

THE RELIGIOUS AS SOCIAL EXORCIST

I want to spin this morning on the relationship between the Church and the World and what it means to be an exorcist; what it means to be alive as the religious, who has never fallen into the pitfall of being the religious, to become an exorcist.

After a lot of brooding and pulling together we knew, some years ago, that the triangle holding the dynamic of the church, was suddenly on target. The way we have talked about the Cadre, the Congregation, and, as we said in those days, the Parish, is dynamical thinking. It is the Local Church. Now there are some in the Local Church Experiment who prefer calling it a local congregation experiment. But that is wrong and it is demonic. It is the dynamics of the Local Church we are dealing with in relationship to the world.

You and I show up in the midst of the social process as human beings influenced by the economic, political and the cultural dynamics of life. There is a tension between the dynamics, so in one sense I do not even want to separate them, but for the sake of illustrating, I'll separate them.

You and I know life is imbalanced. Therefore, when you look at the Social process, it is always out of balance.

When you look at where the Local Church is these days, in all of its dynamics, you see that what dominates is the Congregation. What has become its ally is the leadership in the Cadre of the Congregation. What has collapsed has been the Parish, or what I want to now call the Guild. Our task is to correct that. It is a spirit problem, and the Guild is a sociological way of gridding for us the spirit problem of our time. For when you correct it and bring back the dynamic of souls into the midst of the Local Church dynamics again, you automatically rebalance in reference to the world. You see as a group in history the only thing we are chaste about is renewing the Church. And when you renew the Church, you renew the World. There is no distinction.

Now when you look at it sociologically there are some great demons. One great demon is what I call Congregationalism. Watch it! It is very deep. It is those who want to turn the Local Church project into the local congregation project. All they are after is to renew their Local Congregation per se. But they are wrong.

Now I do not know why - maybe it is because in a few months' time I'll be entering Phase 3 - I have been looking back on the last forty years of my life, wondering how I could have been so stupid. At times Barbara has addressed me with a 2x4 and reminded that, at times, I have been just a little too defensive against some of the criticism of the Order. Now I have a nice big bald spot on the back of my head as you know! It has been there since I was three months old. When I was in a baby carriage, my little sister, who was older than I, scooted across the kitchen floor into an ironing board upon which was sitting a plugged-in iron. It fell right over and burned all the roots out of the back of my head.

On reflection, that for me, is an incident in my life where the Lord showed, I do not know why to this day I am alive or why he chose me. That is to say, I am the Order. It is not something I joined. For the longest time I thought it was.

That is why I set out to be so stupid. I would say all of us have had those hot head experiences, or we would not be sitting around here today. It is something I joined - I am the Order wherever I go, whether I go out to the desert and have to pitch a tent and begin together all over again, I am the Order. The only alternative left to me now is to be a complete zombie. I have no other choice.

And I do not need anybody else to be the Order. Therefore, I have nothing to defend. It is insidious when you have colleagues who live deeply out of the demon of what I call "Congregationalism", and they will always tag you as an institution. We are not an institution, and for God's sake be careful you do not fall into the trap of having to defend yourself like you are one. This is a very subtle trap; but it is deep. When anyone has to talk about "us guys in the Church" and "you guys over there", be careful you and I do not fall into the trap of having to argue with them. That does nothing but intensify the demon of Congregationalism.

It is serious in the Catholic Religious Orders. They are in the same trap. Now I have been through this struggle. I am still a member of a Roman Catholic Religious Order called the "Josephite Fathers". You will not run into them very often save you are working in the Southern states in a black community, because that is their task. Now if you went and asked my Superior General right now about me, he would scream. I want you to know that the Josephites are renewed, because I am here deciding to be a part of this Order in history. For a long time I went through the struggle like I had to go back and renew that Order by myself. But I discovered it could not be renewed by me. I am renewing it by doing this and caring for the globe. I am saying that everybody in this Order who gets trapped in the images of being a clergyman, watch out. If he thinks he has to leave this Order in order to honor the historic structures of the Church, watch out. It is utterly demonic. How do we expose the demonic? When you decide to care for the World in a global way and join hands with other colleagues, you have already renewed the Church. You have renewed the historic Church.

This Order will go in history simply because it is needed. We have nothing to defend. That is what is demonic about the Church. Anybody who has to defend their denomination or defend their particular congregation or defend their particular religious order is not the Church.

There is another great demon on the Cadre pole, the ally, the leadership of the local churches. The leadership defends being the congregation. I know brother Josephites who sat around and lost their mission because they started feeling that somehow they had to find the spirit of this community like they used to have in the old days. Once they raised that question of spirit, they latched onto the demon of what I call "mysticism". That is, any Order on the spirit pole is disengaging from society. All my Protestant colleagues always wonder why these days prayer groups are making such an impact in the Catholic Church. The reason they are making such an impact is because that mass of Christianity is six million people. Anything that hits even in a small way is going to be massive. If I was a Protestant these days, I would be looking at the Catholic Church and wondering, "Well, I wonder how long it's going to take them to march." Oh, I wish you could have sat down for three days this last summer with all the priests and nuns and superiors from around the globe who came to analyze where the Catholic Church was.

When you pull the spirit pole and disengage from the rest of society you are going to have a group of people who will soon fall into deep cynicism and despair. That is what will happen whenever you jump on the spirit pole by itself, and disengage it from the

midst of caring in society. That is why the task of doing what we are doing in the Ecumenical Parish and the Guild is utterly crucial to the global dynamics of the Local Church and to the entire world.

When you look at the world more directly, like we do in the social process triangles, we become clear we are dealing with the demonic quality of the economic tyranny. We are tired of hearing people complaining about big business as the problem. Economic tyranny is rooted so deep; it is inside every single one of us. It is the good life. It has got us; it has trapped us. You talk to anyone about the use of their time and they will find the way out is to structure everything out of their timeline which has anything to do with seriousness and comprehensiveness in caring for the neighbor. You look back at everything on their timeline keeping them from doing that and you can well believe it is because they are holding their time for the support of their own good life. It lives in everyone of us. Do not claim that we are in the Order and therefore serious; and that those people out there are falling into a trap.

You want to see what is going on in the world - look at us. We are the world. There is no dichotomy between us and the rest of the world. We are it. The economic tyranny has grasped our bowels. If you ask me to give up my stipend now and forever, give up my car, give up some of the things that I want in my space, I am going to start asking why we can't figure out some other way. I am not just struggling in the abstraction; I am struggling with the depth real issue inside myself. It has grasped ahold of every single one of us. It is not out there, it is here and it is utterly unbelievably demonic.

In the political, the ally of the economic, I am going to talk about zombiism. I am going to talk about it sociologically, but it really is a spirit problem. It is in the decision-making process that a zombie appears. How do I say that sociologically? In our Ecumenical Parish in Winnipeg, we discovered that in our parish there must be over a hundred agencies. One day I was driving through the parish, and I noticed a house boarded up on one street. An 83 year old lady lived there for twenty three years with out water and no care. Her neighbor had been trying to get her to an elders' home. They tried welfare and agencies to help but got nowhere. The city decided they wanted the house and sent a notice. Finally, in February, when the police got around to getting over there, she had been dead for two or three weeks. She was bloated and had a few cats around her. What kept them alive was her flesh. I don't think we're shocked by that story. We can find that anyplace. The tragedy is that you had a hundred social agencies in that small community, and one lady did not get cared for.

Where Zombiism is symptomatic of our times is in the decision making process. We have a great morass of structures and bureaucratic systems., but when some people need them they do move. In the face of the complexity of society there is a poison in refusing to jump in and do anything about that. It is as if the complexity sets you back; that is what I mean by zombiism. It is sitting around in your little cubby-hole with a million dollar grant, and letting old ladies be eaten by cats. You can have the most serious kind of conversations with colleagues. They will say "Amen" to everything that you say. You shake your head because this was such a fantastic occasion for their life and yet they will not move an inch. It is a frozenness symptomatic of our times.

You and I have had the tools these past few years to be able to say to people when they fear getting fingers burnt, "That is exactly what life is. You always are risking yourself and you are always getting you fingers burnt!" People want permission to know that tha is what life is about.

I think the task you and I have in the midst of what we know about the Church and the World in our time is the task of the exorcist, I do not know if you have seen that movie or not. I am not going to try and sell it to you, but I want to use images out of that.

On the Style pole of the Cultural of the Social Process triangles, is what is called the Cyclical Roles. What becomes the demonic in that triangle is the youth; what is collapsed is the elder's role; and what becomes the ally to that is the adults. I believe it is a correct sociological picture of our scene. Have you ever seen anything so demonic in our society as children? And the adults allow them to be. In that movie, "The Exorcist," the devil showed up in a twelve year old girl; isn't that interesting? Now, why would he show up in a poor, innocent, sweet, gentle, little twelve year old girl? The mother left the window open and the devil came in.

Now isn't that where our society is today? We have allowed the demons to enter our children. Isn't it interesting how people will not move around their children? It is demonic! And I mean to say that that is within us too. You and I know that many people could have been assigned overseas, but what stopped them was their children. How often we make demons out of our children. We can't let them go. We think they are "my children". Because God gave you and me in some situations the power to bring a hunk of biological "isness" into history, we go around saying they are "MY CHILDREN". You know what this stupid Order does? It says they are God's children and He gave them to us. They are human beings before God; they are not yours or mine. But, you take a child away from his parents in our society, and you might as well slit their throat in public; that is how demonic we have allowed children to become. I am not saying children are demons; I am saying we in the adult world have allowed them to be demons. Decisions in families are made around their children. People decide whether or not they want to come into the Order around their children. Isn't that ridiculous? We decide whether or not we will stay in around our children. Are they divine?

For me, it was interesting that the devil decided to enter into a twelve year old girl. You know who straightened the whole issue out? An old priest. An elder was the one who came into that situation and corrected it - a man who was already a dead man; a man that already lived life and knew that, finally, there was nothing in this life worth giving your life for. He was a dead man. He had fought the devil before and almost died of it. Yet, he walked right into that house. The devil was screaming - screaming because he knew a spirit man was there. It was the elder. And when he walked into that house, he said, "I think we've got to move right away." He put his stole on and walked right in. The devil vomited all over him. He stood there. The devil screamed at him, and he said, "Be quiet." The devil took the girl's body and raised it off the ground in tension, slashing the ropes that were holding her down, and, like a huge fissure in the ground, like a volcano, slit her legs right down the side with the tension. And he just stood there and refused to bend. "May the power of Christ heal thee! The power of Christ heal thee! The power of Christ heal thee!" Until the devil lost and had to bring the body back. The devil took the girl's head and twisted it all the way around on a 360° trip. The elder refused to give in to the demonic element. It was the elder - that is what struck me. The woman, wife, and mother, lacked the male dynamic. The husband was gone. He turned into one of our typical marshmallows. She had to try to handle the whole thing herself, and she could not do it. She was totally lost. The doctors could not do it. The psychiatrists could not do it. Nobody could do it. She had lost the adventuring role of the male dynamic, and she was totally lost. Again, it was the elder who straightened it out and played the necessary role.

Now the other priest -- was the Church ever wise by not letting that priest handle that exorcism! You need to be a spirit man. You need to be a corporate teaching team. That is what the Church needs. Now the young priest had a psychological problem with his momma. She died in New York while he was in Washington, D.C. He was trained as a psychiatrist with all the latest tools from Harvard and all the top schools, a brave young Jesuit psychiatrist having a problem with his momma. "Why wasn't I there? I could have done something for her?" He allowed himself to have a problem. And, did the devil ever deal with him! The devil started playing the role of his mother, and the priest collapsed. The devil turned into his mother. He started calling from hell to her son, and the priest collapsed. Who saved the issue - it was the elder. He said, "Do not believe anything he says. He is the father of lies. Do not believe." As soon as the elder saw what the devil was doing to the younger priest he ordered him to get out of the room now! He saved his life. It was the elder again.

You and I do not have the luxury in the midst of caring for the demons of society to be worried about our own personal problems. Can you see what personal problems do in reference to your neighbor?

And then, finally, for me the elder knew what a symbol system was. He had straightened out the pole of Mythology. He honestly, authentically believed that symbol system he had was more comprehensive than any demonic element in society and, therefore, would win. That is why he could stand before the horror, the torture, the vomit of that demon. He knew that the symbol system and the story he was living out of as a man of faith was more comprehensive - it would win. That kind of faith was what brought healing to that situation.

Not only is that a powerful spirit movie for our time, but it articulated for me that, in the kind of world we have, we have to be the religious who have never been trapped into being the religious. Our role in caring for society is to be the elder, to be the exorcist in the midst of society. What the world demands now is spirit healers in every situation. As we heal and cast the demons out of the Local Church dynamic, we automatically cast them out of the World.

Was it St. James or St. Peter who talks of the devil going around like a roaring lion, seeking those it can devour. Every time we dare to deal with the imbalances in society we are seeing the devil. What the world demands now is an exorcist.

And there are such pitfalls in being those religious called to be in the World. One is libertinism. Be careful. Libertinism looks at the demonic element inside your neighbor and because he has had such a difficult time struggling with it, you say "Leave him alone. Let him fall back in bed with the devil., he will somehow get himself straightened out." There is a scene in the movie where the young priest was called over to the bed in which the girl is strapped and the nurse pulled back the sheets. In the tension she was under that girl had used her stomach as a chalkboard. She puffed out on her skin, "Help me." "Help me." That is what the exorcist sees.

One of my colleagues picked up a phone the other day and talked to an Anglican bishop who has been holding us back for five years, demonically accusing us of being outside the Church. My colleague had guts enough to stand there and correct those images in the Bishop's mind - that we are the Church, and illustrated why that is absolutely so. Finally the bishop said, "Well, at least you guys are honest. I'm going to get my key men to be there, and I won't say any negative." You do not let him get off the

hook. You are caring. The devil is subtle. When we go knocking on doors and people tell us to go to hell, it is easy to never go back. But do you understand that it is a cry for help? Only the exorcist will see it. Only the exorcist will walk into a terrible situation and not let the situation win. "Help me" is what every human being is crying today. No matter whether they like us or not or kick us in the rear end, you praise the Lord for that, like St. Francis, "He who throws one stone, may he be blessed once. He who throws two stones, may he be blessed twice. He who throws three stones, may he be blessed thrice." That's the exorcist.

The other problem to be careful of is personalism. You do not know what to do with your neighbor; so they get to like you and you have a good relationship. In that movie, mama had a nice relationship with her daughter. But suddenly, the daughter became a little bit more vicious. The mother went over and grabbed ahold of the devil and his arm went out and mama went screaming across the room slapped up against the wall. The old devil took this great big dresser and rolled it right at her, and she barely got out of the way when it went smashing into the wall. Sweetness and kindness is not what the demons inside people need. Watch out for personalism.

People today want permission to live in pain. They do not want to avoid it. They will not put up with people patting them on the back and telling them they are doing a good job. They do not want to hear that. They want permission to live in the pain that they know is life. They are waiting for the authentic story that releases them. That's what the exorcist gives. People care with a passion. They are waiting for their passion to be unblocked, and it is the exorcist's role to release that passion and that care.

--William Allerdig--

4/16/74