

PROFOUND VOCATION

We have been talking about profound consciousness. We have been trying to get at the bottom of the consciousness that has been the consciousness of every single human being that has ever set about the job of building civilization. It has been the consciousness of every single person who has ever struggled with the issue of what it means to care for society, to build society. What we have discerned is that the consciousness of the man or the woman or the society who is out to rebuild has been the consciousness of the Faith beyond faith. It has been the consciousness of the Dark Night. The consciousness of any man or woman or society that has been out to build society has been the consciousness of the Hope beyond hope, has been the consciousness of the ceaselessness of the struggle. The consciousness of any man or any woman or any society that has ever been out to rebuild society has been the consciousness of the Love beyond love, has been the consciousness of the Long March. This is the consciousness that has build society.

I used to believe that such consciousness was an illness, was an aberration. You know how the consciousness of the Dark Night breaks on you. It is as if you have this consciousness, but you have found a way to surpress it. Then as you go along you have Dark Night attacks much like gas attacks or heart attacks. You are going along in life and suddenly you have a Dark Night attack and you think you have gotten ill. Or, you are going along in life and you have a Long March attack (which is the same thing, really, as a Dark Night attack) and you are convinced that you will either have to recover or die. What the consciousness is that we are talking about here is the fact that this is not something you ever recover from. You do not get well from this consciousness, because this consciousness is not an illness. It is simply the way life is for any man, any woman, any society that has ever been out to care for society or to rebuild society.

Recently, we have been talking about how a human being is confronted in the midst of his life with the profound question which, as you live in this consciousness, becomes apparent in your life. And that question is the question of the meaning of human existence. What does human existence mean in the face of this kind of consciousness? It is never an abstract question, it is always a concrete question of my identity, or it is the concrete question of my vocation, or the concrete question of my style. But, underneath those concrete questions is the very deep question of what life is all about as I live within this kind of consciousness. That is what we want to look at this evening.

We want to look at the fact that in the midst of this encounter with profound consciousness is the question of vocation: What do I do with my life?

And, we want to talk about it under three rubrics, that of the Trust of Being, that of the Power of Being, that of the Presence of Being. When you raise the question of vocation in your life in the midst of this consciousness, it is always the question of the power and the trust and the presence of being. It is the question of vocation, the question of what I do with my life.

Before we do that, I want to read you a story. This is one of my favorite stories. You do not have to take notes on this story. You do not have to look for its profound meaning. You do not have to plumb its ontic significance. You just have to listen to it. That may be harder than any of the other three things.

Once upon a time there was a young prince who believed in all things but three. He did not believe in princesses. He did not believe in islands. He did not believe in God. His father, the king, told him that such things did not exist. As there were no princesses or islands in his father's domain and no sign of God, the young prince believed his father. But, then one day the prince ran away from his palace. He came to the next land. There, to his astonishment, from every coast he saw islands and on these islands strange and troubling creatures whom he dare not name. As he was searching for a boat, a man in full evening dress approached him along the shore. "Are those real islands?" asked the young prince. "Of course, they are real islands." said the man in evening dress. "And those strange and troubling creatures?" "They are all genuine and authentic princesses." "Then God must also exist!" cried the prince. "I am God" replied the man in full evening dress with a bow.

The prince returned home as quickly as he could. "So, you are back" said his father, the king. "I have seen islands, I've seen princesses and I've seen god!" The king was unmoved. "Neither real islands nor real princesses nor real God exist." "I saw them!" "Were the sleeves of his coat rolled back?" The prince remembered that they had been. The king smiled. "That is the uniform of a magician. You have been deceived."

At this the prince returned to the next land, went to the same shore, where once again he came upon the man in full evening dress. "My father, the king, has told me who you are" said the young prince indignantly. "You deceived me last time, but not again. Now I know that those are not real islands and real princesses because you are a magician." The man on the shore smiled. "It is you who are deceived, my boy. In your father's kingdom there are many islands and many princesses. But you are under your father's spell so you cannot see them." The prince returned pensively home.

When he saw his father he looked him in the eye. "Father, is it true that you are not a real king but only a magician?" The king smiled and rolled back his sleeves. "Yes, my son, I am only a magician." "Then the man on the shore was god!" "The man on the shore was another magician." "I must know the real truth. The truth beyond magic." "There is no truth beyond magic" said the king. The prince was full of sadness. "I will kill myself." The king, by magic, caused death to appear. Death stood in the door and beckoned to the prince. The prince shuddered. He remembered the beautiful, but unreal islands and the unreal, but beautiful princesses.

"Very well," he said, "I can bear it." "You see, my son," said the king, "you, too, now begin to be a magician."

The issue of vocation is the issue raised by life itself; and it is an issue raised when the concrete possibilities of life are broken open for you. Now you try to answer this question of what is it that you are going to do with your life with deeds. And these deeds, that try to solidify what it is that you are out to do with your existence, only leave you with an aching sense of emptiness and unfulfillment. You become aware of the fact that life, in posing the question, has already given you the answer of what it is that you do with your life.

I remember when Black people found the possibility of life broken open and began to struggle in wild activity to concretize what it was that being Black and doing Black in history was all about. Or when Western man became aware of the radical "no" said to the West across the world, and furious activity erupted, trying to get hold of what it means to do and to be Western. Or when women got clear that they had other options in life than simply to be school teachers or whores or housewives, and they plunged into furious activity to try to get hold of what it meant to be a woman. People in the Third World, plunged into wild activity--they found themselves some small corner of life within which to try to forge out what it meant to be who it was they were in history.

This is what would be called social action. And social action was about the task of forging out what you can do. It was about showing all of history what you can do. And, in the midst of showing what you can do, the image was that you would forge out some kind of meaning for your life in the midst of demonstrating what you did. And in the midst of that, wild activity collapses. In the midst of trying to do something that made manifest in history what you were and who you were and what it was you needed to be about, wild activity collapsed. It is like you join up in the great crusade to renew the Church and rebuild the earth, and wake up one day to the fact that you are not rebuilding the earth or renewing the Church, you are running the mimeograph machine. That is what you are doing. And that when you die, you will die crossing the street with two armloads of Kentucky Fried Chicken. And as you lie there in the street, with your body broken and covered with fried chicken, nobody will say, "There lies somebody who died rebuilding the earth and renewing the church." They will say, "Look! There lies somebody who died trying to cross the street with two armloads of Kentucky Fried Chicken."

Somehow, social action collapses and what you are left with is not your great crusade, but just some little piddly thing that you are doing. And there, you perceive the answer to the question that you have always been looking for. The answer has always been there. The one simple answer to what is it that you are out to do with your life has always been there. ~~And in that moment, you see, one simple answer to what it is that you are about in history.~~

Now before we go into talking about that answer, which would mean the lecture would be over, I thought we would spin a bit more on this experience.

Now, you take this image of the Trust of Being itself. Every human being puts his trust in something, puts his reliance on something to ground his action in history. Once upon a time men used to rely on authority. What did the Bible say you were supposed to do? What does the law say you are supposed to do? What do traditions and customs say you are supposed to do with your life? And you remember that there was a time when what you were supposed to do was very clear. If your papa was a thief you were supposed to be a thief. There were people in those times who had bad blood. (Do you remember people with bad blood?) They had the wrong kind of blood flowing through them and you knew what they were going to do and they knew what they were supposed to do. But that time changed and you and I became aware that religion poses more questions than answers. And you and I got clear that our mama was temporal and you and I got clear that the law was created by 6 or 7 old men in a back room somewhere. We got clear that the authorities could no longer get said what our lives were about.

And so, we turned to our own authenticity. We turned to letting our conscience be our guide. We turned to "Be sure you are right and then go ahead." And that was a great moment, when people were out doing their thing and being sure they were right and then going ahead. Then we got clear that Hitler was sure he was right and he went ahead, and that Mussolini let his conscience be his guide, and that all kinds of oppressions, all kinds of hatred, all kinds of human destruction were being done by people who were sure they were right and were going ahead. Authenticity, your own conscience, your own selfhood was no longer enough to freight what it was you were out to be in history. You became clear that everything you relied on to ever tell you what it is that you need to do with your life is untrustworthy, is radically untrustworthy.

In the movie, "Requiem for a Heavyweight," Mountain was in a vocational crisis. In the midst of that vocational crisis he became aware that he could not rely on the authorities. He could not rely on his own conscience. Everything had become untrustworthy. His best friend became a liar and a cheat. A girlfriend he thought he had turned out to be someone who imaged him as a project, as something to take up the time with. His other best friend, who was always so concerned about him, was nothing but a weepy wimp who would never do anything but cry and moan and crab, but who would never commit himself to doing anything. Everybody was untrustworthy. He could not even trust himself. He thought he knew what was going on. He thought he knew what was happening. His own conscience was a liar. His friends were liars. His life was a lie. Nothing could be trusted anymore.

And in the midst of discerning that about life itself, he was called on to perform an irrational deed. Did you catch the irrational deed? The irrational deed was not going out to the ring to be a wrestler. The irrational

deed was to trust in the midst of everything being untrustworthy. No, no, that is not right. The irrational deed was to be trust in the midst of everything being untrustworthy. And so you have a picture of this man walking into the ring on nothing. ON NOTHING. He had nothing to go to the ring for. Army was not going to be anything less than a weepy wimp. Maish was not going to change, Miss Miller was not going to change, those people were not going to get any better. Life was not going to change. He was Trust. All he had was nothing. All he had was no thing. And that is what he walked out there on.

When you become aware that everything in life is untrustworthy, there is a kind of rage that breaks loose in the face of your own weakness. I remember watching television a while ago, and learning that Arkansas was one of the largest rice producers in the world. Do you know what they were doing that day in the state of Arkansas? They were having a convention with the rice growers from the Carolinas and from Louisiana and from Texas. And do you know what they were discussing in that convention? How to cut back production to keep the price up. Three-fifths of the world's people live on rice! I found myself saying "What business do they have cutting back production to keep up the price?" But all I could do was scream at my television set. I suppose I could scream at my wife. Of course, she was untrustworthy too, at that moment. While I was watching this horror on television, she was trying to show me a picture in Time Magazine of a child with a bloated belly, "Look at this, look at this!" "No, look at this for a minute. Look what he says here. All these people are going to starve next week." "Will you get away." My wife is untrustworthy. Channel 2 is untrustworthy. Walter Chronkite was reporting this atrocity and he wasn't doing anything. Your knowledge, your decisions, your convictions all betray you to terrible weakness. You find yourself saying "I can never count on anything again. I can never count on anything again.

And then, an irrational deed is demanded of you, that you be Trust. That you be Trust. Not that you find something new to trust in, but that you be Trust. That you be confident in the midst of nothing there to be confident about.

To come at it another way, everybody has some source of motivity. Everybody finds a way to get himself going. Some people are motivated by success, and there are all sorts of realms of success. Other people are motivated by care, or by any number of things. But, you begin to discern that every source of motivity runs dry and you become overwhelmed with a sense of your own ineffectivity. Now, it is not that you can not do anything anymore. You can do lots of great things in some small little tiny corner of the world. In some small little thing like running the kitchen or in some small little thing like bringing off the Town Meeting you can be unbelievably effective. But, then you look at your Town Meeting, and you look at all the Town Meetings. One piddly percent of the population is going to go through these Town Meetings, if they all come off. Two percent, maybe. Twenty-four piddly little Social Demonstrations. How many of the starving masses of India are ever going to

see Taj Gunj? How many of the starving people in Africa are ever going to hear about Kawangware? Twenty-four little piddly Social Demonstrations.

I found myself in India. The story of how I got to India is a journey in itself. I was told I was going away for three months. And they gave me a three-month ticket. Three years later I was still away, convinced that I had been deserted. But, I was in India. And as we came into the Bombay airport terminal we encountered a family of beggars. The little girl cried continuously. She had cried so much that part of her upper lip was pink from crying and sniffing all the time. And she would run up and ask you for bakshish. And if you didn't come up with any bakshish, the next step was on the ground on her knees. I was not naive so I didn't really break up in the face of that, on the surface anyway. We got out of the airport and were headed down into Bombay and I saw a lot of big culverts--you know, these big sewer drainage things--with rags over the front of them. And I asked the colleague who met me, "What are those?" And he said, "People live in those, and when they do not pay their rent they are evicted." Evicted from a sewer pipe! I don't know what eviction from a sewer pipe looks like. I guess they throw your one pot out into the street. But, can you imagine? Evicted from a sewer pipe. And I found myself charged up with motivity.. I was raring to go. I almost tore out the door of the car trying to get out, into the Religious House and find out what my assignment was, because I was going to end this. I went around the continent of India teaching courses, firing people up with stories of 5th City, trying to talk about this and that. I felt like I had poured out my life, and for the first time in my life I was really living.

Then I got a telegram to come back. I was driving to the airport and there were still people living in those sewer pipes and that same little girl was at the airport. And you could see that the continent of India could use up my life a hundred thousand times and never even feel it. Or that Africa could use up your life a hundred thousand times and never even feel it. Or Latin America could use you up a hundred thousand times over and never know it. And you come aware of the fact that you are ineffective in history. You find yourself saying that there is nothing in the world that will motivate you again. Nothing will ever motivate me again.

Then you notice a strange thing happening. I have noticed it a lot this summer. The strange thing is that people disappear while you are talking to them. There was a visitor who came in to talk about Uptown. We took him by to see Dick Kaiser, the man in the electrically controlled wheelchair. Kaiser launched into 30 minutes of Uptown, and then he disappeared, wheelchair and all. And all that was left there talking to this man was Uptown itself. Kaiser had disappeared. And then, when he stopped talking, he reappeared again. And he did not even seem to know the difference. But, I saw it. And I noticed that other people around here disappear. People you are standing with in the hallway and you start talking to them and suddenly they disappear. And what is standing in front of you is Truth, talking to you, and then they reappear, and Truth is gone. Or Uptown appears, or Social Demonstration appears. You be careful who you talk to around here, because they will disappear, and you might see anything. You be careful talking to some

of your colleagues, for they will disappear on you and all you will see is Iron Man. That's all--Iron Man talking to you. It is a terrifying experience to have a person disappear while he talks to you.

But once you see that once, then it dawns on you that in the midst of knowing that there is nothing that will ever motivate you again, you are motivity. Dick Kaiser doesn't need anybody to come and motivate him. He is motivity. He can disappear anytime he wants to. He is motivity. Nobody has to come and get his juices going. He is his juices and he is going and he is motivity, and you had better get out of the way if you aren't motivated, or he will motivity right over you, wheelchair and all. When you begin to get ahold of the fact that you are motivity, the power of being bleeds through your life and you find yourself doing things, but you aren't doing anything. Things are being done through you.

Finally, every man exudes some sort of presence. He makes some kind of impact in history and you and I are always trying to forge out our role. No matter what role that you and I try to forge out, it always seems like your role is ordained. Your role is already fixed. I ran into Mohammed Ali on an airplane. When people found out he was to be on the airplane, they were going wild. There was all kinds of buzzing and talking...and then, Mohammed Ali came through the airplane. He came through the airplane talking to people and shaking their hands, signing autographs, kissing babies, letting little boys feel his muscles. I was impressed. But what I was mostly impressed by was that I knew what went on before he came down that aisle, while the plane was taking off and he was in his seat. He heard all that excitement in the back and he was sitting there thinking, "God, I wish I didn't have to be Mohammed Ali. I wish I could just not be Mohammed Ali. Maybe I could be somebody else. Some other Mohammed Ali. Except if I tried it, they would make me be Mohammed Ali. No matter what Mohammed Ali I tried to be they would want me to be THE Mohammed Ali."

It is as if you experience yourself in life as chosen. You think about the people of Israel. Here they are chosen to be God's people, and they are always finding themselves in captivity somewhere. But, they are chosen to be God's people. They are chosen to go to the Promised Land, except it is apparently promised to several people. They are chosen to bring forth the Messiah, and every major religion tells them from that time on that they have missed the boat.

There is a sense of ceaselessness that overwhelms you. Maybe, one time, you ran the MTST. Forever afterwards, somebody is saying, "Who can we get to run the MTST?" "so-and-so ran it five years ago and was wonderful at it." and forever, you are an MTST operator. I was always a bit impressed by the image that farmers built the pyramids. Day II people built the pyramids. They worked on the farm Day I, and Day II they had to come build the pyramids. And can you imagine some guy, one time, rolls this big huge block of cement to the top of the pyramid, and ever after somebody says "Who can we get? Oh, I know, Old Ezekial was a great cement-block builder."

Forever, you are chosen and no matter what role you try to be you are always the role that you are chosen to be forever and ever and ever and ever. You are chosen. Chosen to care for the world. Chosen to surrender to being a print-shop man for the rest of your life.

When you encounter that you just feel drained. You feel empty. And then in the midst of that, sometimes you find your life filled up again. Not filled up with some new role to be, not filled up with some better life; but filled up with power, filled up with confidence--not your power, not any confidence in anything you know anything about; but power and confidence.

You appear in the room and electricity comes in the room with you. Being itself is your companion. And people start to avoid you. Being itself peers through your eyes. No matter what the situation is. Forever, you are elected.

With the question of Vocation, then, the question of what I do with my life, the answer is given to you. What you do is who you are. You do who you are. You use you up. I really had a laughing fit in the washroom the other day. A guy came in there throwing his towel around, he was angry. "What's wrong with you?" "Man, I feel like I am being used around here!" Isn't that funny? What did he think he signed up for? What you signed up for was to be used up. That's what you do with the rest of your life. You surrender to being used up and you are confident where there is no reason for confidence to exist. You are motivity where there is no reason for motivity to be there. You are presence in the midst of radical ceaselessness. Your vocation is to be vocation forever. Your vocation is to do your life, to use it up to care for mankind, forever.