

Base Centrum

Spring Quarter

Area Prior Spin

HEALING TODAY'S PAGANISM

June 22, 1973

I have often said I experience the Resurgence Songs as neither part of my era nor part of my Ur. I have discovered, however, a resurgence song which I have made my song, because it says everything I have experienced for a year. The last verse goes like this:

"Night and day, under the hide of me.
There's an oh! such a hungry yearning,
burning inside of me.
And it's torment won't be through,
'Til you let me spend my life making love to you.
Day and night, night and day."

That "howl" song talks about the experience of yearning and burning for the Mystery which I have experienced.

I have tried to think of two key events which would point to burning and yearning. I suppose the burning has to do with my experience of deep anger, particularly this last quarter. This profound anger is symbolized for me by the morning I woke up at 5:35. I was so angry because I had not responded to the alarm clock that I picked it up and threw it out the open window all the way across the street.

The yearning comes to me in a symbolic activity I have engaged in more and more of late. Montreal, which means "Mount Royal" is a big island with a mountain in the middle of it. On top of that mountain is a gigantic shrine called "The Oratory." You can see it for forty miles outside the city. It's dome in size is second only to some chapel in Italy. Everytime somebody comes to Montreal, my wife and I insist that we go to the Oratory. We keep asking ourselves, "Why do we go to the Oratory since we have seen it fifty times?" Yet, on several occasions I have found myself (after an exciting day of clergy calling) going to the Oratory and sitting down.

It is impossible to describe it - it is "old mood" architecture, a massive church with a huge dome, but it is filled with awe. You cannot escape it. You walk in and you are in awe. There is nothing you can do to prevent it. You can come in as pagan as you want, but you are in awe. I have found myself going there, particularly in times of deep anger or when my head is hanging, just to experience the awe.

This has to do with yearning, with wanting some way to concretely remind myself that I am a religious, that I am the religious. Sometimes I experience myself as the only religious in that whole piece of geography. I need some way to remind myself that I am not a pagan but a Christian man. Have you been using the word "Christian," not "spirit man," not "man of faith," not "Iron man," not "he who lives his life every day," but Christian.

Where I encounter pagans most profoundly is in the Church. The manifestations of paganism are several. The first one I call decisional lethargy. This is expressed as, "Yes, I know I am called to cruciformity, and I even think--in

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fact I am sure that you know what it means to be cruciformity in our time, but I am going to put off getting my images of cruciformity clear as long as I can." You sit down to recruit a man who, for two hours, nods his head saying, "Yes! Yes! That's right. You guys are fantastic!" So you ask him if he will come to the course. "No." He does not even feel guilt or the necessity to give a reason. He is just too tired to make a decision that might call up even a miniscule amount of passion since he has "already given so much." I sense a tiredness of making decisions about life.

The second arena I call a stay-put-ness. It has to do with decisional lethargy, but it is strange. I went to see the "Poseiden Adventure" last weekend. Somebody recently made the remarkable statement that the "Poseiden Adventure" is about a boat upside down that looks like a Religious House right side up. If you saw the movie, you know it is about a ship which is turned over by a tidal wave so that all the people who were up in the ballroom are now at the bottom of the boat. A preacher decides he is going to go to the top of the boat. He says to all the people in the ballroom, "Life's up there. Look, the water is rising and we're going deeper and deeper. I don't know what's up there but I know that life is up that way and death is down this way." The response of everybody is to stay put. They just sit. Finally, they get angry when he pushes them to pick up life. They know the future is neither more nor less frightening, more nor less clear, down there in the ballroom. They just want to stay where they are. "I'm not going to move. It's just too much, anymore."

The third arena I would point to is what I call embarrassed engagement. I experience people apologizing for relating themselves to society. When you go in to talk to someone about what he is doing, he hangs his head and tells you he is "having a little bit of fun" or engaged in "this little thing." He is the old liberal social action type, embarrassed to tell you he is trying to do something because he is so humiliated by the collapse of his efforts.

As a Christian man I experience all of the paganism in my own being in what I call luke-warm spirituality. You have all experienced it. You study St. John of the Cross and do a mediocre job. You put just enough into it so your pedagogue will be clear you are more or less talking out of your deeps, but you do not give your whole life to it. It is just mediocre. You experience the spirit pool. It is so warm and refreshing that you might have to make an incredible new decision about your life. So you tiptoe along.

The other way that luke-warm spirituality comes to me is in the stance of the unmoved address. There is such open lucidity today that life is an address that whenever you start to move in on anybody, as a guru of course, they say, "Ah, I see you're doing tactics on me and I won't change, you can't do a thing!" They take an unmoved posture which has to do with that stay-putness. At one time, if you walked up to address somebody's life they would growl at you, but now they know you are trying to get them to decide, so they decide to prove they can decide not to decide.

The second manifestation of paganism in the Christian man is what I call imagination collapse. I experience this in workshopping. I am doing strategies for the next four years when it dawns on me that they are lousy strategies. You

are so clear on your work that you get mediocre in your vision, in your passion over the revolutionary tack. You have watered down the vision. Have you ever heard somebody, with his head buried on the table, say, "I've lost the vision." I never understood that remark. It is impossible for any one of us to lose the vision! That is why your head is in despair, because you have got the vision. You cannot lose it, but you want to water it down. You ask a question like, "What should we do?" and you see the intentional fog machines create a mist around your head. "I can't see the vision through all of this." You have made a spirit decision which does not have anything to do with unclarity about the future. It has to do with the decision to serve God.

The third arena makes me more angry about myself than any other. I call it courteous relevance: relevant but not revolutionary. And "courteously" relevant. You come up to your colleagues and say, "These tactics are a delight today. Could you do them for two more days?" For a while I thought, "Ken, the reason you are using this approach is because you know the guru style is necessary, and not the pedagogical style. Then one day I said, "Hog wash!" Nothing was happening to their lives because I was being so courteous to them. You go to a local church and they say, "We cannot recruit in our local church because people are not ready." If Tim Lush had decided that six years ago, I would be riding a motorcycle down in Acapulco. Well, isn't that true of you?

Our task has to do with deciding that we are going to put a fist into history. Being a revolutionary is something entirely different than being relevant. It has to do with radicality. It has to do with cutting over against your fear of what might happen. I experience myself much more on the pole of, "That's what is necessary."

The documents we were reading in the Cabaret group contained the term "sociological healing." Before I read that, I had the category "serious healing." Now this activity of healing is what our passion, our engagement and our religious houses are about. First of all, we have to remind ourselves to be a fountain of peace. That is, we as a body of people, as a movement in history, are the peace dynamic in the midst of chaos. People show up at the religious house, as if they were arriving at Mecca to kiss the rock. It is not the rock they see, but the peace manifested there.

Secondly, as the movement we are a cairn. A cairn is a pile of rocks that the Bedouin Arabs stack out in the desert where people have died. The cairns mark where there are water holes and oasis. That is the way a man marks his journey. In our style we are those cairns. Human beings we encounter in the movement literally mark their journey by us, where we stand.

The third area of healing is, I believe, the Cabaret, even though it is such an edge category that I do not know its full significance. The Cabaret has to do with the break-loose. We have ahold on "being" Peace, and on "being" a cairn on the way, but do not have ahold of being the unbelievable breakloose of passion that is needed to smash lethargy. I wonder what is going to happen this summer with those people who are going to be tired. How are we going to get them to "be" the Cabaret?

In connection with the Cabaret is the Xavier Principle. The foundational

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quality of the Xavier Principle is a steel vision and passionate concern for innocent suffering so that there is nothing to keep you from deciding to do your task. My symbol of that quality is the preacher in the Poseiden Adventure. All the time he is heading for the stern, where the steel is one inch thick, and the water is rising behind him with every step. There is another group of people who are going to the bow of the boat. There is no more data there than at the stern and its one inch of steel, or the Local Church Experiment and the Guild. This cop who has been crawling around after him says, "How can you be so sure that this is the way to go?" The fellow has no answers for him except his passion. He says, "I have decided I am going to get these people out of here and, by God, I'm going to do it!" That is the Xavier Principle.

- Ken Ellison-