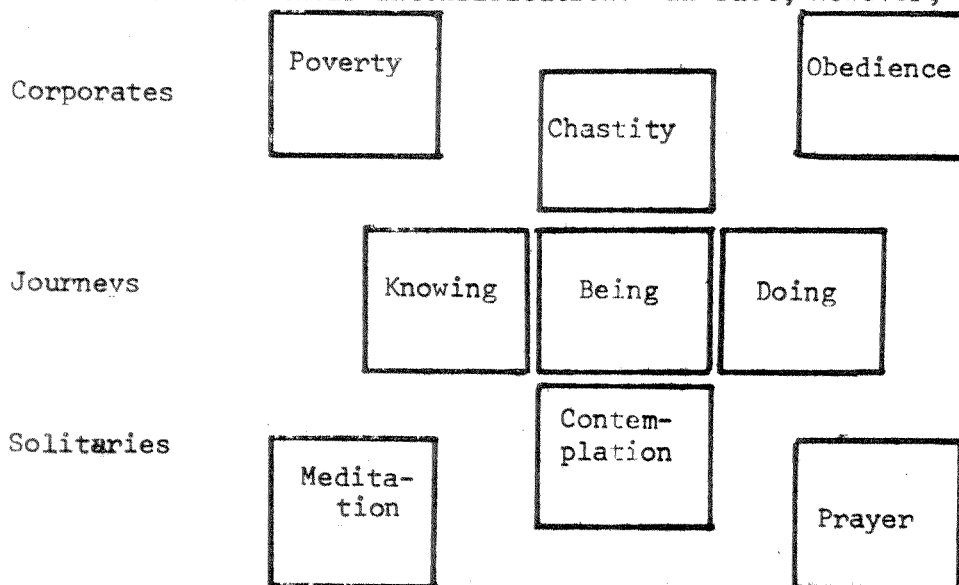


THE RELIGIOUS EXERCISES OF THE CORPORATES

It is appropriate for us to review the journey that has gone into the preparation and experimentation with the religious mode to this point. In order to see that truly, Summer '72 has been the summer of the corporates.

On the New Religious Mode chart, the corporates are poverty, chastity and obedience. That is the arena in which the religious exercises this summer have had their intensification. In fact, however, we began our



work with the religious mode, and with the religious exercises in general, with the bottom row, meditation, contemplation and prayer. Many of you are very familiar with 15 years of work in the movement on welding out practices that enable us to be solitaries. That whole bottom row should just be labeled the solitaries. We have that orientation. Then we point to the middle three charts, knowing, being, and doing, as the journeys. We will talk about those a little bit more later.

Let me start with meditation, contemplation and prayer. The religious exercises operate on an unconscious level. The performance of a religious exercise is a sheer rehearsal of a dynamic that goes on in the depth of human existence all the time. Therefore for you and me they seem, oftentimes, somewhat perfunctory, somewhat difficult, downright phony. Well, that means you are on the right track. That is to say, the recovery here is a difficult one. It is a dangerous one in that you are working with an area that the church has had difficulty with, and finally bankrupted, in this century, namely piety. The pitfalls there, as well as the promises, are so overwhelming that you literally have to move as if laying a track, one step at a time over the abyss, and so there is no hurry.

The spirit movement here is pioneering in the receiving of the spirit that is present in the 20th century, or to use secular wording that is helpful, pioneering in the edge of consciousness itself. The 20th century transition is a particular and pivotal explosion in consciousness. This cannot be appropriated, finally, without religious exercises. We have to divorce, though, the phrase "religious exercises" from anything that has to do with religion, or that has to do with anything particularly Christian or particularly associated with a religion. Rather, whatever else a religious exercise is, it has to do with building the new wineskins to hold the heady new wine that is the 20th century.

In order to be responsible for this breakloose in consciousness, a new framework has to be built to hold the outpouring of the spirit. I realize that sounds like pious language, but I think anybody in the 20th century would understand the complexity and the overwhelming possibility of the fruition that the 20th century is. What we are talking about is not something that religious people experience. Quite the contrary, it is a way for every last person--fat lady and skinny man--to participate fully in the burst loose of creativity, the burst loose of wonder, the burst loose of responsibility, the burst loose of happiness, that is the 20th century. Therefore, religious exercises are simply a way of building the new wineskins.

We began with the solitaires and worked first of all with the exercise of prayer. We moved to meditation and began to work there, and then to contemplation. What one needs to see is that when those words are used, they refer not only to practices, but also to a state of being. They refer to a phenomenon, a happening, an occurrence in a person's life that goes on all the time.

In meditation you are simply delineating the fact that everyone of us lives within a community, both externally and internally. The dialogue with that community, our being in community, our entire conscience, our entire conscious life, is continually informed by what people have said to us, what people have written down for us, what we have learned. That is a dynamic that simply operates. It is the interior community. This is the state of meditation. The exercise of meditation, therefore, has to do with bringing intentionality into the dialogue with those who have gone before and who are present in our lives.

In prayer you are talking about the fact that man is freedom. We say that prayer is raw action, the action before the action. Prayer is the kind of deep resolve that goes on within a person whenever the free act is a possibility. Therefore you are not talking about something added on to life. You are not talking about a pious ritual superimposed upon life. You are simply talking about the nature of man, which is freedom, and which is grasped under those four categories on each of the charts. In the case of prayer, they are confession, gratitude, petition and intercession.

Contemplation, similarly, is simply a way of grasping the fact that you and I live before mystery at every moment. When you show up with your eyes open, life is a montage. Whether you are sitting in a meeting, whether you are sitting in a room, whether you are outside, life is a montage that bombards your whole consciousness at every moment. The medieval church pictured the psyche, you know, as a stained glass window with so many facets, so many parts, so many dimensions that you could not even see it all. It depended on how the light shone on it. Your interior life is a mystery. It is a bottomless wonder. The montage is simply a way of imaging how the interior of our own complex conscious life might be grasped. We have used the exercise of building a montage, of painting a montage, of writing on montages, in order to somehow delineate our own interior awareness.

Now, in the left hand column of the New Religious Mode chart poverty and meditation are set aside a little bit. In the middle is knowing. On the right hand side obedience and prayer are set off from the others, and doing is in the middle. Those represent a crucial relationship. It has to do with the fact that meditation and the state of being of poverty are intimately related. The relationship has to do with the nature of transparent knowing. It is built on the presupposition that knowledge, or knowing, comes in encounter and not in ideas. That is what we mean when we say transparent knowing is a happening. It has nothing to do with adding on content. It is knowledge that is the knowledge, illumination at the center. Poverty and meditation are the same when you get to the point of the certitude at the center.

We talked about the state of being of poverty as being dramatized in the fast. If you put the exercise of fasting and feasting beside poverty, and if you put the exercise of watching and waking by the state of being of obedience, you have the initial attempt to put poverty and obedience into exercises with the kind of clarity we have had on meditation and prayer. In the fast what you are doing is "comprehensivising." You are thrown over against the comprehensive, which can be talked about as a knowing experience, not knowing in the sense of adding another bit of data, but in the sense of exposure to all of life. Fasting is the comprehensivising of your own interior images.

Watching, or obedience, is "historicizing." It has to do with effective participation in history. It is a doing category, not in the sense of activism, but in the sense of meaningful action. Therefore, the watch is related to prayer. It is related to the pause before the involvement.

Therefore, there are really only four things: the watch, the fast, prayer, and waiting. The Biblical formula is "watch, wait, fast and pray!" That is all there is--the watch with obedience, the waiting with meditation, the prayer with prayer, and the fasting with poverty. Those are going on whether you ever see them or not. The exercises are their objectification and intentional participation. Watch and wait and fast and pray--that is all we are going to talk about; that is all there is.

The other parts of the charts inform those helpfully. Let us start with the fast, in order to ground and perhaps clarify the corporate exercises which we have participated in in Summer '72.

Poverty has nothing to do, in the first instance, with what you possess or how much you possess. Poverty is built on the understanding that man has a hole at the center of his being which cannot be filled up no matter how great or how many possessions he has. Man is constantly driven to fill up his life with things, and that is as human as the day is long. But what he realizes, what overwhelms him, what dreads him is that no matter how many things he has, he can never fulfill his life. "You can't take it with you, baby," is the way it is. But that is your freedom. When you realize that there is no attachment that can give your life significance, then you have the possibility of being the free man that you were created to be. You came in with nothing and you go out with nothing. That is who God created you to be. That is who you are.

The exercise of fasting dramatizes the human condition in a radical way. The fast enables one to discover the freedom that he already is. In the fast one is confronted with personal contingency. The frailty of human existence in the fast comes at about the end of that second day when you realize that your fingertips, or the underarms, have begun to tingle just a little bit. And if you tried to focus on the leader of the group, and he got a little hazy, that wasn't his fault. Your eyesockets began to burn, and if you dared to inhale, an odor would literally knock you over. If you tried to work hard, it was all that you could do to muster attention for fifteen minutes, or is that an exaggeration? In the fast every image in your conscious mind literally passes away. It is unconsciousness. If you are going to participate in any situation, you have to muster every sensation that you know anything about and pour it into reality. Then, in the fast, that sort of floats away. The levitation and giddiness that occur are the uncontrollable sensation of your whole body taking its leave.

At that point, in order to grasp yourself and your life in that situation, you have to imagine as hard as you can a picture of what is going on. In order to posit yourself in that situation, you have to grasp a picture of what is happening. That is the hardest thing to do in a fast, picture what is actually going on. It is much easier to just sort of float off.

That concern for the situation, that concern for positing yourself in that situation, is the drive that fills human situations. The concern for life, the intensive pushing of yourself and grounding yourself in the midst of that fast, hanging on for dear life, is the drive for life that human concern is built on. There is no altruism whatsoever. It is life or death. Every society that has ever shown up has been built out of that kind of concern and not out of do-good-ism. It has been built out of the care that life be created in that situation. I think every society

that has ever been built has been built on the backs of those who intentionally fast, one way or another, by those who intentionally sacrifice every image they have ever had of society and rebuild the images they had of society for the sake of others. Now that is a bit abstract, but if you think about what happened to you in the fast, it was literally as though every picture got wiped out and you had to redraw your life. That is what I am talking about in terms of society. Your entire community gets wiped out and you have to re-design and rebuild your own identity.

Now we come to the watch. The watch is related to obedience. It is built on the understanding that man is a longing for involvement. The curse that man operates under is the curse of the first man, the curse of work. What it means to be a human being is to involve yourself creatively with others. The awareness, though, of real engagement comes when you see yourself still needing to create significant work at the very point where death faces you with the cessation of all work. What it means to be a human being is to be meaningfully involved and concerned at every moment. The confrontation with death completely wipes that out. Therefore, the only engagement that is meaningful is obedient engagement. That is not busy-ness. That is not just acting. It is intentional involvement. This is the watch. The watch prepares you for intentional involvement. It prepares you for meaningful work, rather than just work. This is the cry of the 20th century. Man does not want a job, man wants a vocation. That is not something new, that is the way life is.

The exercise of watching through the night revealed to you that life is a constant process of maintaining alertness to what is going on. It is like the fast, but it is a totally different exercise, in that you realize that you kept losing consciousness and then you were back. You kept going out and then coming to. You kept becoming blind and then you saw that you had become blind. You realized that all of your life has probably been a process of living in darkness and waking up to what was really going on, or that your whole life was in the watch. The intense suffering and agony that goes on in the watch, which is part of the staying awake, is a symbol of the suffering and the agony that is necessary when one participates in life alertly all the time.

There you are: you are given the task of building those strategies and tactics. The designs and systems seem overwhelming. You have to do a global one, you have to do one for twenty years, you have to include everybody, and you only have a two-hour workshop. Well, the agony is obvious. The mirage or the illusion that comes to you is that your problem is the character who gave you the strategies and tactics to do. The real contradiction is in the strategies and tactics. The problem is never external, and in the watch this becomes clear. The problem is always in the spirit. The problem is always in your relationship to the problem, which is a struggle of involvement, of attentiveness, the struggle to participate meaningfully. The agony and suffering that you are given is never for your own sake; it is for the sake of history.

In the watch, you realized that if you do not do this job, nobody else is going to do it. If you do not build a design for history, history will go on, but it will not go on in the way it needs to. History will

continue without you, but your job is that with the consciousness that you have, with the understanding you have, with the possibility you have seen, to invest that into history--and not let some slob decide which way history is going. Your job is to keep the lamp lighted, to be alert to every moment in history, or history will go down the drain. Do you not grasp that we have the possibility for a whole new adventure in humanness on this globe, probably for the first time since 500 BC? Unless you build the possibility of that new human adventure, it will not get built. The only problem is that you keep the lamp lighted, that you keep alert.

Now, we have talked about the states of being of obedience and poverty. We have talked about the exercises of fasting and watching, which dramatize detachment and engagement. There's another level, too. I talk about it as a level but it sits on its own. There have to be indices or signs of poverty and indices of obedience that go beyond the watch and go beyond the fast and that are common to all of us. If in the middle of the fast you experienced intensified consciousness and creativity and explosion of images and sensitivity that you never had before, then you realized that that has just always been there. It just took the fast to get the lid off your own unconscious images of your own possibility, of your own reality. Therefore, in the fast, what is structured, is the fast and the feast. What is uncontrolled is the heightened consciousness. Do you see that? The fast and the feast is a structure that releases unknown possibility. On the other side of that, unknown possibility has always been there. The way life is is unknown possibility. It is just there.

Now, a way to elicit that at every moment is what I mean by indices. It seems to those of us who have worked in this area researching it that the indice of poverty is the habit. The habit is the symbol and the focus and the means of intensification for the unconscious deeps of your own being. By wearing the habit, you have cosmic permission, you have continual permission, to allow the unknown possibility that is you to flow at any time.

I'm really being very practical. You may not think so. You know what happens after ecclesiola at night? You know what happens after supper in suburbia? You know what happens to our society in the cities at night? Everything is set up so that when the evening hours come you relax. You can forget everything after supper. Even if you try to work, it's easy. Our whole society anesthetizes your being from supper time. When you get off, when the whistle blows at 5 o'clock, you are put back into a womb of comfort. That's all right. But the habit, the habit is a bump that occurs in the midst of that relaxation. The habit is a symbol that creation is still going on and is about to take place. That's a little impertinent, because you are not the creator. But, in the 20th century, the way life is is creativity.

Your mind is like a computer, although without computer cards. It just has whirling montages going on all the time and what's necessary is that you intend that computer, that you release that computer, that you enable that consciousness to flow. The habit is a symbol that when you decide creativity is going to take place it takes place. It is sort of like saying, "Build the designs for an Odyssey." Somebody says, "What's

an Odyssey?" Or, "Build a system for globalized economics." Somebody says, "What is globalized economics?" Well, at that point you push the button that says globalized economics and up pops a montage with global economics on it. You just start thinking what you know. Have you not had this experience in those workshops? "I don't know anything about globalized economics," and then people start talking about globalized economics all afternoon?

The habit is the continual mark that that's a possibility even after 5pm. The only problem in church renewal is to enable people to be spirit people between 9 and 5. That is, we are not after just another exciting thing that's going to give people a kick for another 2 years. We're talking about a lifetime, and the only way one lives a lifetime is in a habit. When the People of God began to grasp the flowing of the Holy Spirit, they had to have an objective shield. The objective shield is the uniform. I'm not suggesting that you take on any kind of uniform at this point. I'm just trying to lay the basis that you are going to be driven to habits in order to stand the assault of the awe itself. Without the handles, without the structures, without the habit, you get burned to a crisp in the midst of this creativity. You know what I'm talking about? You get left alone in the workshop.

Somebody suggested that we continue the fast but not in the same way, that every time you sit down to eat you call yourself to the fact that you are breaking the fast. Do you see that you spend most of your life fasting and only maybe 3 hours a day actually procuring food? And when you leave the meal you symbolize that you're now finished feasting and are going to continue the fast, which is the state of being of disengagement, which is the discipline of unlimited creativity. That happens three times a day, at least.

We have to have a mark like the habit for obedience. The extension of the watch and the wake is what we're talking about. You cannot go along under your own steam for more than about 3 days unless you are hypnotized or some other way. But that's not what the watch is finally about. Do you remember the Ballad of Finnigan's Wake? I missed the novel, but the Ballad is very short, and it has to do with a man who died. In our society the wake probably has only been continued by the black community but originally it was a high festive celebration. This is the way the watch is also imaged. The wake is a celebration at the funeral, or before the funeral, if you will, and goes on in the night sometime. Anyway, in the Ballad of Finnigan's Wake, things got to moving so well that Finnigan actually woke up. Well, nobody dropped a beat--they passed him the bottle and the festivities went on!

The watch and the wake are a symbol that you have gained charge of the body. It's something like intentional engagement. That is, when you decide to do something you decide to do it with your whole being. This is not simply a wild fanaticism, it has to do with spiritual healing. Have you not grasped that by allowing ourselves to spend 4 weeks in concentrated effort, the likes of which you have probably never efforted before, that healing has gone on in the corporate body? It is something like this: when you decide to do something with your whole being, what happens is that the psyche is relieved. The psyche is at

rest. Rather than being ripped and torn by tepid decisions, you decide with your whole being you are not going to be tired some Saturday. Do you understand that? You think you would be tired by the end of the 4th week. You are not going to be tired. You will never know such motivity. It is that we have been obedient people, not to some authority but to the decision to participate, and therefore rest takes place in the midst of our corporate activity. This is the continuation of the watch. Your being is refreshed when you work like crazy.

The symbol, the mark of obedience, as it has been used in the past, is the cross. We have worked with the symbol of the wedge blade for quite some time now. You draw that wedge blade on the board enough times when you teach the church lecture, and talk about what it means to be the people of God enough, and, you know, if you close your eyes and imagine your posture, sometimes you really think this is the way you are bent. This is the way I walk into history. Now, I do not look like that, but in my imagination I look like that. If we were going to symbolize being on the edge, and that's hard to do when you are in the midst of other people, we take on the posture of the cross. Have you not seen some people in the midst of the workshop stretch like that? Well, I think you probably ought to do it about every 15 minutes. In some workshops that is necessary. That's the posture of the cross. Did you see it? You can do that at the office, you can do that after dinner, you can do that at any time. But now I suggest that every time you do it, it will be different!

In the past, and we have a great debt here to our universal catholic church, you would cross yourself. That was the mark of your final engagement, which could take place at every point in your life. In the monastic tradition, there is the practice of the monk's walk, which was a daily practice of the actual symbol of the long march to the cross. For them the long march was for life. If every day about noontime we all took two trips around the chapel, in that intentional activity we would symbolize the long march. Or every time you walked from your workshop to your congregation, every time you walked along the beach, you were heading toward the cross. Every time you went to the bathroom, every time you sharpened your pencil, you were walking to the cross. You are walking to your final engagement. It has to be something like that. It has to be something that enables us in the midst of everyday life to grasp our final engagement, our final obedience, that is to say, the watchfulness that is intentional.

We are going to have a ball Thursday night and, if you followed your chart, the only one left is chastity. Somebody said the ball is related to chastity. I think that's right. Well, wouldn't that be exciting if it really were? What is chastity? Chastity is not something super-imposed on life. It is built out of basic human propensities. Every man has deeply imbedded within him the drive to be utterly different than anything else that has ever been. You can talk about it as status seeking or you can talk about it as competition, but that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a paradox that occurs when a human being grasps that he's set aside. In that sense he's different.

In our tradition we say a man is holy. What it means to be holy is to be so different that they used to draw the pictures of the holy men.

You have seen medieval paintings with a kind of glow around them? Well, they were hunting for a way to dramatize holiness. If you were holy you got your picture drawn and there was just a little glow of light around your head. Here was an ordinary person -- and that's crucial -- who decided to be utterly different. Do you catch the paradox in that? This is what sacredness means. This is what holiness is. In the midst of the common, ordinary mundaneness, you grasp yourself as set aside, called out. This is chastity. It comes when you grasp that the myriad possibilities of your life now have to be focused into one thrust, if it is to be effective. Chastity happens in the confrontation with the mystery in which you stand in solitude before God, which in the 20th century means to grasp yourself as over against nothing. Yet, you are to become holy even as he was holy, which is to say you are to become nothing.

You have seen those halos on some of the older saints? That was a shiny zero. They were not silly about this business of holiness. It was an understanding that you carried within yourself, in terms of your mission, of single-mindedness but no status. When you grasp what chastity means then you can see its relationship to the ball. A ball is something like the red man's fiesta. Can you image a ball? Can you make that transfer from what you know of the red man? The ball is a fantastic drama in which, over against the successive and mundane and everydayness that is the toil and curse of man, you set aside a period of time for ecstatic explosion. You will not make the 20-year march if you do not have a time to let that ecstasy loose. That is the ball.

This is within the church's tradition. Do you remember the medieval festivals? They were church festivals, all-day affairs in some cases. They were great celebrations for the common people, for you and me. The Orthodox pagentry is what we would recapture. The dramatization of the story of salvation goes on in the worship service and in the pagentry of the Orthodox church. And now, in the ball, we are going to dramatize the 20-year march in one night. We are going to squeeze 20 years into 20 hours. Can you take it utterly nonchalantly? This is Luther's great word, holy nonchalance. That's the only way you are going to make it. The pressure, the strain, the task, the work, the visioning, has to be done nonchalantly and steadfastly. The ball is our way of dramatizing that.

It is a dramatic journey. It has within it a rehearsal and a display of our common life. It's the time in which our community acts out who it is. It is the pause before the battle. It is the refuge in the midst of the march, a time in which you rehearse the election which is yours before the calling of the march. The ball is also the great culmination. It is the great time of having completed Summer '72, having completed the past 20 years, and therefore the ball will be symbolizing the launching out anew. It is the place in which we take every fear, every tension, every conflict, and thrust it upon the ball. The ball is a representation of the other world. We're going to go to the other world, in the midst of this world. We are going to dramatize our victory before the victory. That is to say, on the night of the ball we are going to celebrate what we have already decided to accomplish in 20 years. We are going to have the victory dance. We are going to decide the victory

before the victory.

That kind of relationship to chastity is what we are after, and hasn't the Lord been kind to us to give us a phenomenon like the ball. Here is the secular religious. Here is the form of the People of God and nobody knows the difference! All they know is that a ball is going on. For me and you the ball is our exercise of chastity for the 20-year march. Do you get the paradox in that? It does not look any different from any other celebration. From society's point of view it's a ball. For you and me it is the exercise of the intensification of poverty and the intensification of obedience, which is chastity.

Somebody suggested that we need to continue the ball. How do you do that? Well, you need an indice of chastity, you need a mark. We've experimented with various kinds of garb. I'm not suggesting that we go this way, but consider the ring. It has been used this way in our own tradition before, as a symbol of willing one thing with my whole life and for my whole life. You wear your wedding ring or some other ring on your left hand, and you wear the ring of chastity on the right hand to symbolize that you are, even if you are single, married to God.

You have looked at the next 20 years. You have seen the horror and the struggle and the crummy colleagues you are going to have to march with. You have seen the mountains you have to climb, the rivers you have to ford, and the land you have to move through, and you decide in the ball to dance over the abyss. You never decide that anyone else should make that decision at the ball. No, you decide this in solitude, before God, at the ball.

Do you grasp now that the ball is a corporate drama in which the solitude of your own existence becomes portrayed with such intensity that you waltz. The only way to appropriate that God has won is to waltz. You have decided to win with him. This is the solitude before God. The ball is chastity. This is when you rehearse your final accountability. For the only question God will ask you was what march you went on. Was it the march of the People of God, or was it the march of God's People? That will be the question that you struggle with.

Every celebration after the ball is going to be different. We have tried various occasions and some have come off, and some have not come off. Now, after the ball, every occasion, every ceremony, every celebration, is an extension of the ball. When you have a birthday, that's an extension of the ball, that's a celebration. When you have a family anniversary, that will be an extension of your decision that you made at the ball. When you say hello, when you say good-by, that's a ceremony in which you rehearse your decision to be the chaste one. Every celebration will take on new meaning, in light of your decision to be the chaste one.

Whatever else a religious exercise is, you never lose the sense of uneasiness or phoniness about it. You and I, though, must have the fortitude to go ahead and experiment on behalf of the fat lady and the skinny. All of civilization lives representationally off of our religious exercises.

The ways we guard ourselves in these exercises are three: first, that they be utterly secular. Secondly, they are to be grounded in humanness. Do you not grasp that you could talk about your experience on the watch with your Arab brother without any theological conflict? Do you not realize that you could talk about your experience of the fast with your Buddhist brother with no theological conflict? We are not talking about religion, we are talking about humanness. And, thirdly, we take every exercise unseriously. This is humorous. It has to be taken with nonchalance. It has to be taken with carefreeness. The ball we are going to have is the time in which we decide the holy nonchalance in the midst of the most intense march that the People of God have ever made.

Rick Loudermilk.

