

II

THE SUBSTANCE OF TAKING

CARE OF YOURSELF

Do you find that the Bible is coming alive in a new way? It has already come alive to anybody in this room, or we would not be here. But isn't the Bible coming alive even in a new way? If there were a rule that I had to read the Bible, it would turn to dust. The same thing would happen if I read it because somebody said that at 5:00 or 6:00 I had to read it. But, these days, I like to have the Bible close by.

Let your bearing toward one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus, for the divine nature was his from the first: yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death—death on a cross. Therefore God raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names, that at that name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven, on earth and in the depths, and every tongue confess, "Jesus Christ is Lord," to the glory of God the Father.

So you too, my friends, must be obedient. . . you must work out your own salvation in fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you, inspiring both the will and the deed for his own chosen purpose.

(Philippians 2)

I am going to read you a poem. It was written by one of your colleagues. Each one of you should have a copy. I hope you take it home with you.

Life is so painful

so overfull these days truly—they are the last aren't they—

The days of your life

are always the last days. There are no other days no other days

to be angry

to be a Fighter for the Faith to loath injustice

and to burn the laws that oppress rather than give freedom.

Life is joyfilled and endlessly caring these days these last days of your life aren't they—

There is no other time

to be caring

to be with your whole life the compassionate lover

of the world that you are.

I don't mean to be impertinent to the artist by commenting on that poem, but I do want to say that whenever the church has been alive she has declared to the world: "These are the last days." For the first time in my life that makes sense. For anybody who is alive, these days are our last days.

I want to continue talking about taking care of yourself. If you have not been catapulted into the profound depths of consciousness, you do not have to talk about taking care of yourself. The normal structures of society take care of you pretty well. Once in a while somebody flips out of them and has to receive special treatment; most of us make it to the grave. But once the depths of consciousness have opened up, and you have dared to walk into those portals of consciousness until the day you die, you are vulnerable in a way that you cannot even describe. You had better take care of yourself.

When I think of taking care of yourself, my mind goes to standing at attention to life. Taking care of yourself is finding the means by which you stand at attention.

I feel as if I have dug through twenty miles of the rubbish that has been piled upon religious exercises through the centuries. But I finally got down to the secret of it all: it is to experience your experience. That is underneath all the wisdom and insight about the devotional life. Taking care of yourself begins with standing at attention, and that involves at least four things.

The first of them is checking on your spiritual attire; that begins in the morning. I should think that the thing you would fear most would be appearing spiritually nude at any time. I remember a great phrase from the Christian milieu in which I grew up: "Don't ever be caught anywhere you would not want to be if Jesus were to come." If you could take some lye and a brush and scrub all of the crusty moralism off that phrase, you would get down to something absolutely essential. I do not intend to be caught spiritually nude ever again.

The second thing that is involved in standing at attention is *the external environment*. I would not dwell my days anywhere else than in a place where I chose what I would be unconsciously addressed by. I might make terrible mistakes, but I would not choose to expose myself to any environment which did not address my profound understanding of my own selfhood.

The third thing is what I call the crutches of integrity. Integrity is not a simple thing. Of all the agony that we go through, deciding our integrity is the hardest. One of the crutches of integrity is humor, being able to laugh at yourself and knowing when you have to get other people to laugh at you.

The last thing that has to do with standing at attention is afterbrooding. I cannot tolerate anger in myself. I do not go around trying not to get angry; that would be old mood virtue. You could spend your whole life trying not to be this or that. But I cannot stand myself when I get angry. I hate myself for days at a time.

When I get angry, I try to stop myself immediately. And then I try to remember the point before which I was not angry, and after which I was angry. Then I start pushing, and the moment I begin to grasp why I am angry, then I forget the whole thing. There is no sense of guilt; that is not what I am after in doing this. I am trying to spot what I am angry about. You know that you are never angry about what you think you are angry about. When I have located the real reason for my anger, then I can deal with it. After brooding is dealing with your responses to life.

The second arena of taking care of yourself is to grasp the substance of it. That substance is the Dark Night of the Soul.

You do not take care of yourself in a vacuum; there is content and it is strange. The content of taking care of yourself is the intensification of the Dark Night of the Soul and the Long March of Love.

The interior dynamics of belief and trust and certitude are, phenomenologically, the awarenesses of humiliation and of weakness and of resentment. I wish somebody years ago had been able to help me understand that this resentment is the fight of God itself. It is not some violation of a moral principle that has nothing to do with my life. How many times, even this morning, I resent, I resent. The last awareness is suffering. I like to call it "salvific suffering".

In the Long March, which is the Dark Night looking outward rather than inward, you grasp that, in the profound depths of consciousness, there is only dislocation. You have read about people of the 1960's being dislocated. I understand that. But it has taken me a long time to see that profound consciousness is always dislocated. There is no home. I am a stranger here. And, in the depths of profound consciousness, life is always a sense of ineffectivity. In these depths, life comes always as depletion, worn-outness, expendedness. Finally, life always comes as salvific unfulfillment.

The categories of the dynamics of hope are the intensification of these. The intensification of the first set of these categories is what I call ghostliness. Everything becomes sheer mystery as the contingency that is humiliation intensifies and the contingency of rootlessness intensifies. Never again are you clear about anything. Never again are you clear that you are right. Never again are you clear about any idea, any concept. There is no ground. All is sheer mystery. Ghostliness—the strange presence, which is forever incomprehensible, consumes your being.

The second category is the intensification of weakness and ineffectivity. It is the experience of a *ceaselessness*. It is as if you were on a treadmill. Never again will you have the experience of going anywhere. You experience ceaselessness when you become aware that, after having given your whole life to alleviate the suffering of mankind, when you die there will be just as much human suffering as if you had never lived. So it shall ever be until God rolls up the pathway of Creation itself.

You know how every few days you say, "When I get this done things will be different. Surely they cannot continue this way." That may be true for some people, but not for a man of profound consciousness, not for a man of the spirit—not for a man who has put all of

his life on the line. That man experiences the eternality of ceaselessness, and it just about drives him crazy. But unless you have that experience, you know nothing about the profundity of consciousness itself.

The third category is called nothingness. This is the intensification of resentment and the intensification of expenditure. You experience yourself as simply not there anymore. I do not mean that as some moralistic, altruistic concept. Quite the opposite! It is a horrible experience to experience yourself just not there anymore, that your relationships are there, but you are not. Then it is that you understand, in a way that profoundly frightens you, that resentment is born out of a sense that you have become the doormat of God himself. When you are filled with resentment toward me, that resentment is not located in me. You can put that in un-theological language! Being uses being. That is our life.

The last category, the intensification of salvific suffering and salvific unfulfillment, is salvific presentness. It is as if you are not there anymore; Being takes you over and you become the presence of Being in the world. Perhaps you smile when you sing the hymn, "Make me a captive, Lord, and then I shall be free." But remember, you are a captive.

I do not think the church helped me when I was young to see the dread of that which fascinated me, the terror of that which was my glory. I am no longer my own man in any way whatsoever. Whenever you see me strive to be my own man, then you have a clue to the fact that I am not my own man. I am free only in total and abject surrender to Being itself, so that my presence is never again my presence, but only the presence of Being itself.

I am describing the dynamics of hope. And perhaps, after all, you did not want hope as much as you thought you wanted hope. I mean the hope that cloth not let you down. I mean the hope that is beyond hope. The hope that is over against your hope. What I have just described is the substance of taking care of yourself.

A few days ago, a young lass came in at 5 o'clock in the morning, sat down and began to talk. Only three sentences had poured out before I saw, clearly, that she had a dose of the Dark Night of the Soul. So I said, "You do not have to say any more". I began to tell her what she had come to tell me. Her head started to nod and I could almost hear her saying to herself, "How in the world does he know exactly what has been going on in me?" The point is that underneath all human illness is The Dark Night of the Soul-not underneath some, but all human illness-the Dark Night of the Soul.

Now I understand how the Starets developed the capacity to see through a situation before anything was ever mentioned. In 20 or 40 years in the desert, they developed a discipline that enabled them to understand and to embrace the profundity of consciousness itself. Before someone opens his mouth, you know what is underneath his words. You know that if you had time enough to sit there and pull the leaves of the artichoke aside, you would get back to the same heart. Today's new transcultural human being is discovering the essence of man all over again. And the essence of man-that which we all hold in common-is the Dark Night of the Soul.

You think that you have a problem with your wife? You think that you have a problem with your Prior? You think that you have a problem with some other culture? You think that you have a problem with your assignment? Underneath all of them- the Dark Night of the Soul.

I meet you again and again, and I have this tragedy and I have this glory, and yet more and more it is as if you are not there. Only the Mystery that I encounter in you, (and I could not encounter it except in you) is before me. Before that Mystery there is only humiliation and weakness and resentment and suffering and rootlessness and ineffectivity and expenditure and unfulfillment. Only in the midst of this, only here, nowhere else, are you aware that the heavens open and the voice cries out, "Thou art my beloved son." It is only there that the heavens break loose and you hear the voice, "Blessed art thou."

Taking care of yourself is seeing to it that you do not experience these dynamics one by one but all at once, in every situation. How could you get to me, if I had already eaten my weakness? And eaten my humiliation? And eaten the fact that there is no home for me anymore, save Heaven itself? I am talking about being your own man. I am talking about being a man of the spirit. I am talking about being a man of faith. I am talking about being a Son of God. I am talking about working out your salvation in fear and trembling, knowing that Being itself is depending on you.

My Lord Jesus, before life had a chance to humiliate him, humbled himself and found in that humiliation the pride of being God's Son. It is being hurled back on the Word: My life is approved.

"Attention! Here and now! Here and now!" It is being a man of the profound deeps in every situation, for the rest of your life to the glory of God. And do not forget the rest of us. If you do not care for yourself, if you collapse, we have to carry the whole load.

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