

THE INESCAPABLE POWER

We are in the Land of Mystery today as we are every day. In the Land of Mystery, I want to deal with the inescapable power of Being, the inescapable power of life, the inescapable power in the way that life is. This is the trek which the second verse of the song we just sang articulates in lyrics.

"The mystery is everywhere.
I'll ne'er escape its awful stare.
Destroyed, unveiled, within a searing glare.
Doomed to live transparent within my dying.
Why am I condemned to see The power of this finality.
Still I shall die yearning
Lost in the wonder of mystery."

I invite you to go with me to the Land of Mystery. In the Land of Mystery there are at least four, just therenesses. One is rocks. Second, there are eagles. Third, there are wolverines. And fourth, there is one elephant, just one. All of these are in the Land of Mystery. You have to get into the mood to talk of the land of mystery, of the Yellow Submarine. That movie was a very bizarre story of how the Blue Meanies invaded the land of Yes and with their special ray gun, turned it into the land of No. Then the Beatles, in wild animation, got in their Yellow Submarine and set out across this strange land inhabited by all kinds of monstrous creatures to destroy the Blue Meanies. Their goal was to turn the land of No back into the land of Yes. Anyway, you have to hold that kind of wild imagery in your head to grasp the drama, the power of the way life is.

The imagery of the other world has to do primarily with restoring spatial imagery to the vocabulary of 20th century man. The Church has rightly destroyed its imagery of the second story universe over the past 100 years. Platonic dualism allowed us to separate life. We cast half of it up in the air somewhere. Then we could more easily avoid dealing with the absurdity of life by calling some "real" and some "ideal." The twentieth century secular revolution has taken those two sets of images and rammed them into one universe allowing us to grasp the fullness and unity of reality. Now with the Other World imagery, we have begun to recover how it is that when you see space, objects, things going on, you begin to see through those into the finality of life. You see the actual drama that is going on. You see the eternal, to use time metaphors, you see the eternal in the temporal. You see the deeps of life in the very conspicuous, in the very obvious tables and chairs, and other people. You see the way that life is in the very immediate moment, in the very concrete happenings of your life. The reason we use imagery is to get outside your immediate situation to come back and live in it, utterly conscious of what our life is actually about. It is like taking a long journey out across the universe to stand in the context of final things, looking over all of history, and seeing into the deeps of human possibility, then deciding to live our day to day life in that context all the time, transparent to all of life that is going on. That is the only reason that we have Other World metaphors, to break us loose from the immediate man, to be the destinal man, to be the eschatological man, in the midst of every day- bam,, bam, bam, bam, --living.

Let's look at the Land of Mystery in the midst of the Other World topography. First, there are rocks in the other world - lots of them - big ones, small ones. Ones that fall on you, and ones that just sit there and won't move. I mean reality is that way. Mystery is always coming at you like a big boulder coming down a mountain side, and you are in a car down there on the road. But it seems that the only thing your car can do is spin its wheels. No escape. And there is not even a way to get out of your car. It comes at you. Life is just that way. Reality. And that is indeed the way awe comes. It always comes in the very concrete-banging into, or being banged into by life -by other people, by the shifts in history. Like Viet Nam. All of a sudden a boulder shows up on the tracks of the U.S. of A. Express, as we head into the future. I mean to tell, that boulder won't move and we just bammed into it. All kinds of parts of our machine are flying off, and now we seem to be sitting there, steam belching out the side. Roaring and snorting are coming out of the engine. That old rock is just there. It is a given. In the Other World you see that rock is where the Lord meets us in history. That is where you encounter life. Where you encounter the meaning of life, the deeps, is in the very concrete.

We used to think, for a very long time, that you really only meet God at the end of life. You finally meet Him at the great roll call up yonder, when you finally stand there and face him face to face. In the meantime, you go on from year to year (hoping that you don't get killed) and have some fun. Sow a few wild oats. It wouldn't make any difference until, wham, you get jerked up there into the final hereafter. When, at the end of time, the roll call is called out, your name will be either on the roster of good guys, the scroll of life, or the scroll of death. It was powerful imagery.

I lived out of that for years -still do live out of it, by the way. But I'm clear that my life right now is being slammed into by mystery. I have to make a decision to stand before the awe of this situation, and of every situation. It's like awe is always leaping out at you. You walk down the street, and awe steps out from behind the telephone pole. You are walking down the street, and right out in front of your car, wang, there it is. Or it seeps out from the inside of a restaurant. It floats out and there it is, awe, right there, totally engulfing you. It is inescapable. The problem with time imagery is that you cannot separate yourself from awe. "Maybe I'll meet God tomorrow. Maybe he'll send me a special message. What shall I do to get a special message from God?" Did you ever play that game? I spent years looking for messages from God. I'd go to bed and pray hard hoping it would show up on my pillow. Or I would go out there and talk to someone and hope he would have the message. "Do you have a message from God for me?" - something to let me know that I had run into life authentically, that I had had an encounter with the Final One.

That kind of use of time obviously was an escape. It cut me off from life itself. There is no way to escape awe. It is in your life. It is in history all the time. There are moments that you become conscious of that dramatically, but most of the time you and I wear our foggy bottom spectacles, only seeing fuzz out there, seeing gray. Then, all of a sudden, you get slammed into by a boulder coming down the mountain, or you meet one just sitting there on the railroad tracks and you have to come to terms with it, no way to escape it. So I submit to you, as- one who lives in the Other World, that Awe, the Final One, God, is present in your life. I mean right in the midst of it--at every moment. That is the glory, that is the Kairotic dimension of time. In the Land of Mystery there are rocks. And they are real ones, I mean they can kill you, maim you, they destroy. But they are out there for one reason . . . to have you finally come to terms with the way life is in the midst of your life. There is no awe in the Other World, or in this one. It's only when the two worlds collide that you experience awe. It's only when you stick those two electrical wires, positive and negative together, that you have sparks. Finally I am released to live my life by the awe- full one, as the one who lives in this world -- in the Other World. I am the awefull one.

Secondly, in the Land of Mystery there are eagles. How many have ever seen an eagle? Not long ago, I saw a picture of an eagle. I always get confused between eagles and hawks. They are very similar in my book. Both of them are out after you. There is a picture of an eagle, right in front of one of the commodes on the West Side. All you see is his claws right in front, like this, and he's coming at you with his head back a hundred feet, and his claws out ready to grab you. Mystery is not just a thereness. It also comes after you. Every place you run there is awe, there is mystery, there is the final one. Every place you go you are up against God. Sartre was right, there is no way of getting out of life. "No Exit." For me, Tillich pushed it all the way to the end. You can't even escape it through hidden or open suicide. I mean, that eagle is going to get you wherever you go. You are in the cage of your life, and all of a sudden through the bars of that cage comes that eagle, and it is "yyaaayyyaaaayyy." He is right in that cage with you. It's a small cage, and you can't get him out. Nor can you get out of your cage. You just have the eagle with you in there. He is just clawing away at you with reality, with life. If anybody in the room has a tendency toward paranoia, here is your chance. But he is right. The paranoid is clear. Every man has things to deal with. God will not let you alone.

It's like, every time you walk down the street anymore, out steps this man. And he walks up and shakes your hand, "I'm from the Other World." It's like, everything has a stamp on it. "Other World." "Other World." "Other World." For indeed, the man who lives in the Other World is transparent to all of life that's going on, the mystery is everywhere. All the time, he hears that eagle screaming, however dimly, because he knows that unless he responds with that kind of presence, when you have an eagle in your cage you are awake! When you have that eagle in your cage with his claws out, you are awake. You are looking. You are present to what is going on. You see every moment is sent to you from The Other World. "Here, Cramer. There's a moment, there's another moment for your life to be lived".

My mother had a great gimmick she used on my sister and myself. We used to live on a farm next to a river. We used to go out to the river when the salmon would start to run. Dad would go out there in the evening

after work and gaff the salmon to get our winter's meat. Anyway, we couldn't go down to the river without my parents along. Well, one day my sister and I took off for the river by ourselves. We got almost to the bank of the river, and all of a sudden, "yyaaayyaaaayyy", the eagle. Only it was my mother. She had a long switch, about 5 feet long, a sapling off a peach tree, and I tell you, we hopped and skipped, all the way from the river to the house. Man, did we have welts on the back of our legs. That's just one example of how yayayaaya got after me. My mother tells me now, years later, that she killed that peach tree taking switches off it. Nothing is un-holy. Nothing is un-holy. Nothing is un-holy. This is the way our fathers put that.

Third, there are wolverines in the Land of Mystery. I don't know if you have ever seen a wolverine or not. They are relatively small animals. They don't look like a dog, but they are about that size. They have long hair and ferocious teeth. They have incisors that will rip out a chunk of your arm about like a shark. They are very fast and are courageous. They have been known to take on grizzly bears. They have been known to attack men. They have one other mark of distinction. They go for one thing when they attack: the jugular vein. In the North Land, every spring time after the thaw, you would find the remains of an old trapper or two beside a trail. A wolverine had gotten him. The land of mystery has wolverines in it.

In the midst of life you run up against limits. It's like you experience yourself as never being able to win. In the Other World, you live in a land in which you never win. You are up against that which you cannot conquer. It conquers you. You cannot spook it, or scare it away, or drive it off. You can get out whatever kind of weapon you want, even a nice modern laser beam, but it won't do. It's there. I mean, life is just going on and keeps on going on.

Awe is amoral. It moves in on you whether you have been good or bad or happy or unhappy. It rubs out the babies of good people -and the babies of bad people. The rain falls on the good and on the un-good. Or to put it another way, in the Land of Mystery, the wolverines come after you. You've just come back from Sunday School. You've been praying and preaching and singing, and WHOOM a wolverine gets you. Or you have been out all night long carousing or whatever you do that's bad any more, and a wolverine grabs you. It's as simple as that. It's amoral. The mystery is like kamikaze from the Other World. All of a sudden here he comes. Have you ever seen a kamikaze? You probably haven't seen a kamikaze or you likely wouldn't be alive to tell about it. With a kamikaze, the basic principle is that the guy has decided to die, busting into your boat. He's made a covenant and he's not going anywhere except to get him a ship. It takes his life. He climbs into his plane, and says, "I know I'm going to get panicky, so I'll strap myself in with buckles that won't unbuckle." He has his plane full of one thing, enough gas to get one way and as many explosives as he could pack in. Life is that way. It's a kamikaze coming from the Other World. Ooeoeoeoeoeoeoeoeoe right at your ship. You know how it goes. You are sitting in the little boat that is your home, in your little office, in your little church, and a kamikaze comes sailing down into you or to use our other image, you look out the window, and there is this wolverine slinking around waiting for a strike at your illusion.

In the Land of Mystery, I submit, there are wolverines that are just looking for someone who is living in illusion. And as soon as they spot one, they leap at the jugular, and it is over. You have a whole new life on your hands. Mystery is winning. It has won, baby. Life is the way it is, and you are going to go down the tube before it does. It's that consciousness that you and I have, that finally YOU cannot win.

Maybe one more example. All the way through my life at home and for many years afterwards, I used to think about how I could "whup" my dad. "By God, that SOB, he's whipped me enough. I'm going to whip him." I used to spend hours thinking, training, doing whatever I could to get muscles in those flimsy little toothpicks of arms. "I'm going to get my dad." The battlefield for the duel was arm wrestling. Go ahead and laugh. It was a ridiculous thing. My father is something like a truck driver. He was a logger, he worked out in the woods with cables; he'd haul these 150 pound tail blocks over his shoulders up steep mountains. He was strong, and I was out there doing chin ups, running around the field, while he was carrying these huge blocks. I finally made my last big challenge, before I went off to college. We always started in a very humorous way. "OK, Dad, let's shake hands." Now, if you made it through that one and your arm wasn't paralyzed, you went on to arm wrestling. Aaaarga!! I never got to arm wrestling. It was not until I came to terms with the fact that I could not win, that I stood before my father, as my father. I didn't say I couldn't win. That's not the issue. And that's the way it is with life. I'm the vanquished one. Not until I come to terms with that fact in my bowels, that I am one who will never win, will I be given back my life, will I be given permission to be the one who lives in the Other World, who lives his life in this world.

Finally, there is just one elephant in the Land of Mystery, and he's a big one. I mean he is the mastodon, the elephant. He has long hair, and big long tusks. The one thing that is peculiar to this elephant is the pink eyes that see everything that goes on, just little beady eyes. He also has just a whole body full of memory bank. I mean he remembers. He has that eye out there scanning around, looking at all of life, and looking at me in particular, and he doesn't forget a single thing. He is clear about the way my life is in a way that I refuse to be clear about my life. He knows what I do at my desk, in my bedroom, and what I think, when I go for a walk somewhere and think the thoughts that I won't allow myself to think anywhere else. He has his eyeball right on that. In his trunk, he has his complex sonar system, and it's got a bug on my very consciousness. He is tracking me. It's like that trunk is always following me around, and he has his eyeballs out there watching me.

All that is to say that I am a human being. I know that life is that way, that I am a known man. And that every part of my life is known. I am known by the mystery. Remember Par Lagerkvist's The Sybil? That was a ferocious novel, for me. Here was a young maiden woman who was raped by awe, raped by the mystery. Neither you nor the mystery ever forget those experiences. Your past is approved, but it is not forgotten, baby. Your life as it is received, but it is not ignored. Whatever you are and have been and will be is known, I mean, it's total exposure. Yesterday, today, tomorrow, there is no escaping from the fact that you are a known man, Cramer. Everything you ever imagined and could have imagined is known. All of your escapes from your greatness, those have been tracked down. Memory bank. All the times I said "No" to life, and all the times I have said "Yes" to life. All of my illusions about who I am, about who my wife is and who my children are, you just name it off.

All of that is to say that Being has a complete up-to-date track record, with your name at the top of that track record, with what you have done and what you have not done in history. In the Land of Mystery, that is just nothing but sheer joy to know that you are a known man. It is also terror to know that I am a known man. In the Land of Mystery, the elephant is the one who just stands there, and in your knowing that he knows everything about your life, that you are given permission to live that self-hood that is yours, to live your actual relation to life. That is the occasion of authentic selfhood.

There are no secrets in the Other World. There is only the Word, that pronounces your whole life good. It's like, there could not be a 21st century United States of America, unless Viet Nam had happened. There has not been a new Germany save Eisenhower had done what he did to Germany. You know what he did with the Germans? He held before the unbelieving eyes of the common man, the realities of Dachau and Auschwitz. Germany is now a self-conscious people as it never was before. America is now a self-conscious people in a way that it never was before Mylai happened. Nothing moral about that. Nothing good or bad. It is standing before the facticity of your actual life that gives you permission to live it, to participate with your life in history.

We used to live on a hillside where the road went by, after we moved into town. When the cherries were ripe, the crows would eat the cherries, and we were left with the pits. We used to throw the pits at cars as they went by down at the bottom of the hill. One day a cousin of mine and I were throwing cherry pits at cars, to hear them go "ping" off the top of the car. One lady went by, who, we found out later, was a stranger in town. We threw our barrage of pits at the car. Then came this screech. The car pulled to the side of the road and out she came. We found out that the window had been opened. One had hit her lap and one her little daughter. Up the stairway toward our house came this woman. About that time my cousin and I vamoosed. We were out in a big brush pile at the side of the house, crawling around, hiding underneath grass and brush, trying to cover ourselves up. Bang, bang, bang, on the front door. After a moment or two my mother came to the door and the lady told her the story. "Somebody's kids were throwing. They must have been your kids. It came from up on this hill. What were they doing? And my poor little daughter! I'm going to sue you!". All the while we were lying out there hiding in the grass. As with most mothers, her affectionate name for me was not Donald. But Donnie. And she had a particular way of saying that. You have heard that kind of thing before. Out to the end of porch, looking down at this grass pile, came my mother. "Donnie, come here. I know you are down there, Donnie. Come here." We stayed there for what seemed several hours, but it didn't take long to sweat us out. She escalated the war very rapidly. I wasn't prepared to become a vagabond at that point. I wasn't even a teenager yet. Anyway, out we came. And you know what probably happened on the occasion of being known. It was exposure to the way life was. That was a very simple event, a sort of common garden variety game we play. And most of us don't usually have someone to call "Donnie" into our ear.

Be clear about the fact that the one who lives in the Other World, always has that elephant with his trunk out there with eyeballs peering out, standing there in the midst of life keeping his eye on you. Nothing moralistic

about that. That is the way it is. An ontological fact. You are a known man. Good, bad or indifferent, you are known by the mystery, you are known by God. Thereby you are given your life back as the one who can say about his life, "I am the known one and the known one is precisely the loved one". So in the Land of Mystery, you have rocks that don't move, and you have eagles that sometimes get in your cage, and you have wolverines who come for the jugular of your illusion, and you have elephants who know. There is no escape from the way life is. There never has been, and there never will be. And that is the yes that life is to you. It is in living before God that you live, or you do not live at all.

Donald Cramer