

Chicago Centrum
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THE NEGLECT OF BEING

These spins aren't simply something about last quarter; they are spins about our lives--as last quarter exposed them.

I always experience this time as an accounting, as a refreshing kind of gift, primarily because of the context in which it happens --that is, as our corporate time of reflecting. The first two or three priors' councils I came to I thought we came to get our practices straightened out. Now that it has finally occurred to me that we never get our practices straightened out, I realize that we come together to recover our one-being, our one-thrust in history, our spirit deeps...so we can continue to live as revolutionaries who never get their practices straightened out.

It has been good to talk about suffering this time as we've come together. I'm not sure exactly what language we can use to articulate the meaning of that suffering, but one phrase that has come out of my own struggle is the phrase, "the neglect of being." Suffering is the neglect of being. It is not the result of the "neglect of being", it is what goes on in anyone's life when he realizes his whole life is always filled with neglecting being.

The reason I keep saying the "neglect of being" is that I do not know what to say after I say that phrase. It addresses the awareness that I have in my own life that when I experience suffering, when I look at suffering, I see being itself, neglected. And it is not always like I am neglecting being. Sometimes it is suffering in someone else's suffering when you see in their life the neglect of being. It is sociological suffering when you see in society the neglect of being. Maybe some other words that you might start using to say the same thing would be: "the neglect of wholeness" or the "neglect of fullness", or, the "neglect of completeness."

The awareness that life is good is not something which comes first as intellectual; it comes first as the experience that I am still here. The world is here. That we are in the "hereness" of the world. And, that we can reflect on all of that. The "neglect of being" is whenever I, or anyone else, or the forms of society, reflect living as if the world was

not given, reflect living as if our lives were not lively. On the other side of that, you talk about style, you talk about dance, and joy, and pain, and so forth; but suffering is just "being neglected."

It has been helpful, too, for us to talk together in this council about a sense of interior vacuum. All of my old images about "interior vacuum" have collapsed, and a new set is emerging.

One moment the things happening around me are so exciting and wonderfilled that I bubble all over, it's running out my ears, I walk six inches off the ground. Thirty seconds later, without anything having happened, without anybody saying anything, I am totally empty. I have bubbled all out in thirty seconds. I suppose that is related to our decision to be poured-outness. Any of us who still find ourselves accounting relative to how good or how bad we poured ourselves out this week have no understanding of that decision. The decision is that our lives are ALWAYS poured out.

It is on the other side of that that we face the decision of where to pour our lives out. Vacuum is when my life is running out and I have not decided where it is running. Vacuum has nothing to do with the fact that I have said that my life is care for the world. Vacuum still happens to me at any given moment when I find that I have not decided specifically the way my life is going to run out. If all of that is the Dark Night, then I am not intellectually unclear anymore about what the Dark Night is. The Dark Night is a lifetime of struggling with what it means to see that poured-outness every day, every moment.

Another helpful image for me has come in the appropriation of the Hunter Warrior--the one about "not-doing". In one of those little solitary reflections you get for Tuesday night Sodality, I received a contemplation reflection that said, "Don't just do something, stand there!" The thing literally screamed at me off that page; I never got past contemplation that night. Sometime the next day I prayed, "Don't just do something, stand there." I think that has to do with being Being.

The more we press on the Doing pole, the more serious we have to be of non-doing. There is nothing we have to do. That kind of consciousness has also to do with suffering and the vacuum. If you live that way, you are going to experience a vacuum, and you are going to suffer.

Being in the world has been the latest thing to break loose for me. Being in the world. Remember when we got those plaques for our houses? We had the House plaque, and we had the Institute of Cultural Affairs plaque. We ran home and put them up. About two or three weeks later, I was coming up the steps one day, reading my plaques: "The San Francisco House", "The Institute of Cultural Affairs." The "San Francisco House"? My God! Somebody left the "Religious" off my plaque! I ran charging in the house to the telephone, and started to call collect for a return call on the Watts line. Then I decided I did not want to wait a week, so I called direct. "Is Slicker there? Slicker, somebody left 'Religious' off our plaque! I'll send it back. Can you get me a quick replacement?" That is the first time I understood what Segundo was talking about when he said the Church has no other world but this world.

I started seeing more clearly than ever before that the Religious House is inventing forms--cultural, economic, political forms--and that our consciousness of being in the world now is shifting. It is not an intellectual shift, it is an interior shift--a relational shift which has to do with all of our life, and the sociological forms of the future we have set out to invent.

Carol and I were laughing last night about our room upstairs, the one where the next guy's light shines in and the curtain hangs open while you are getting dressed, and there is a war of the phases going on outside. What flashed through my mind was "I'll be glad when this is over and our family can return to normal!" When we get back to San Francisco it will be the Prathers with their two grandchildren all packed into one room, and the Walters, all four of us, packed into one room, and down the hall all six of the Cortezes, and guess what? -- That is normalcy! If we cannot create family-ness in that kind of givenness, we're not inventing the future. What we're doing instead is living somewhere between the past we have had and the past we would like to have again.

Or consider the normalcy of the economy of our house in San Francisco. I'm increasingly impressed with how we have decided we are not really being cruel to ourselves when we do things like holding up our house checks and stipends when we are in financial trouble. We are not being hard on ourselves when we require that every decision come out of a long thought-through and deeply-considered consensus. That is normalcy for the future. It is terror now, but it is normalcy for the future.

We are indeed about inventing the manifest style for the new man who embodies his suffering, his vacuum, his non-being, and his being in the world. That is all we are about. We have

Twenty Programs, and that is all they are about. We have Commission and Centrum, and Guilds and Cadres and Galaxies; and that is all they are about. If a Galaxy does not have the same kind of normalcy that you have interiorly in the Religious House, then it is not a Galaxy. It is some kind of thing that is trying to recover something that is gone forever. It is something that has nothing to do with invention. The real task is now to look at our moment of history and decide what style is needed for us to embody as we stand in the midst of that invention we have decided must go on.

I used to think we were copying Jesus. Jesus yelled at people, so I went around yelling at people. That is not what we are about. I have tried several times to induce someone to crucify me, but nobody will. Today, if you go out and make a radical risk, thrust yourself in a situation, and take a stand, some fool will get up and say "Everybody has a right to his own opinion." Well, we are not going to get anywhere copying Jesus that way. Whatever it is Jesus did has to do with his ability to look at his particular moment in history and decide what form of expenditure would shift history. That is what we are copying. Today it may be speaking very softly, and never saying anything in public. The style we are inventing has to be a style which changes the course of history; and the measure of its effectiveness is not over against anything that has past, but wherever history shifts.

Copying Jesus the Christ has to do really with servanthood, which is the manifestation of care as the style of the servant. I am trying to get hold of two words we use very freely that have to do with servanthood. These words are: "Enablement" and "Tactics". It was refreshing to encounter the great team in the kitchen. They had decided to handle the dishes for who knows how long; and it was great to encounter their relationship to that task. They were enabling history to come off. We say in PLC and RS-I that being the revolutionaries means being able to run mimeograph machines. We get all excited about that until we are assigned to run mimeograph machines. But I'm not talking about that. I am talking about walking into a lecture or walking into the dishroom and finding that the first question is not, "What's wrong here?" but rather, "What's the positive trend in this situation that my life ought to be extending and enforcing?" That is tactics. Enablement and tactics are the same thing.

It has taken us a long time in the Local Church Experiment to find out what a tactic is. We thought tactics were bullets.

Whenever a contradiction showed up it was the enemy, and your relationship was to pull out a bunch of tactics and "Bang! Bang! Bang!" What tactical thinking has taught us is that contradiction has to do with the positive and the negative trends. What we are out to do is to restore balance rather than pull out a 45 milimeter Howser to pulverize the negative. When we find an imbalance, what we have learned to do is add a little to the positive trend to pull it back into balance until it overcomes the negative. That is not some little principle of operation. That is servanthood. Servanthood, enablement and tactics -- all are new happenings in our lives.

The last thing I want to do is quote a galaxy pastor who made a comment last week which has entered my Meditative Council. This character stood up last week in the Clergy Forum/Galaxy Pastor meeting. His church is asking to leave the Galaxy. Everybody that he has had in the Auxiliary has kicked him several times, and he is trying to recouperate from that. He has confessed to several tactical blunders, and has decided he is going to lead a social act of repentance. Well, his statement at this meeting was this: "What we need today is a decision to recover responsibility for our dreams." He has dreamed that the Church would be renewed for the sake of the world. And he has grasped that he alone is responsible for that. Somehow or other, aside from the romantic flow of that line, that statement has to do with Being, it has to do with having seen the neglect of Being, and it has to do with having decided to embrace the vacuum that is forever at the center of our lifes.

-- George Walters

6/1/74

