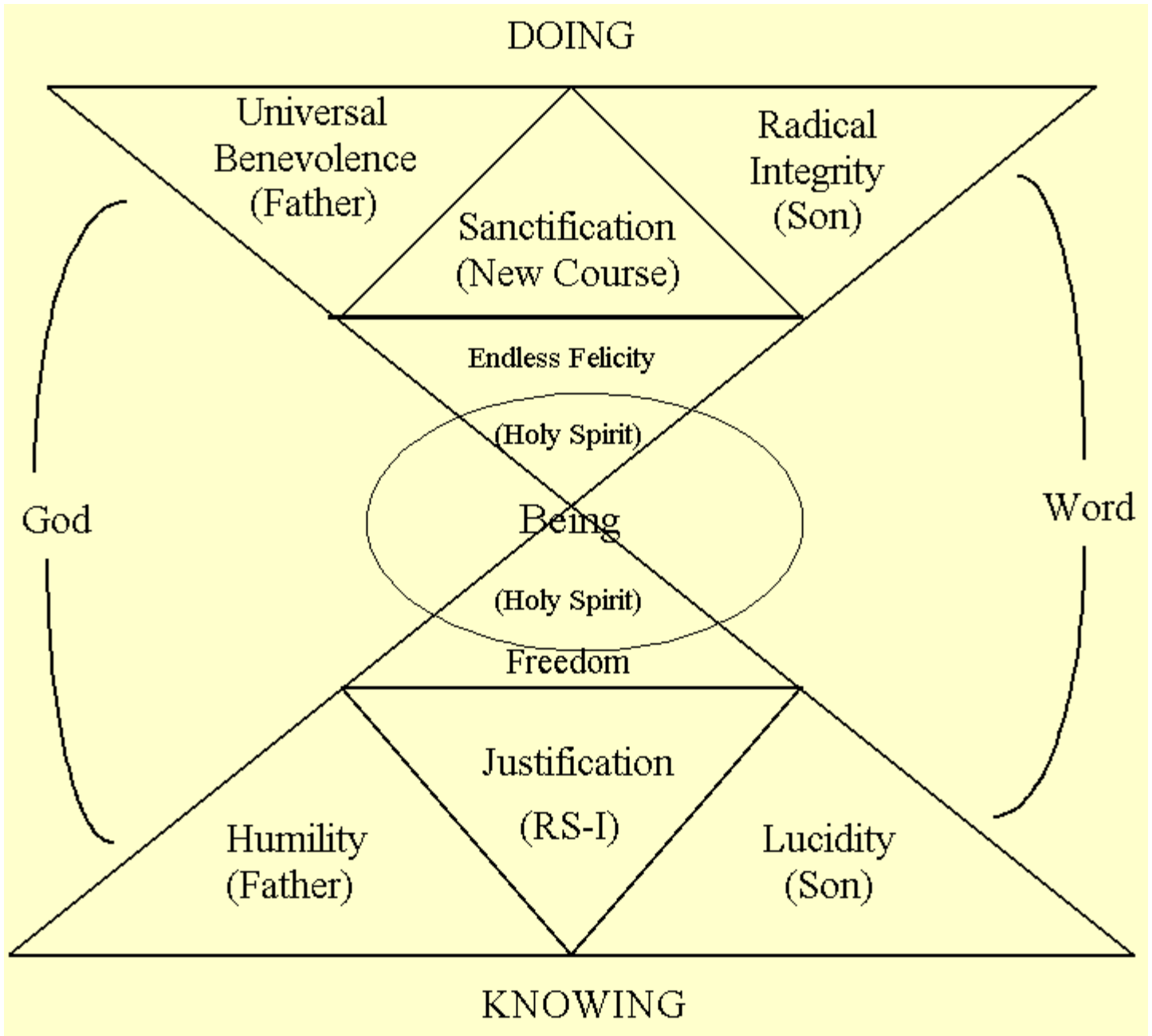
15. There is a third thing that I would call on us to remember. In the past, maybe because of the world view, it looked as if sanctification had to do with the individual. Certainly in this century, where an intensified pseudo-individualism has defined Western society, this was the case. I believe it was present in Wesley also, although you can point to other things in Wesley. Today, at least, sanctification has to do with society first rather than with the individual. This is not only because society is the arena in which sanctification manifests itself, although that is fundamentally the reason. There is also the fact that a person who is not busy building the New Social Vehicle will never know anything about what sanctification is about. You can not be aware of it outside of radical engagement in building a new world.

16. These three things help us over a crucial problem that has to do with the so-called doctrine of assurance. I think that what I have said about the relationship to the postmodern world deals with that. That is, sanctification is a state of being that is in no wise a psychological state, therefore, there can be no assurance in some form of feeling. I am trying to say it is not an experience; it is a state of being. This is its decisional aspect. You can sense in the Psalmist a kind of unbelievable assurance. Even the kind of assurance in which he is able to say all Hell has broken loose. But that assurance, if you will notice, is decisional assurance. It seems to me that is crucial.

17. The other classical problem, of course, is the relationship of justification to sanctification. You remember that in Calvin, when he had to deal with the problem of assurance, his words were, "There is no such thing." He said that nobody can be sure about his final salvation. Final salvation means that you do everything you do for the glory of God. If you are not seeing that board for the glory of God then you know you are lost. However, even if you are, that is no guarantee that you are saved. So you need to be out there building a new society. But that is no assurance of anything. I do not even see this as debatable, as an issue in our moment in history.

18. I might also add here that on this level of our pushing through on sanctification, it does you no good to go first looking up things in books. You have to think a while, then you go look up books. This is not an exercise in gnosticism and gnosticism is going to be a far greater temptation here than it was in RSI.

19. The other great issue in the relation of justification and sanctification is not divorced from the problem of assurance. In fact both Calvin and Luther tend somewhat in the direction of it. It is that if you are justified, you are sanctified. They saw that relationship as very immediate, or that justification and sanctification are two sides of the same coin. We have often used that in our day to get ourselves out of perplexity. But that relationship is what the diagram shows.



20. You recall in RSI that we draw the triangle with the Father or God pole at the top, the Son or Word pole in the lower left and the Holy Spirit or Freedom pole in the lower right. However, here I have rotated the RSI triangle a third of the way around to the left so that the Spirit pole is at the top. Then I have drawn the

sanctification triangle as a mirror image so that both Spirit poles are in the center and the God and Word poles are on corresponding sides.

21. If we use the language of virtue to point to the happening of RSI, we call the God happening humility. You can understand that. I remember the first time that was ever put up, one colleague was irritated. He could not stand humility, and he was going to have nothing to do with a Christianity that had to do with humility. He outgrew that when he saw that that humility up there did not mean Uriah Heep. A man of faith is not humble before men, he is humble before God. Take the word contingency and put it into the sense of a virtue or basic relationship to life, and you get your secular equivalent. That is you are a creature, and I mean forever a creature.

22. Then, in the Son dynamic, lucidity is the virtue or the relationship that is present. In the spirit part, it is freedom.

23. Now you can do the same thing with sanctification. The equivalent to humility is Universal Benevolence. That word benevolence is ruined for us today, but it was a fine word. Maybe Good Will holds it. The word Universal helps to hold it. Then, where the Son dynamic is, is what I want to call Radical and I mean by that foundational, Integrity. Here would be included the virtues associated with the stoic sense of honor. The self-control of Aristotle could fit into that. Or the category of wisdom could fit in there. And then, on the Spirit pole, I am going to put a word like eternal, or Endless Felicity.

24. I would like to add that justification is the category of knowing when you think of it as a whole. And sanctification is the category of intensified doing when you think of it as a whole. Then the center, the intensification of both, is the category of being. It just occurred to me the other day that when you break the word being down in a certain way, you get BEING. Now there is a district superintendent in Malaysia that we know well whose name is NG. And I thought, "Well, by golly, it would be simple for him: I be NG" Now if I wrote over here "JOE", it would be "I be JOE". That is humorous but I am serious. It is right here where all that business about becoming the being of your being, happens and no other place.

25. Also notice that on the left is the God dynamic and on the right the Word dynamic. Now, since justification and sanctification are but two sides of the same coin, you can see a transparency within the transparency that is there for each pole and for the whole. That is, if you place the two behind each other with the poles corresponding, you can look through lucidity which is justification, and see integrity. And viceversa, if you look through Integrity you see Lucidity, and so on for the others.

26. But we also need to articulate the dynamics of the happening of sanctification, as we have been able to articulate the dynamics of justification. You remember the dynamics of justification very clearly. First of all, there is the breaking in of nothingness. Though possibly RSI could be done from a different perspective, it is done from the perspective of the Christ happening. Lecture one on the question of God is the beginning of the Christ happening; lecture two on the Christ event is the impactment of that happening, and lecture three, on freedom, is the decisional dimension of it. All three dynamics are also in that center lecture on the Christ happening.

27. In RSI you begin with the external happening in your life, which could be the bite of a bumblebee or the death of your son, that throws you to the edge of the universe where you find something that is nothing, or absolutely other than you. That is the beginning of it. It is into that vacuum that the awareness comes. It is the awareness that you have no other universe to live in. It is that simple, that mundane. Or it is the awareness that "My God, I made it! In a great big hunk of nothing, here I is." It is very mundane.

28. You are very well aware that, because of what the Christ happening is, in each one of the lectures, you go around the same push. For example, the Christ lecture might begin, "My wife is the wrath of God for me. I remember when we were in the University and we would bring students in, they would come around in that living room. One time when a bunch of them were there, my wife got up and went to the kitchen over her shoulder saying 'Joseph I will see you in the kitchen.'" What you do is to get that first lecture over again in two minutes so that you can get down to the break in of awareness.

29. Now the next dynamic, the most frightening one of them all, is that that awareness in the midst of being over against finality leaves you no choice but to make a decision about the decision of your life, no choice. This is why in RSI, outside of the stupidity of those of us who teach it, everybody there is going to be angry. If they are not angry, you have not taught the course. Now, there was never any headbeating in RSI, when it was taught right. That did not mean you did not take a few gizzards out. But taking gizzards out is not headbeating.

30. Oh, I do not care how many times you go to RSI or teach it. If you are really teaching it, your guts are out on the floor because you cannot avoid the question of your life, which is what you have been trying to avoid with stone walls four miles thick. Then even after they get shattered, somehow or another they come back up again, thicker even. The New Testament says seven times as thick, unless sanctification sets in. Anyway, you have to say just one of two things: "Yea, verily" or "NO." If you say "No," you have made a decision. You never say just "NO." That's an incidental thing. What you say is "Something else is going to be my God," Or it is like the woman who says, "I would do it but I can't give up my children." There is no sentiment in that. All she is saying is that she has decided that the children are going to be the center of her life. No weeping in it. That is just the way it is. That is what she decided. Or she could say "Yes," and, for the sake of God, decide to give them up as the center of her life.

31. That decision to say "Yea, verily," is the embracement of the freedom that you are. There is the burden of that, but also great joy and great fascination. That is what you mean by the Holy Spirit, only the Holy Spirit is the whole thing. He took your cherished idol away; he brought in the awareness of possibility; he pushed you up against the unavoidable decision. Then, when you can say "Yea" when you embrace who you are, you are freedom.

32. It is at that point and no other point that sanctification has any reality. Sanctification is a happening in one's Life. If you have been teaching RSI as some kind of intellectual exercise, then you will not have the foggiest idea of what I am talking about.

33. After RSI you are standing in the center of the Spirit, but the happening of sanctification does not start there. No, you start on the Father pole. The best way I have to get hold of what happens here is that in RSI the divine activity, is pulling the rug out from under you, leaving you standing on nothing. That means pulling every rug out from under you, or you do not have the nothing. Sanctification is exactly the opposite. God does not pull the rug out, but he takes a hundredton crane and just all at once drops it on you, BANG! The bit of humor in that is that you are already standing over nothing. That is hard enough to do with just your own body, and now he has dropped a hundredton crane and that crane, obviously, is the universe. Oh, he is mean, and anybody who did not see in RSI that God is an S.O.B. has not yet arrived at the center. Well, if you thought he was an S.O.B. there, now in sanctification it is squared. Mainly because you have nothing to stand on. Now if you were on good solid ground, most of us could be a reasonable facsimile of Atlas, but when you have nothing to stand on, then it is entirely different. It is utterly irrational. If you thought RS-I was irrational, then sanctification is the double paradox.

34. Sanctification is where you become aware, to put it in mundane human terms, that you were pulled out of the rear end of a cow. I mean that you were not born first into your family, or into your nation, or into your race, or into your religion, or into your church. You were born first into humanity. A cow had you, not your mamma. That is the hundredton crane. Every single fiber of your being right at this moment is trying to find ways to deny that, by this and by that, even by saying that this is an awful crude picture. Anything to get out from under that crane.

35. All this does not happen when you are sitting around up on cloud nine. It only happens in the concretions of life. I warn you that, as Kierkegaard says, when you are beyond the naive stage, you do not have to be hit by an outside sledge hammer to have the effect of being hit by a sledge hammer. Even your imagination can tear your world to pieces. It is as if before it took ten deaths in your family to do it. But when you are here in sanctification there is a subtleness; but the force of it is unbelievable. You know that right now in your life you are having the deepest spiritual struggle you ever had, all of you. And some of you are not going to make it. You are going to find three good reasons to give up. Not that I would expect or want that, but those are just the hard

facts of life. You have to remember that you are not one bit different from every one of us in the room. This is the beginning of the experience of being pulled out of the tailend of a cow.

36. In our day, it may be intensified by external occurrences, where you have just a whiff of a culture other than your own. I have noticed it among people in the East who have been angry with me, a person of the West. I have noticed in them the kind of struggle that I have in me. One way to try to stave off having to become a global person is to be angry with those of another culture, saying that they do not understand your culture, merely an obvious fact anyway. Oh, the escape mechanism is fantastic.

37. Now it is not that sanctification, as we are beginning to talk about it, has not been going on for years. Ten years ago, twenty years ago, the first time that you ever got the slightest dawn of that hundredton crane, that was sanctification. Think of the hundreds in the movement who, as long as you were playing the tune of justification, danced to the drummers beat, but then they smelled sanctification, they sank, for reasons that you cannot even relate.

38. What I have described is not the pain. The pain has to do with awareness. It is awareness relative to integrity. It is as if the problem of lucidity turned into the problem of integrity. You can talk about this inside yourself. Remember how exciting it was to be lucid? And then how painful it was to discover that lucidity had a price? And guess what the price was, integrity. It has nothing to do with morality at all. It has to do with standing, but you do not say it out loud, you say it inside, as when you line up your three boys and say, "Boys, you know that you got stuck with a stupid, broken, fragile father, but I want you to get one thing clear, whenever you come back, he is going to be standing right where he is now." The Psalmist knew this too. There is the pain, beyond the pain of life itself.

39. This dimension of awareness cannot happen until the hundredton crane falls.' I am trying to say that every man has his integrity, but it is the cause of the god he worships which defines his integrity. If you worship your kids you have a kind of integrity because the cause of your kids becomes your cause and that defines your integrity. But that is not what I mean by radical integrity. In that awful moment when the hundredton crane has crashed, then integrity is laid bare, and that is the pain. Oh, I could suffer a million hundredton cranes crashing on me but it is only when I have to face the fact that all that my life is about is hundredton cranes crashing on me that the pain starts.

40. Now it is that you are faced with the unavoidable question, the question of your happiness. And, as one of my colleagues said, "This happiness ain't no laughing matter. You have no choice about having to choose. This is the pain of the human happiness of fulfillment. You decide to expend the freedom which you appropriated in RSI. Kierkegaard, in the first six pages of his Philosophical Fragments, says freedom is like a penny. It is a penny, until you spend it for an ice cream cone. Then you do not have a penny any more, you have an ice cream cone. And freedom must be spent. Here is where Augustine and Palagius had their confrontation. Unfortunately many of us have picked up the Palagian viewpoint which is just the rather obvious awareness that you are always making choices. You have to decide whether to go down this street or that street. Augustine saw so much deeper that Palagius was not even able to follow him. He saw that there is not such a thing as a will except a committed will. It can be conscious or unconscious, but that will is committed. I mean freedom is spent. And then, out of that already spent will, you make your choices. This is why he emphasized the fact that new birth had to be radical. It had to alter that conscious/unconscious committed will.

41. The paradox here in this freedom, when that freedom is committed to this radical integrity, is that that freedom is like the woman's barrel of meal: it is spent but always full. It is as if, when you give that freedom to the cause of nothingness, then that freedom, which is spent once and for all, is always there to spend but in no other place. The moment that you worship some idol, which is the means of reducing the weight of the hundredton crane, then you spend your freedom; and, though you may not know it, you do not have it any more. Fulfillment is only when you take this full responsibility, which means the job is never done. Should creation last fortythousand octillion years, this job is never done. And this is what Aristotle and Plato meant by happiness. It is not having fun, in a mundane way, but it is this expenditure. This is to say that you decide never again will the definition of happiness decide you, but rather you decide the definition of happiness. The expenditure of that freedom is like the new birth. It is a onceandforall, which has the quality of being ever again.

This is your fulfillment. You want a fulfilled life? Then you decide that here is your integrity, and here is your happiness.

42. Then you say, "Look at me. I am happy. My life is happiness." You know you have always wanted fulfillment. I think of a colleague who is searching. He has his fulfillment already in his hip pocket. When he set out to find fulfillment, he had the chance of deciding that his life was fulfillment. Your life is fulfillment, and only in that decision do you maintain your freedom. If you think that happiness is anywhere other than your life, you no longer have any freedom. But when you spend your freedom for the cause of God, then your freedom is always full and running over. I like Phillip's translation of Amos 5:24, "Let justice roll on like a mighty river, and integrity flow like a never-failing stream!" "Integrity". Justice and integrity, I believe that both those categories are, in Paul's term, rightwisdom -righteousness coupled with joy and peace. But it is the joy which is unspeakable and full of glory, and the peace which passes temporal comprehension.

43. Now, for a long time we have wondered what it meant to love God. In RSI all of us learned the unbelievable lesson of what it means to be absolutely loved of God. In sanctification we are learning what it means for a man to love God; no piety, no morality, no legalism, no abstract doctrine, just life, life to the hilt. I believe that our world today is no longer struggling in justification; it is struggling in sanctification. And we have the responsibility of announcing the Word that enables people to name the happening of their life, so that they can be what is going on in this time in history.

Joseph W. Mathews

This electronic excerpt is reprinted from 'Bending History: Selected Talks of Joseph Wesley Mathews', with permission granted by Resurgence Publishing Corporation, ISBN -10: 0976389207, (c) 2004. The full publication is available for purchase at Amazon.com. Original paper document available at the Joseph Wesley Mathews Archives, Wesley Theological Seminary Library, Washington DC.