

### LIVING ENDLESSNESS

Recently, I was in a church in which the pastor preached a sermon on rededication. The preacher became caught up in his sermon. He began to talk about the great challenges this church was facing and the great need for a better year than the last. He became so caught up that he rushed out of the pulpit, threw himself on the floor in front of the altar and cried out in a loud voice, "Oh Lord, I am nothing!" The assistant pastor over on the side saw this happen and quickly jumped to his feet, ran over next to the pastor, threw himself on the floor and said, "Oh Lord, I am nothing!" The church janitor in the back of the church came running all the way down the main aisle, lay himself down on the floor and said, "Oh Lord, I am nothing." Then the assistant pastor elbowed the pastor and said, "Hey, look who is trying to be nothing. "

The subject tonight has a "Catch-22". It is about Nothing. For a couple of days now, I have had a dialogue going on within myself: One voice says, "What am I assigned to talk about?" The other voice says, "You are assigned to talk about Nothing." "Oh, then I can talk about anything I like?" "No." "But, I thought you said I didn't have to talk about anything." "What I said was you have to talk about Nothing." "But, there's nothing to say about Nothing!" "Now you are talking!"

I remember a little poem that has been helpful to me in the past:

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even a Poet)could  
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i Mean is  
what knocked him over Wasn't  
(for instance)the Knowing your  
whole(yes god  
damned)life is a Flop or even  
to  
Feel how  
Everything(dreamed  
& hoped &  
prayed for  
months & weeks & days & years  
& nights &  
forever)is Less Than  
Nothing(which would have been

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Somebody looked at the blackboard and asked me where was Hope. I said it is right there where it always is, in the middle between Profound Faith and Profound Love. However, you can't see hope. It is nothing. It is hard to talk about Nothing as you shall soon see. But, I have said some things to myself, as I have thought about this matter.

First of all, Hope is not something good, or bad. It is not something you ought to have, any more than Profound Love is something you ought to have or Profound Faith is something you ought to have. Hope is like going to Peoria. There are two kinds of people: those who have been to Peoria, and those who haven't. You are not any better or any worse for having been to Peoria, you are just different.

Hope, like Profound Love and Profound Faith, is not an interior quality. Everyman hope, unprofound hope, naive hope, are interior qualities. That is why we say things like "don't lose hope" or "don't get your hopes up", meaning by that something about temporal hopes, which are interior qualities. But this Hope that I wish to speak of is not an interior quality. It is a state of being itself in which your being participates, and your participation occurs at the point of the demise of your temporal hope, all your other hopes. The war that goes on between this Hope and your other hopes cannot be seen. It is a state of being itself in which your being participates, if it participates at all...reality.

Hope is not a sociological conclusion either. It is not a matter of looking at the trends and saying, "Ah ha! I see there is hope!" That is "everyday" or "everyman" temporal hope again. The issue in the category of Hope is not the question, "Is there hope?", but rather "What is worthy of being called Hope?" What is worthy of being hoped in? Hope is not functional. This Hope does not do anything for you particularly. It is not something to strive for, and yet when Hope has appeared in your life, it does things to your life. Hope is the difference between what should have been there and what is. Hope cannot be seen just like the breeze cannot be seen. What you can see are the leaves trembling, when the breeze goes by. In the same way you can see residues of hope. You can see tremorings which are not hopes themselves, but which are the products of hope having passed that way. So, what I want to talk about is not Hope, but rather the tremorings of the leaves in a life where Hope has passed. Later in the week, we will discuss the tremorings in a society when Hope passes through that society.

First, tremoring or residue within life is when you experience ghostly relationships. I do not mean anything weird by this, although this sounds weird. I experienced this kind of Hope last September. We were having our Regional Council in Montreal. We began on Friday evening with practical visioning and Saturday morning we were going to do contradictions. Then Saturday afternoon we were going to do proposals. As many of you know, working in Montreal has been like working between a rock and a hard place. The past years, that has been a place where results have not come easily. So we articulated the practical vision Friday night, and it was rather glorious. We listed the courses we were going to have, the demonstration projects we were going to have, all the things that were going to come into being that coming year.

On Saturday morning we got the group together and we said, "All right, we have got all the arenas of practical vision on the board; now, what are the blocks to these practical visions?" We went to work on the first column and utterly decimated

that vision. They were ruthless, they were lucid. Without being mean, they just laid out very practically how we were not going to have these courses next year. They took the next one. It was the Primal Community Experiment. They went to work on that one and decimated it. We were not going to have a demonstration that year, that was clear. The mood of the group plummeted as we just systematically, out of our lucidity, destroyed the vision that we had invented the night before.

We decided to stop for lunch. One couple participating had never been to our meetings before. They were about to leave, and the woman said, "Well, I certainly appreciated being in the meeting." I thought to myself, "I'll bet." And then she said something very peculiar: "You know, for the first time I have had hope that something can be done in this city about the problems that are here." I was really startled. I didn't ask her what she meant; they were gone before I had a chance to ask that question. I have been brooding over that all year. Somehow, the Profound Hope is that which appears in the midst of daring to face, in utter stark reality, what you have on your hands. I do not know if this is what the woman meant, but perhaps what gave her hope was seeing a bunch of people willing to not kid themselves about what they have on their hands, but on the other side of that, to decide to have lunch and go on. Somehow, the profound hope has to do with that.

It has been like that all year. In the sense of these ghostly relationships, that woman has been a ghostly relationship all year. And since then, I never know what to predict about her. And, as I reflect on this, I do not know how to predict anybody these days. You just cannot count on people any more. You cannot count on your enemies to be enemies. The guy who raked you over the coals last year wants to have a Town Meeting this year. And the guys who were in the Galaxy last year do not want to have anything to do with you this year. A mysterious quality has entered human relationships, and you just keep running into this quality every time you turn around. My experience is something like Midas. Everything you touch these days, turns into mystery, not into solid gold, but just the opposite, really. They turn to some kind of an ephemeral reality that could go this way, that way, some other way. I refuse to predict any more what people are going to decide. I have stopped being quiet about things like Academy and Summer Programs, because I am always amazed at who says yes and who says no to different kinds of commitments. To me, that is an indication that Hope is appearing. A new order of being is coming and people are making radical decisions. Everywhere you look, families are "up for grabs", men-women relationships are "up for grabs", these relationships are just seared by this mysteriousness.

I grew up thinking that you build human relationships. And yet, my experience is that when I return from a week's trip it is like we are starting right at the beginning again. You get a group of colleagues together, and your first step is to create basic covenants all over again...why we are there and what we are going to do. Only then can we begin. You can presume nothing. And on both sides of that, you can presume neither too little nor too much. Ghostly relationships are a fact of my experience, and I think that is true for many of us. It is fact in our time that anyone including me, can decide anything, at any time. If you are searching for solid human relationships, you are in trouble. This is where this hope appeareth and where there is transformation. Some people running seem to be able to operate in the midst of that kind of flux. And those are the ones who hope with a Profound Hope.

The second tremor or residue of this hope appearing has to do with what I will call a sense of ceaseless responsibility. I do not know how you experienced this

but my whole sense of time fell apart this quarter. There was no rhythm, there was just a flow. It was exciting, but all of my attempts to get battleplans on time, to get rhythm, to get rationality, were just exploded. And usually, they were exploded in the direction of thinking too small. Things happened faster than you could plan them. The happenings were ahead of your planning. You ended up planning after the event, which is a heck of a way to do things, as I experience it. In the midst of that you feel ceaselessness, in the sense that this event or that event has no particular significance. The significance is in the flow, and significance is in the thrust. And that is the Hope. Where you find yourself hoping is in the midst of that thrust or in the midst of that flow. You sense that there is no end to the demand. You sense that there is no winning or losing any more. How could you possibly win or lose? That depends on some scale, and all scales have been exploded by the resurgence that the Twentieth Century is and that the globe is caught up in. You experience a mysterious bouyancy. You are on top of that somehow. You cannot figure out how you are on top of it, but you are. You are not going under and yet you have every reason to be under.

There is a tenacity about people today that is part of this ceaseless responsibility. People in those local communities grab on to those things like a dog with a bone and they do not let go. They are making things happen out of a sense that they are there for the long haul. I was astonished to find that we seriously hear that we would impact 35 million people in the next few years. Last march, we played with the thought of doing 1,000 Town Meetings and now some of us think 10,000 is conservative. Something has happened to us. We have been exploded! The resolve in this is discovering that I have decided to ride it out. I have decided to be on this flow and see where it goes. I have decided to grab hold of this adventure and let it carry me and let it carry all of us into a new land, into a new universe, the dimensions of which none of us can predict.

Another aspect of this hope has to do with self-abandonment. I find myself shocked. Have you reflected on the style in which this assembly is operating? Opening night, we discovered that we have conquered the status problems, that we could not find enough people to sit at the head table. Status has become a non-issue. People will turn over the chalk faster than you can imagine. Some guy walks in the door, a new team member, and they throw him the chalk. People are not trying to get into everything. People are not interested in running things. Nevertheless, people are passionate about getting creativity into history. There is a new sense that is not my creativity, or somebody else's. It is the corporate creativity. It is the corporate passion. It is the power of a body of people. The most startling thing that people experience in these Town Meetings is community forum. This is what I hear being repeated again and again. We spent all day and we came away not arguing and fighting. We came away more together than when we started. We were literally dumbfounded at that reality. That is not something that the CFC does; that is Hope appearing. People have decided to put their petty differences aside and get on with building the earth.

I do not know whether it is all the disaster movies we have seen, though those are certainly expressions of some kind of sensitivity that we have. I do not know whether it is all the books we are reading about the eco-spasm, about the end of the industrial age, but there is a clear consciousness today - that we have our last chance on our hands. It is now or never, and in the midst of that situation, people are not collapsing. They are saying, "I do not care about my importance, let us get on with it. Let us build the earth."

It reminds me of the play Antigone where you look around at the boat and see that it is full of crime, full of corruption, poverty and death, and a storm is about to tip it over. You don't say things like, yes, or no or maybe; you grab the wheel, you get the boat upright. You shout out orders and if anyone says "No" you shoot right into the mob. It has no name and you have no name. Only the ship and the storm has a name. We have that kind of nobodiness today. We have decided over against all of our natural desires to be big fish in little ponds, to be little minnows in the whole ocean of history. And that is the self-abandonment. It is the sign, another tremor that hope has appeared.

We are beginning to see and experience what I would call an unconditional presence. Most people have conditional presence, or they are not really all there. What qualifies their presence is their temporal hope. To the degree that I think the job I have now is not the job I hope I will get in the future, I am not really there on the job. To the degree that the community I live in is not the community that I think I want to live in when I get my hope straight, I am not really there in that community. To the degree that the family I have is not the family that I wish or hope to have, I am not really there in that family. Now you take it from there. My presence is diminished to the degree that I have hope for something different in the future than what I have now. The sign of possibility, the sign of Hope appearing, is that we are beginning to experience people who are really there.

When we moved in to become a part of the 5th City community, we put our kids in the school, drank the water, breathed the air, lived with the crime in the streets there. We became subject to the doom people live in, and that doom comes out in many, many subtle ways, some of which we did not even realize until International Centrum was moved to Kemper. We wondered, why are people beating up this building? Well, in the ghetto, one of the ways you act out the doom that you are under is to tear apart the physical facilities there. In three or four years, all our urban houses looked like Ma and Pa Kettle's farm and those of you that ran into them know what I mean. They were run-down, they were crummy, they were the dogs that you kick - in the sense that your life is hopeless, in the sense that you were oppressed. You took all kinds of radical measures to try to break through, to try to get some sort of participation around here. Well, that illustrates for me that when you decide to be in a local community, you decide to take upon yourself the doom, the hopelessness, the despair that is that community, and you live through it. There is no other hope, no nifty models, no battleplans, just human beings who take that doom and live through it.

Every place that is going on in the world, is human creativity bubbling forth. Radical decisions are being made. Think of a man like Cesar Chavez. You can be sure where his body is going to be found. You know what doom he has taken upon himself. Or Mother Theresa and how she has moved the world simply by deciding to live out the doom of one particular locale and pay the price. As Don Juan says, in Journey to Ixtlan, you decide the place of your death. Decide where you are going to die. When people run into a guy who has decided to die where he is, rather than some place else, Hope appears. Hope appears. It is an experience of unconditional presence, unqualified by any kind of wish dream. The decision that where I am is home.

Have you ever tried to pick up a trunk with one guy on each corner and each guy trying to pick up just his corner? You can't get it off the ground. This guy is the one who picks up the whole trunk from his corner. If you get four guys like that on a trunk, it is as light as air. This is what we mean by Social Demonstration: picking up the whole world from the point where you are. When people go and do that, they experience unconditional presence and Hope appeareth.

And this is a description of the state of being called "Living Endlessness". It is the experience of having all your relationships become transparent to sheer mystery. It is a matter of having your sense of significant time overwhelmed by the ceaseless flow of historical participation. It is a state in which you forget your importance in the midst of engaging the civilizing process at a point of life-and-death struggle. And finally, it is being unconditionally present in all aspects of your life because you no longer hope for some other set of circumstances. Your hope has been fulfilled because you hoped in nothing.