

The Other World
TREK XIV
Summer '72

"PROBLEMLESSNESS AT THE CENTER"

THE UNKNOWABLE PEACE

Some of you that have known me in the last few years, and those of you that have known me well, probably have been conscious that for a little over a year I was in a very deep depression. I guess it started some time back in May of 1970. About 1970, I guess, Fishel said that he was going to go back and do the Academy while I stayed and took charge of a Religious House, and that was the start of it. I didn't recognize it then didn't recognize it for some time after that but I've spent my whole life trying to be somebody. I mean I went into the ministry to be somebody. It's a great place, to be somebody. You don't have to do nothing, till you get up in front of people every Sunday, and they shake your hand on the way out and tell you how much of a somebody you are. It's the only place I could figure out where I could be somebody from where I was starting from. But, that pales after a little while.

So I thought I'd get myself into the Movement, and be somebody in the Movement. That was a little more difficult, especially when the guy I got to the PLC was invited to come to the Continental Council in 1966, and I wasn't. So I thought, "Well I'll go join myself an Order and be somebody that way." Well, you know that doesn't work very well around here. And finally, I think, to solve my problem, they decided to get rid of me, and send me out to a Religious House, and it still didn't mean anything. Then Fishel left, and I was somebody.

Well, you know, you bask in the glory of that, when it happens that way, for, oh I guess, two or three days; then, I mean, it begins hitting you-what it is, that you always wanted to be. And in, I mean, then I began entering depression. And I suspect that it wasn't till later in that year that you could really say that I was in the kind of depression that I am trying to talk about; when I got hold of the fact that being a Religious House prior was nothing but hard work. I mean there weren't any more rewards. All the things you thought were rewards turned out not to be rewards after all. All you have is hard work, and you know that that's just a pile. Then we said, "Well, let's just go create a Local Church Experiment, and we'll do something there, and that way we can be somebody." So during that first year, though I was in the Religious House, I trotted over to base three times a week, and we created ourselves a Local Church Experiment. And there I sat, getting ready to start Summer '70, and do the final work of the tactics of the Local Church Experiment and realized that I didn't have any churches to do the project in the Chicago Metro. The closest thing we had was a church in a northern suburb and the North Shore House had already claimed that one. The depression got a little deeper. I began to say to myself, "Well, I was thinking it is time to get out of Chicago. After all, I've been in Chicago for four years, and I shouldn't have been assigned to the Chicago House in the first place." (I was clear we should have gone to Atlanta). Lo and behold, into my Ecclesiola during Summer '70 dropped a pastor from Oklahoma City, who became one of my team priors, and it just became clear to me where it was that I needed to be assigned the next year. And sure enough, I got myself assigned to Oklahoma City.

But a strange kind of thing happened for I discovered that the great jewel of the South turned out to be made out of glass. It wasn't all that it looked like, from 800 miles away. The Religious House oh, I mean it was fantastic When we arrived there were 22 people there the day I showed up, and I soon discovered that that wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

The Galaxy I mean we never worked so hard to put four churches together as those particular churches. And then I discovered everything was not as green as it seemed, and I wanted to die. It was not anything near what I had expected it to be. (You are clear by that, I take it, that the situation had not changed; only the eyes of the beholder had changed.) I began to get hold of what was going on, and began to see that the Local Church Experiment was a lot more work than I had planned on while I was working on it during Summer '70. It was not at all as I had planned

it to be. And I discovered that my colleagues had turned out not all to be saints after all. In addition to that, they demonstrated it, not just to me, but to the whole movement by not coming to Summer '71. And I showed up alone, or virtually so .

Well, I was ready to be reassigned the next year, to somewhere else. Anywhere else a new place would be nice. In fact, Miami looked like the perfect place. So some of us gathered together, and we made out our assignment charts of where everybody should be assigned for the next year. I put out my chart, that had me going to Miami; and everybody else in the room put their charts out and had me going to Oklahoma City. Well, that deepened the gloom. And you have got to say that the gloom was over the possibilities. My wife, she was not as stupid as I was; she saw it. And I mean, the Fall Quarter of this year, she was just ecstatic. That deepened my gloom. It always works that way, doesn't it? When she is up, you are down; and when she is down, you are up. I mean, it always works that way. And that just made it worse.

In addition to that, they put two new religious houses into our region. So not only did I have the possibilities that I had before that I did not want to have, I had two more religious houses there with that many more possibilities and that much more work. There was not even status that could help you out of that. I began to get to the point where I just sensed that I was utterly out of control of what was going on. I mean, everything I hoped for was out of control. Everything I had been after was out of control; and if I needed any more reminder of it, the fine youth who had been just a gem of what it meant to be a young person in the movement and in our Order, who had just one more semester with us, collapsed. He had just one class a week in night school to finish off his high school, so we decided to treat him like an adult, and overburdened him. And he collapsed. And, that was the last straw. I mean, it was finally out of control, and I began to sense that there was nothing that was important anymore. I began to sense that I had been utterly trapped. I gave up even wishing that anything could be different. It was not that I had just given up that this or that could be different, but I gave up wishing, period!

So I came back to Chicago in December for the Local Church meeting. I sat around having given up all wishing and in the middle of that meeting, all of our people from Oklahoma City came up and we were working and I got so tired of just everything, that I just flaked out a couple of sessions and went to bed under the protection of having a cold. Then one of the pastors, from one of the galaxy churches, mentioned to me that his sister, when she had been in the Academy, had been sick and her priors had said that she had a spirit problem. By that time there was no way out; it was utter entrapment. There was a death that happened there, once I began to see what I began to see, that that was just the way it was, and that it was never going to be any different from that; that I could count on never being any different from that, that life was just that trustworthy.

Now a miracle happened in the midst of that: I have suddenly discovered that I do not have any more problems. It happened dramatically. The next Monday evening we came up to this, the Kemper Building, which was to be given to us the following Wednesday. Some of us came up and had dinner up here; and in the middle of the dinner, while we were trying to talk about the possibilities of the next twenty years and what it might mean to have this building to use during those next twenty years, lo and behold the house two doors north of us over here, burned down. We left the dinner en masse and crowded around the upstairs windows on the fourth floor, and watched that house burn down. In the process of standing there, watching that house be consumed by that fire, it happened that I got clear on the way life is always going to be. It would never be any different. When that happened, I turned around and discovered that I was a man without any problems. All the griping that was going on there was the same when I got back as, it had been when I had left in the beginning of December. But it just suddenly became clear there were no problems there, for that was just the fruit of my hand. If I had created all of that griping, I could uncreate it; I could create something different. What was going on there was no longer a problem.

The galaxy? Why it just became clear that I had unlimited tools to work with that galaxy. There was not anything I needed that I did not have available. I mean, Gogarten had just come into my consciousness, and I did not need anything else but that one little phrase of "being responsible to God for the world" rather than "responsible to the

world for God." That was all I needed; I had everything I needed at hand. My wife? As soon as I came back uncollapsed, you know what happened to her, naturally. But here collapse was only a minor disappointment to me. It was like I did not have one of my weapons that I had hoped to use over here on my right hand, and I would just have to pay a little attention to her rather than having her help me out. But I mean there were no problems there. I did not have to go searching for my significance anymore. I mean that whether any of these things came off, or did not come off, was not crucial to me did not make any difference relative to who I was. I was all I needed to be, and that was all there was to it. I was in charge, and I did not have to worry about anything else. I needed nothing. I created a quarter plan out of sheer air which astounded my colleagues in the Religious House, it just overwhelmed them. They had not seen me do anything like that for four months, and it came out of sheer nothingness. Significance was not even an issue.

All the threats were gone. You have to imagine what it was like to be the prior of a religious house during the fall of that year: To have been prior of a religious house for three years, and suddenly be given two young whippersnappers who had not even lived at base. I mean to have two young whippersnappers come around and have them just move in on your house meetings like they were in charge, that was a threat all fall. But, suddenly those men were no longer a threat to me. They were my colleagues; they were doing what had to be done. Thank God for them! They were no longer a threat. And, Chicago's evaluation? I did not care what things were said about our House. It did not matter to me what Campbell said about the courses that I was talking to him about. There were no external threats that could bother me. What I have discovered is that since that time, my problems have never been the same. Now I have had problems since then and you know me well enough to know that I will probably always have problems, at one time or another. But my problems have never been the same. I do not sweat the small stuff like I used to. Any little thing used to be enough, but not any more, not the last six months. I just find I do not get wrapped up in my problems anymore. Something has happened to me that allows me to see that the problems I have are just my agent for the future; they are not what my life is all about. A kind of confidence has come. What happened in the midst of that is that I discovered that nobody could get me angry anymore; nobody could get me angry any longer. There was not anything that they could do.

Every other person became, not that which could get through to me, but that which called forth a response from me. It was like life, itself, suddenly came to be good. Life could not get me angry at it. Everything smiled at me, it did not matter what was going on. As over against earlier having had to tortuously turn everything that happened to me into something that was good; suddenly, the whole fabric of the cloth was good, in and of itself, and I did not have to force it bit by bit. The Christmas party that we had at the House was suddenly a fantastic event. Even the children in their bathrobe play, the whole thing was suddenly good. The new course and not knowing whether we were going to have it or not going to have it waiting all winter long for the call from Chicago and every time we called, they said they did not know whether they were going to have it or not. That was fine! No bother, if they were going to give it to us, we would get it done; if they were not going to give it to us, we were not going to worry about it. It did not matter. Learning that my sister was sick with cancer, it was good. It was not what I would prefer; it just did not have the capacity to throw me into despair. And my colleagues? I mean our House got angry that quarter; they had just been touchy in the fall quarter; they got angry in the winter quarter. But none of them could get through to me. There was no way that they could get through to me, to create that kind of anger in me. The visionlessness of our region could not bother me; all it did was to require me to build a bigger context. My wife's daggers in collegium suddenly were no longer a problem. I mean they were a problem but they were her problem. They were not my problem anymore. My colleagues in other houses across the continent where I was teaching. It used to be that whenever I flew into some other region and they told me about what they were doing, I used to have to just chop it down, to destroy it, because if it was really good, then you had to take a new relationship to what you were doing. In the winter quarter, it was not like that. I found myself like a flying missionary into every region where I went coming in and telling them how fantastic everything was going on. I mean there were no problems, and nobody could get you angry and there was no hostility .

I had transcended beyond that. I was a wonder even to myself. My own good cheer was enough to overwhelm anybody that knew me, but it doubly overwhelmed me! I would sit around and ask, "How is it that I can be this fantastic human being? How can I be this alive?" It was a wonder. Even my mistakes were humorous. I introduced Bishop Mathews at Oklahoma City one day. I was trying to compliment him. He had spoken the night before at Oklahoma City University, and that guy had done a tremendous job. So, when I went to introduce him to a breakfast of movemental colleagues, many of whom had not heard him, I said, "If you missed his talk last night, you missed a great talk; but if you were at Summer '71, Summer '72, and have taken CSI, you didn't miss anything." Then I looked over at his wife, and suddenly was clear that that was probably not being too complimentary about his speech. What I was trying to get said was that he had pulled the whole of what we have been trying to do in the last three years together in just one hour, but ended up saying that he did not have an original thought in his head. I must admit that it took me three or four minutes to get over that! After all, he was my bishop. But even that was humorous. That could not raise hostility.

And the future itself: it was obvious that it was to be created. It was there to be had. Why not have six houses in the Oklahoma City Region next year, and create a model and go build it. If it looks, and it began to look very quickly, like one church, which we had hoped to entice into our galaxy, was not going to make it, why even the possibility of that future coming at you could not phase you, could not get you angry at the future. It became clear that the future was just there to be obeyed. If the new course came, then you did one set of things; if it did not come, then you did another set of things. The future was your friend. And you began to see that what had been going on through this whole time, was one great and glorious battle with Satan. That was all there was. It was like once you got the demon identified, then the fight was clear.

Sitting in that priors' meeting watching that fire, what came to me was, "My God, these other guys from these other 35 religious houses have been up here talking about what they have been doing. Now, objectively, what they have been saying about what they have been doing, cannot hold a candle to what we have been doing. And when you have begun to see that, then you begin to get clear that the problem was in the way you have decided to look at the situation. I mean, the issue was in my eyes, in how I decided to look at what was going on. It was not objectively out there.

Then you began to get clear that the wrestling was with Satan. The wrestling was with that one who sat inside your being, who said, "Crap on it all. That's not significant; that's not worthwhile." And the option you began to sense that you had inside yourself was something like this: You could go out and tear down what everybody else had to say in order to feed your own cynicism, to sustain you, to be the bread of your continuing life. If you wanted to, that was one of the temptations to tear it down, to feed your own cynicism. Or you could sit back and start to boast about what you had accomplished, knowing all the while what you knew, which would allow you to continue your cynicism; I mean, you had done it and the others had not. By comparison, theirs still was nothing but a pile. That was the second way of handling the situation. And the third way was to require some kind of special concession to get you out of your situation.

It so happened that at that meeting in December, Joe Mathews started talking about a trip around the world that had to be taken. One of the religious house priors would need to go with him. That sounded like just the special kind of concession I needed. After all, it was my turn. Everybody that interned when I interned had already been overseas; I was the only one. It was obvious that it was my turn. Well, Fred Buss had a great trip, I understand. Those were the battlegrounds on which I wrestled Satan: tearing down everybody else's work to feed my own cynicism; boasting about my own, therefore, showing that theirs was not as powerful as mine; claiming the power of the world for myself; or, looking for some special concession from the impartiality of life itself. The victory was in simply deciding that what was, was significant in and of itself. And when that happened, the victory was sweet. That was being on top of the world. It was coming out of the tomb. Four months, a year, three years, suddenly I was clear that they were tombs that I had been in. And I came forth to life as I had never had it before. The experience was that of relief for what I had escaped. Overwhelming relief. And suddenly, every little thing was just fantastic those children

in their bathrobes, just fantastic! Getting on the bus to drive 6 hours to Amarillo through the middle of the night to be there for a meeting and turn around and come back, six more hours; it was just fantastic! Everything became new.

It seems to me that that is what it is to deal with the Unknowable Peace, the fourteenth trek in the Other World. These Other World lectures that we have been giving I do not know how you get hold of what it is that we are trying to do with these. Bishop Mathews said the other day to a small group of us that as he grasped hold of where the church was at this time, he saw the Other World was the crucial issue. That those who were charged with articulating it in ways that people could understand today had given up that job, did not have the tools to do it, and therefore had taken off and were ministering to the systems of justice. The clergy have left the role of articulating the Other World because they have not been given the tools to do it. The laymen, sensing what has happened, have gone to using forms of another world that is now gone outmoded ones, that can no longer be lived in. The church finds itself in a polarity that is racking us, and the necessity is that you and I find ways of articulating what the Other World is all about, so that a layman can release himself from grasping hold of an other world that he has had to hold on to. Every man has to have an other world; if it is not the Other World, it has got to be some other, other world, like Cabaret or like The Godfather. But he has to have some other world. Perhaps if we get it articulated, then the laity can let go of an outmoded other world and release the clergy to their vocation again.

The bishop mentioned the folk experience of a woman who said, talking about a highly educated preacher that had come into her back village, "I didn't understand all the words he said; but I've experienced everything he's talking about." For me, that is what the Other World is about. If you have not experienced every experience that these lectures have been talking about then the lectures are wrong either the chart is wrong or our way of articulating it is wrong. The Other World is our common experience. It is the experience that everyone of us has had. Some of those events of it have been more conscious; some have been more pivotal; some of them have been more graphic. But all of us are in a state of being and never out of a state of being. We are always in one. The question is are we deluding ourselves about which one we are in or are we seeing the significance of the particular state that we are in. And what I have been trying to work on this morning is one of the states in the Sea of Tranquility, in that area that deals with this life and that life, with tragedy and glory. "Tragedy, illumination", that was yesterday. "Glory", that is what I was trying to deal with. Tomorrow we work on "temporality" and then Thursday on "death" and "eternity."

It seems to me the key to the problemlessness at the center, or the Unknowable Peace, is in the exteriorized self. What I have been trying to talk about was a shift in vantage point that happened to me from looking at life the way it is. It was like being impacted by the mystery, and creating a self as over against an unself, and orienting oneself to service of others. All of those areas of the Other World require selfhood and the focus comes through the self. But in the Sea of Tranquility the focus gets outside the self entirely, or one is utterly unaware of being a self in the midst of the Sea of tranquility. In the Sea, the self drops out. And the only question is the one that Theresa lived under "What is required?" That is the only question, and it is only there that the peace that passes all understanding comes.

Now I will say quickly in more intellectual categories what I have been trying to say. The peace that is glory is first of all finding yourself trapped by the mystery. It is finding yourself utterly caught by the mystery of life and discovering that the capacity to wish for anything is gone. The capacity to attach oneself to anything is gone. Not just attaching oneself to things is gone, but the capacity to wish for anything is gone. You find yourself in wishlessness. The capacity to be concerned about detaching yourself from things is utterly gone. "Detachment" itself becomes a category of righteousness. You begin to see that there is no righteousness there. And you experience yourself utterly without control, but confident in living without any control. That seems to be the first part of being trapped by the mystery. That is, the hope is no hope. That is hoping where there is no hope at all, knowing that even that hope is God's action. That is what I think Gogarten was pointing out in that passage where he talks about the piety of the Other World being the piety that is God's action.

It is not the piety that you enact. It is when every bit of your action, in terms of piety, has failed, that the piety of the Other World has a chance. Or, if you like, it is Kazantzakis, in Saviors of God, saying that the third duty is to

surpass hope; it is "sailing calmly toward the abyss." I remember when we first studied that, one of my colleagues in the midst of our study said, "What would happen if we sank, as we sailed calmly toward the abyss?" The hope is in no hope whatsoever. But note that even sinking would be the mystery at work. And that is where the comfort is, in no hope. Underneath, the mystery is ever there.

Secondly, the Unknowable Peace is problemless living. It is understanding that all your problems are gone. It is trusting that "the way life is" is "the way it is"; and, therefore, you do not have any problems anymore. Even though you have total responsibility still, you cease to search for significance. It is like you give up looking for significance, and therefore you do not have any problems anymore. Nothing can threaten you any longer. The flip side of seeking for significance is in not finding it, or the threat of not finding it. But what impels you onward is grasping hold of the fact that your security is already present. It is like you have thrown off your albatross; you do not have to carry it around with you any longer. It is the end of the "or else." "You do this or else!" Unknowable Peace is the end of that. It is like you do not need anything any longer.

Third, the peace that is glory is in transcending your hostility. It is in being the man for others the man who gives up being at war with life. He gives up being over against life the way it comes to him. He gives up saying, "Life ought to be coming at me some other way." It turns the neighbor utterly into an object. He is no longer a subject relative to you; he is entirely an object of your concern. I think that was what Buber was after when he talked about the "I" and the "Thou." That thou, that neighbor, is entirely a thou. He is not something you are trying to manipulate to have some effect on you one way or another. When that happens, you move out of self-embarrassment to wonder at yourself.

It is a sense of being unaffected by life, unflappable. Yesterday I was in a meeting, the same one the bishop spoke to, and while we were talking about another issue, I injected what I thought to be a critical insight. And Fred Buss in his inimitable way said, "That's not important, Hess," and went on. Those of you who know me know that in other circumstances that would usually be enough to touch off a monumental rage I mean, vast rage. Yesterday, it did not even phase me. It did not even phase me. There was no anger, no pouting: unaffected by life. It is knowing that whatever the future brings will be fine. It is knowing that you are utterly unperturbable, nothing could bother you. This week as I have been working on this lecture, nothing could bother me. I have been utterly unperturbable. We were going through the wall, the block we had been hitting at for three weeks; but even the great adventure of the NSV did not phase me. I just kept right on working through the lecture. We had huge problems getting through the wall going over and working six hours to work it through. No problem, it did not bother me. I was utterly unperturbable. Until my wife came in last night and said, "Do you have a funny story?" Booom!!! I told David Scott about it (he is giving the lecture downstairs) and he kind of enjoyed it: Here I was working on transcending hostility and my wife comes in and I say, "Can't you see I'm working on my blasted lecture?" An unknowable peace you know it only took a few minutes and I was beyond it. I got clear that it was not her problem; it was my problem. Now, I mean anger is going to happen to all of us; but transcending it, that is what peace is about. It is being able to handle it. It is funneling it into creativity relative to a problem you are working on.

Fourthly, it is making clear that there is only one enemy and that there is only one job to do and that is "fighting to not fight God." Isn't that the way you experience it? You have to fight to not fight God. That is what you mean when you say that you have only one enemy, and he is Satan. The only temptation there is, for the man in the Other World, is to fight God. The only temptation, for the man in the Other World, is to not love this world the way it is. That is the only temptation that he has. It is getting clear that God, the one who is bringing man all these things that are happening to him is not the enemy. The one who suggests that he is, is the enemy. To fight through that fight and to grasp hold of the sweetness of victory, is winning that fight to stop fighting God.

Or to put that another way, unfaith is, for the man who lives in the Other World, is to miss the moment by moment glory that life is. It is to allow some moment of some workshop to go by without having grasped its glory, to have fallen asleep during a moment of an all-night watch that is losing the fight with the one enemy. I mean that it is easy

to miss the huge glories; at least I find out that I spend a life time learning how to miss the huge glories. All you have to do is just tear everything down and it comes easy; I missed the glory of the New Religious Mode being forged in 1968 over the problem of having to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning. Can you imagine? Can you imagine? I missed the glory of the Academy being created because I was sitting in a religious house in Chicago, instead of doing it. Can you imagine? I missed the glory of Summer '72 because of its discomfort, Can you imagine having been present when twenty years of creating the future of society and then going away talking about the fact that we were sleeping in dorms? Or worrying about not getting any food for three days? Can you imagine having missed the glory for the minor discomforts that were there? That is Satan at work.

Or I find myself fighting over against Satan in struggling to not destroy the little glories. Sometimes it happens that you get somebody who thinks that she cannot do anything at all. But she can sing folk songs more fantastically than anybody you have known. You finally get her up in front of the whole congregation to sing, and then you find the temptations welling up in you: You make a little joke to show that you are still in charge. To miss the glory of that kind of break loose in humility for the sake of a little bit of status!! Or to miss the glory of anything for the sake of dullness. That is the fight with Satan. That is the struggle with the enemy, for the glory, the wonder, the tranquility that is life in the Other World is found only in the midst of the battle with Satan himself.

When you identify the temptations to destroy the glory of the moments of life as the same temptations that Jesus had in the garden, then you have identified your enemy. And then you are able to attack him and to fight with him. When you see that the despair that you have been in for three weeks is really the "dark night of the soul," then you have already triumphed.

I do not know about you, but the first two weeks of this program the despair was black and deep. For three days I went around telling myself: Charles Wesley, with all of his hymns, could not have been experiencing this when he wrote about the dark night; it must have been something else. I was wrestling with the fact that what I was experiencing was the dark night. I identified it and I identified its source and immediately I began to experience the victory.

How does it feel to engage in this kind of struggle and find this kind of peace? It feels first of all like a great liberation. It is like you have been led around by the nose with a string through your nose, and suddenly it is loose. And you give up being pulled around by your drives and your compulsions. There is a regret in it, to be sure. It was simpler being led around by the nose, but it is a release. It is like "they can't do anything more to me. What can they do to me?" And suddenly it is a relief. You get clear that there is not anything that anybody can do to you. There is not anything, and therefore it is a relief. It is a fascination. All your paranoia is removed. You get clear the universe is utterly impartial; it cannot be manipulated to favor you whatsoever, and you also get clear that it cannot be manipulated to be against you. All your paranoia goes away. There is terror in that, the thought of losing your special place in history. But there is a fascination, too; it is a dance like a fife floating up high on top of a march. Haven't you been excited at how we have been able to sing songs that we were never able to sing before?...like the "Washington Post March" or "In The World of Spirit" to be able to sing that quick. It is the fascination that makes us do that. And then there is a jubilation, an exaltation in fighting that fight.

It takes a grim resolve in the midst of it though. Anybody that went through that watch and did not understand grim resolve did not stay awake through the watch. It is a grim resolve, but it is a jubilant resolve. It is a fantastic time. Every struggle is interior when you grasp that there are no problems. There is just battling with Satan over the particulars of your existence and knowing that peace is in battling with Satan and never letting him win.

Fred Hess