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COUNCIL V George McBurney 8/3/70

For those of you who are holdovers from Summer 70, may I say that I never ceased to be amazed at the high calibre of some people who just don't seem to get the word. Prisoner who lived on as prison grounds-keeper.

For those of you who just arrived for Council 5 - Welcome to the Animal Farm. For the benefit of those of you who were not here during Summer '70, let me say that those of us who were here, including people like myself who were attached but irregularly assigned, sat where you're sitting and heard words that will bend history.

I feel tonight as though I am walking where the saints have trod - and for a sinner like me - that ain't easy. I am convinced that the only thing I could do to top the performances of the past month on this crucifix would be suddenly to ascend directly into heaven.

Recognizing that that is not a viable possibility and realizing also that should I suddenly become transparent, Fred Bus - the Institute's stand-up comedian in residence - would immediately appear on the stage to fill what he would call a vacuum, I am compelled to stay here until I have exhausted either my words of wisdom or this audience -- whichever occurs first.

My corporate assignment is to say something profound about the Secular Layman in the Spirit Movement. Since this was a corporate assignment, I had corporate assistance and what I am about to say includes ideas suggested by all of the men in the NorthShore Cadre. When St. Joseph the Mathews announced this assignment, he didn't say layman - he said lay MAN -- which automatically obliterated the new women's forum.

My only problem with the new women's forum is you just can't ever be enough of those beautiful, bitchy babes in the whole world.

Having said that, I can now go on to the discussion of the problems of men -- particularly secular laymen in the Spirit Movement. Those problems might be illustrated by the following contextual statement from a book written by Bergen Evans in 1946: (The Natural History of Nonsense)

Until about a hundred years ago rational men lived like spies in in an enemy country. They never walked abroad unless disguised in irony or allegory. To have revealed their true selves would have been fatal.

Today their status is more that of guerrillas. They snipe from cover, ambush stragglers, harrass retreating rear guards, cut communications, and now and then execute swift forays against detached units of the enemy. But they dare not yet risk an open engagement with the main force; they would be massacred. Their life is dangerous but exciting and is warmed by a sense of camaradire not often known among the dull conscripts of orthodoxy.

I'm going to read that again and take poet's license by changing a few of the words. And since Desmond Avery may be asleep, I ask his colleagues sitting next to him to wake him up, since not everyone here cares to listen to all of my words of wisdom twice.

But let's try the contextual statement this way, which I suggest doesn't change the substance of what Bergen Evans said eight years before the Spirit Movement emerged:

Until about sixteen years ago, the People of God, which include the Spirit Secular Laymen lived like spies in an enemy country. They never walked abroad unless disguised in irony or allegory. To have revealed their true selves would have been fatal.

Today their status is more that of guerrillas. They snipe from cover, ambush stragglers, harrass retreating rear guards, cut communications, and now and then execute swift forays against detached units of God's People. But they dare not yet risk an open engagement with the main force of God's People; they would be massacred. Their life is dangerous but exciting and is warmed by a sense of corporateness not often known among the little old ladies -- male and female -- who inhabit what's known as the "real" world.

One word that comes to me out of my Revised Standard Version of Bergen Evans is corporateness. And those of you who were here for Summer '70 heard so much verbosity on that subject flowing from both saints and sinners around here that I won't belabor the point except to say that anyone in this room who is not impacted by the sheer power of the corporateness which created such things as the electric grid, the electric electric grid and that 1200 page tome which spewed forth from instant Random House, not only is not aware of what is going on -- he should be cremated before it's too late, which in India is within four hours after death.

Another word that comes to me from Contextual Statement is that the Spirit-Secular Layman dare not yet risk an open engagement with the main force of God's people.

It occurs to me that with the advent of the Research Assembly and all that will flow from it, the point at which us laymen risk an open engagement with the main force of God's People may be closer than we'd like, if we had our druthers.

For the moment however, since for fear of massacre, he dare not risk an open engagement with the forces of the real world, the Spirit-Secular Layman is destined to hang on that cross of tension between this world and the real world -- never disclosing fully to either world all that he knows about the other.

He is not sailing calmly toward the abyss -- he is standing, spread-eagled and frantic, astraddle of it, like a giant with one foot on either side of the Grand Canyon -- and with both feet on banana peels.

At the risk of further offending the Summer 70 holdovers with preachments about the North Shore Cadre, let me just say to the rest of you that we are a group of nine couples from the North Shore Area who are secular laymen and who have decided to allow ourselves to be manipulated in a spirit movement experiment.

The master manipulators from the Ecumenical Institute manipulated us into being - they manipulated us into Odyssey Global and they manipulated us into Summer 70 - to mention just a few major items. Never have so few been manipulated so much and so experimentally for so great a cause.

Anyway - this Spirit-Secular Layman probably spent the first 25 years of his life getting educated and the next 20 years lusting after the goddess of success. Although, for your information, Fred has a more than adequate income, he never has any money. He belongs to an exclusive club, has a suburban home, a station-wagon, three beautiful golden-haired children, and a thoroughbred dog whose ancestry can be traced back eight generations further than he can trace his own. He belongs to the right church and his religion, until recently was that of his ancestors. By all contemporary orthodox standards, he has it Made.

And then some event occurs in his life in which some basic illusion is just utterly destroyed. The 4-inch thick plexiglass bubble in which he has been living just suddenly disintegrates. He may find out, for example, that the widespread myth that his company always treats all of its employees fairly just isn't true. Or he may find that a friend whom he has always trusted implicitly has disappeared to the rear when the machine guns started firing. Or he may find that while he's been sleeping with the goddess of success, he and his family, which has always been a great symbol in his life, have somehow drifted apart.

In any event, something happens to this man which makes him suddenly realize that that goddess of success who has been his lover for twenty years is nothing but a common prostitute.

He's like the architect I heard about who's been designing the new Sears Roebuck Building in Chicago -- which will be 1450 feet high and thus the world's tallest building. When asked whether the design for the building was the epitome of his career - he said "No, it just means a lot of hard work to get it done. And when it's finished somebody else will build a taller one."

That architect has discovered that his vocational structure has turned to dust -- just as his magnificent building will someday do.

And as we all know too well, from that moment forward, his life will never really be the same -- regardless of what he does.

The male menopause has occurred and this Spirit-Secular Layman's struggle to really live has begun. The surface of his self has been punctured and he has started the long spiritual journey to the center of the universe within. Before this happened, he made all of his decisions exclusively out of the challenges to his own life. He now suddenly finds himself among the elite People of God who try, at least, to make their decisions out of the challenge of comprehensive humanness.

If I might digress for a moment, it occurs to me that there should be no generation gap between this aware man and his college student son who happens to be an authentic -- and I emphasize authentic -- hippie. Because the suddenly aware father and his hippie son are now at about the same point in the journey. It just took Big Daddy twenty-years longer to get there.

But if this suddenly aware man thinks his earlier life was a struggle, he ain't seen nothing' yet.

Because unless he decides to just abandon all those suburban creature comforts and whatever degree of economic political and cultural status he may have attained in the secular world -- unless he decides to just abandon these and become a full-time member of the spirit movement, he will find himself, as I suggested earlier, living in two worlds.

If this Spirit-Secular Layman could have his druthers, he would get out of one or the other -- or maybe both - of these worlds.

He might, as I suggested earlier, just appear one day at a religious house like Bonhoffer's man of duty, with no economic employment, and five hungry mouths to feed and say: "Spirit Colleagues, here I am, ready to join you in stuffing envelopes, building models, sweeping floors, cleaning toilets, or doing whatever else you'all need done."

Or he might, like Bonhoffer's irresponsible genius, just retreat back into the world as it existed before the onset of his male menopause, and avoid the spirit world like the plague it has become in his life. But being a free, obedient responsible man, he knows that he cannot operate out of his druthers. He knows that he must do not what he druther: do but what his spirit journey demands that he do.

And the Spirit-Secular Layman with whom I am most intimately acquainted believes that for him -- for now - that demand is that he continue living in both worlds. That he continue using what he has acquired in that world to help enable this one; that he undertake to build a bridge between the two worlds so that they may eventually become one. Because it seems to me that if the two worlds do not become one, they both may expire.

I am not suggesting to the other Spirit-Secular Laymen here that you will encounter the demand in the same way. The demand upon you may be to vacate the secular world and live exclusively in this one. Or, to put it another way, your Journey to the Center of the Self may demand that you literally risk everything in the search for the center. This certainly has happened to some Spirit-Secular Laymen and it most certainly will happen to others. And we can all thank God for these happenings. Otherwise, the Spirit movement order would be comprised of nothing but clergy and their wives. And we all recognize what a total disaster that would be.

But only you can decide what the spirit demand is upon your life. All I am suggesting is that so long as we function as free, obedient responsible men responding to the spirit demands our lives and not responding to our druthers, we will somehow just know what those demands are and when they are demanded. And if the demand upon you is that you continue to live in two worlds, you quite likely will find yourself in a cadre -- if you aren't already in one. And if you think a cadre is going to be the Church of the Holy Comforter, let me dispose of that illusion right now.

It has been my experience that no human organization is ever truly an organization until it encounters and survives a crisis. This is one reason why most business corporations are not truly corporations. But don't you suspect that the survivors of the Penn Central disaster are probably a little more corporate than they were three months ago. And Summer 70 may be the crisis that determines whether the much-touted North Shore Cadre is really a cadre.

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Our assignment during Summer 70 was to come off with nonchalance and style. We accepted that assignment with such enthusiasm that concern was expressed that instead of coming off with nonchalance and style, we were creating an image of drunk and disorderly.

Meanwhile, back at the split-level ranch, the internal struggles went on. And Summer 70 has brought those struggles into sharper focus than any event during the short history of our motley crew. Our existence as a cadre has been hanging by a thread since its beginning and Summer 70 has been the sword of Damacles hanging over that thread.

We have had great struggles with the problem of total engagement or corporateness -- great struggles with total detachment or the conflict between assignment and individual decision -- and great struggles with total dedication or the will to do one thing.

To quote the pharisee to whom I've been married nearly 21 years, this summer we have seen the elephant. The question is "Will we survive?"

At the moment, I am assuming that as free, obedient responsible Spirit-Secular men and women, we will survive because survival is demanded. The spirit movement demands that we continue the experiment in what it means to be part of an aware spirit group - extended family - common use of resources.

My purpose in all this is only to suggest to you two things:

First - That all those spirit secular people here and elsewhere -- and particularly those Spirit-Secular LayMEN who are engaged in a lonely struggle for survival in two worlds -- should be aware that they do not struggle alone.

And secondly, that while a cadre may furnish spiritual enablement, it isn't a messiah either.

For those of us who will continue to fight for survival in two worlds, our lives will be dangerous but exciting and will be warmed by a sense of corporateness not often known among the little old ladies - male and female - who inhabit the real world.

And as we continue the struggle, may the Lord be with us all.

AMEN.