

CONTINENTAL PRESIDUM
NORTH AMERICA

THE STATE OF THE MOVEMENT

WINTER QUARTER
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I want to share a word with you that I have hated all my life, and that I do not like any better now. That word is: "If you ask anything in my Father's name, I will give it to you."

You are not going to like what I am going to say, and I do not like being assigned to say it. But we have won. We are not winning; we have won. As soon as we dared to paint that continental grid on a wall we had won, and the fact that we have won fills us with dread. It may take five, ten, twenty, even forty years, but we have won. And that is awful: to be standing on that shore, looking back at our life, having won and still having the burden of acting out our life. Then there is no excuse for losing, is there?

What happens when there are no more external blocks? You and I have been getting the meaning of our lives out of those for so long, the conviction that our situation, our metro, our congregation, our region, our religious house is different from any other situation. Now we find out that there are no external blocks; there are only internal blocks. You want people in the religious house? You can have them, if you dare to embrace the kind of suffering that it will take to have them. If you want all your courses filled up, you can have them. Just ask for them, in my Father's name. Isn't that dreadful? There is only one block to the renewal of mankind--and that is me. What a life: to go out recruiting and to have won before you go out there.

That happened in Milwaukee recently. We came upon Wednesday night with seventeen people in a course, and you know you cannot have a course that small. So you just go back out there, knowing that you have a course, that you just have to act it out, and so you come back with thirty-three registrants for that course. But the fear and trembling and awe of walking through that experience, knowing that you have won! What is it like to go recruiting for Basic Training School, having that in you mind, knowing that every one of those people that you asked is going to say "yes," and yet you still have to walk through that--that you cannot avoid one little nitty-gritty detail, yet knowing that if you have the nerve they are going to say "yes."

I have finally got hold of what being sanctified means. I used to play a little basketball and I could never figure out those guys who came up wanting that ball for the last shot of the game. I did not want that ball for that last shot; in fact, I was hoping nobody would throw it to me. Yet, I think they knew what it means to be sanctified. They were standing on the other side, they had already won; the ball had already gone into the basket, even if they had to act that out. If only they didn't choke in that situation--and there is always the possibility that they would choke and not act it out.

I think this is where we are as a movement. We are just on the verge of saying, "Give me the ball," knowing that we have everything that we need, if we have the nerve to act it out. I do not know what has been happening in your house or your living room lately, but I call it standing between the groaning and the ecstasy. It is like a sudden revelation from heaven when you see that these six or twelve people are going to say yes to the next thing you ask them. And you know that you do not want to ask them, so you walk around groaning. I remember one day when I did not do anything. I was trying to make out a list, but I could not do it, my pencil refused to work.

I could hardly stand on my feet, I would fall over on the couch because I knew what was happening. Those people were going to say "yes", if I dared to write their names down and put a timeline into it for that week. That is when this kind of weakness overcomes you, and this is the kind of groaning that is going on in the movement. We see that the impossible is possible if we are willing to embrace the suffering and let that suffering be for others.

Then, on the other side of that groaning is the ecstasy. I have this sister in Montana, who has a Pentecostal background. She wrote me a letter the other day, and the last sentence was, "What do you think about speaking in tongues?" Well, I had a whole speech all ready for that, and I was preparing it and was going to say, "Well, you remember that speaking in tongues was one of the lesser gifts, and you did not need to be a Christian to do it, the pagans were pretty good at that, too." I had the whole context written and then I came down to the Continental Auxiliary meeting and participated in the workshop on Thursday night. It was a fantastic workshop, but I looked at the objective data on the board, and I could not find anything that I could really understand. Suddenly, I realized that what had happened to us was that we had been having a four-hour spirit conversation. The next morning it really broke loose. We were totally giddy, hardly able to stay in our seats.

That kind of breakloose is happening. There was a time when you heard people in the movement described as looking like warmed-over death, hardly ever smiling and without any sense of humor. Recalling that, I found my moralism welling up in me the other morning: what are people going to think about us giggling and singing and falling off our chairs? And I was afraid in the face of this new manifestation. I could not really handle that in myself.

That is where we are, standing between that groaning and that weakness of knowing that we have everything we dare to ask for. The only question is What do we ask for? And that kind of ecstasy, that kind of breakloose, is happening, it seems, every time you try to have a simple conversation. You ask where the bathroom is, and you have a spirit conversation. You can see why you have a hard time getting where you need to go. This is what is happening today, and there seems to be no way to avoid it.

I want to talk a bit about the dangers of being in the transformed state. It has been fun living in the tension between being in time and timelessness or eternity, as you watch your colleagues come back from Academy or a teaching trip or wherever the movement is gathered or the Word has been announced. It is like watching Moses coming down from the mountain--the faces shine and they have these two tablets of the New Religious Mode and the New Social Vehicle. They come back down the mountain, back to the nitty-gritty, and they walk into the congregation or the family or the religious house, and all of a sudden, where did this golden calf come from? When you meet that, having been in the transformed state and then having come back and re-entered the nitty-gritty, how do you get out all the assignments that have to be gotten out in the next half hour to make that week come off? The nitty-gritty and the tension eats you up. I still do not know if anyone has a model to deal with how we make that transition from the mountain to the plains without having to break the tablets every time and go back up the mountain. I am sure that we are called

to live on the plain. I think we are still human, still historical beings, even though we are transformed.

But have you noticed the new power of your meditative council? It is essential to have your meditative council, but it is as though every time you are recruiting, when you are standing there, knowing you are going to win, you have Charles Moore sitting over there saying, "Now, Glen, you know that if you set an adequate context, you can get any man to do anything you ask." And there is Troxel, over on your other elbow, saying, "After you have laid out all these crummy excuses, tell me why it is not the will of God that you go?" And Larry Ward is sitting back there saying, "If you are going to go to Hell, it will be over my dead body."

Well, I can handle that kind of meditative council--I even find it helpful--but what really gets me is now all of a sudden I have the Lord on my meditative council. So I have got up a whole bag of short courses for the Lord. Every time I get ready to call on a man, I say, "Lord, you know that that man has not got a possibility of saying 'yes' to being the church and going to that course. You don't know him as well as I do. Let me tell you about him; I have known him for six years. He is a bigot, and besides that he hates me. I simply will not go and ask him to go to RS-I. Then there is a pause, and pretty soon I have used up all my short courses, and I find myself sitting in his living room with him saying, "Why, yes, can my wife and my son go, too?" That is what is going on in the meditative council.

Another way this has lighted up for me has to do with our forefathers, some place back in Lutheranism, getting into a fight over a thing call predestination. I never used to have any idea what that was about but thought it had something to do with determinism. But I have got clear recently about what predestiny meant. Predestiny is knowing your destiny before hand, knowing that you have won and then coming back and having the guts to live that out, to act it out and not fall into a ditch. That is no determinism here; you can choke at any point. But that kind of self-consciousness is there. Every time you sit down in someone's living room to make another call, you know you have been there before. You have lived that before, and you know that if you do not deliberately blow it, the response will be a "yes." So when you come up-against that destiny, how do you finally say that I am my destiny right now--that I do not have to wait until some time in the future, but whatever the world is going to be, that is what I am right now? Whatever destiny requires, that is what I am. The only question is, "Am I willing to be the victory that has already been given in every moment, or am I going to try to hide in the corner or run into the locker room where nobody can get the ball to me to make that last shot in the ball game that has already been won?"

I learned a great deal this past week about chastity and prayer, and I finally got that grid grounded for myself. How is it, once you know you can have anything you ask for in the Father's name, that you avoid becoming a whore, in the Biblical sense? How do we as the movement stand in the tension between being revolutionaries and being successful? This is where we are today. We can be so successful, if that is what we want; we can have denominational officials coming to our door. There is a flood of visitors to 5th City these day. If we want to be successful, we have it. But if we want to be revolutionaries, that is another thing.

I think of all the efforts we have put into recruiting our relatives and our friends and having those wish-dreams about this great and fantastic person that has to get to RS-I--and of the considerable time and prayer and effort we have spent to make those things happen. I had an opportunity to fly to Montana for the occasion of a funeral recently, and I thought, since it is going to cost me 200 bucks that I do not have, a good justification for going there is to recruit my sister to RS-I. So I did, and, lo and behold, she went to the course. But you know what? The course was cancelled. I was so angry I was ready to explode at the Lord or anybody else who wanted to tell me that that was the way life was. I am still angry, but what I have come to see is that there was no network to care for that sister, if she had taken RS-I. She is a great spirit woman, and she could bring off a whole area by herself. But the revolutionary's question is, "What does it have to do with that grid?" I have to admit that what I did did not have anything to do with that grid.

That is what I am talking about when I say that we are discovering what it means to be chaste in our prayers. We are chaste to the grid, knowing that RS-I is not a course but an invitation to a life-long march or journey, and that it is immoral to recruit our relatives or anyone else unless there is a model to care for people on their journey. The other night, one of our men, who has taught Sunday School for thirty years and is here now at the Basic School, said, "This says, 'Basic School.' I'm an old army man. Come on, what's next, six weeks, two months, a year?" We are clear that we are not inviting somebody to something that is just going to fix up his neuroses but involving him for life when he walks in the door. And we made that decision before he walked in the door; when we made out the list back home, we decided that he was going to be on this journey for life.

You can have anything you ask for, but how do you know what to ask for? We have some answers for that. There is one polis in Milwaukee where, if we were intentional and put our troops in to work, we could probably have fifty people every time we decided to have a course. There is another polis there in which, if we threw in all of our troops and prayed day and night, we might get twenty-five. The question is, what is the revolutionary action? Do you decide to be successful or to bring off the metro? How is it that we develop that kind of chastity that allows those kinds of decisions to be made not according to where we can be successful but out of what is finally strategic and necessary to care for the world. How many more religious houses or galaxies or whatever are we going to be able to support in North America before we start looking at some of those empty spaces in which the victory has not yet been acted out?

The question is, "What will it take?" That is just another way of asking the question, "How much suffering are you and I willing to embrace?" That is how much it will take. Have you noticed you have the Midas touch these days? People do not turn to gold, but they turn to spirit if you decide that you have the kind of power and subtlety and nonchalance and the tools to walk into any group anywhere and allow people to say "Yes" to their lives, "Yes" to their call to be the church. All is possible. But how do you decide what is really needed?

You know we are a movement these days. It has happened. We have a lady in our congregation that I have not been able to recruit, although I have been trying for four years now. She asked a lady from another galaxy congregation, who works with her in a department store, "Have you heard of this RS-I course?" And the other woman said, "Sure, that is a great course. You really ought to go.

Why don't you take your son?" When people start being recruited in department stores, we know we are a movement; we are no longer just playing games.

I have had trouble in the past with the line of the song "Three billion people die and never live." As I looked around at this movement, local man always seemed to come in the shape of a white, thirty-two year-old with a seminary education. But suddenly that is no longer the case. We are broader than that image of what it means to be the movement. This has shown up for me in many arenas, but particularly in that of the elders. We have elders in many of our churches who are just rising up out of the earth. They are not even dying any more. Two years ago, in my congregation, we had eight funerals; this year, we only had one. Three years ago they were saying, "Let the young people do that." We have not heard that in two years. They are very clear today about who can do it. They do not have to turn their job or their life over to somebody else, and consequently, their life has been given back to them. As for the youth, we have youth that we do not want. They are more serious about life than we want them to be. What is happening there is a rising up of local man. I shudder every time I think about the people who came to Basic School this time from my congregation and about those who are going to have to come next time. My parochialism just gets shattered everytime I think about this. So I bring out that bag of short courses: "Lord, do you know what you are doing by allowing people like that to see the vision of being the global movement?" I am sure he knows what he is doing, but I continue to show up as a man of unfaith many, many times. "Surely not that one Lord."

We have a movement on our hands. The other night I talked with a lady about the Basic School. She had not been to a course for four year and had complaints about the cold food, the bed, and staying up so late. After a half-hour context about the Basic School, I did not think there was a prayer. But she showed up the next morning in the office and said, "Now, what makes you think I am qualified to be the church and to go to this school?" Three quick short courses, and she gave me her registration. What makes me tremble is how many of those people there are sitting around in that congregation for four years who have never got called on. I had a blinder, a screen up there that said, "There is no way, no chance that that one could ever say 'yes' to the gospel or be on the journey." I am sure you all have those people sitting back there in the bleachers waiting until somebody has the nerve to give them a call, or the Lord tricks them.

What happens when people find out that their lives as given are good? I remember a Parish Leadership Colloquy I was in. When the participants found out that their universes were being cut off and that this life as given was good, they fought and did everything possible to get into some other universe. Before the Holy Spirit lecture, the pedagogue had to earn the right to give that lecture for about a half-hour. They wanted to say, "That is not the way life is; all of life is not good." Finally, they gave her permission to go ahead and give that lecture.

But when it was time for the church lecture, that group of people pushed the pedagogue right up to the edge of the cliff and said, "This is not the way life is. Life as it is given is not good." They made him go back through the whole course, and all the time he was standing with one foot over the cliff and it would have taken just a little nudge and they would have thrown him over. Then, all of a sudden, they saw he was not going to lose his nerve, that he would not recant. One little lady who had some spirit, had sent the

pedagogue a note earlier, asking, "Do you believe in the power of the Holy Spirit?" He had written back, "That is the only kind of power there is." This lady now raised her hand and said, "Let's hear him out; give him a chance." Well, from that point on, it was as if those people had been waiting all their lives to hear that lecture. They were a different body of people on the other side of that church lecture. How many people have been waiting all their lives for somebody to call them and tell them that their lives are worth living. Some of these people are getting old and tired, and they think that nobody is going to call them, that no one is going to take their lives seriously. But here we stand as a movement with the tools to call them and with the structures to keep them called.

I waited six and a half years to preach one sermon in the congregation; it had to do with that global grid. We had that up for some time, and the galaxy had a big one that hung in the basement of the religious house. Nobody dared to ask what it was. Finally, we got a smaller replication model and one of the men who had never been to a course, as he was playing dart ball, said, "Is that a picture of our neighborhood?" I said, "Yes, that is right; that is a picture of our neighborhood." Then another lady, who had also not been to a course, asked me about it at a meeting one day, I said, "Well, what do you think?" She thought it might be a picture of the church. Well, yes, that's right.

One of the youth asked the same question, and I said, "That is the picture of what your life is about because you were bapti ed." That gave that small congregation the occasion finally to see that in fact they were called to be the light of the world and that what they were about was in fact acting out what that meant in the neighborhood. That is the church. You used to worry after you had given one of those fine sermons, that someone might come up and ask, "Pastor, what shall I do?" You were worried because you knew you did not have anything to tell them. Well, we have something to tell them now. All we have to do is point at that grid and say, "That is what we are out to do. Before you could even open your eyes and see, in our tradition you were commis- sioned. They did not even ask your permission, but they brought you up there and dumped the water over you and said, "Go therefore unto all the world and make disciples of all the nations." Your parents decided what your life was going to be about.

What is it like to have won and still be called to act it out day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, as those who have won? "If you ask anything in my Father's name, I will give it to you."

Glenn Wheeler

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