

PENETRATION REPORT -- by John Baggett

The task of the penetration division is to structurally deliver the Word through RS-1 courses and through our total curriculum to every human being across the globe. When you are struggling to get a hold on where the edge is in your division, it's helpful to hold before yourself the context, and John Wilkerson's prayer yesterday morning just shocked me once again into the total context of penetration. The image that I had was again Salinger's fat lady, who we have usually affectionately called the last fat lady; and it has to do with the fact that the work of the penetration division isn't done until the last fat lady, that is to say that fat lady who is the last one to take RS-1, has had RS-1. And really it's not done until that last lady who is the fat lady has had the total curriculum that enables humanness in the next generation and the generation after that and on -- and probably that last fat lady is not yet born.

Lynn Bell, out in Seattle, was in a somewhat despondent mood recently when I was out there, and was talking about some people on the job that she was concerned about who had not had any exposure to the curriculum. She was wondering whether it was wise to try to recruit them to a course or not, knowing that there was no adequate follow-up method to deal with that, and knowing that it might not be tactically helpful for her to go recruiting in the office where she was working, and at the same time she was very much concerned because she could see that as people were wrestling with the depth issues of their lives that RS-1 was exactly what they needed. In our discussion we had to contextualize for ourselves the fact that our basic strategy of contextual re-education is tied in with our strategies of structural reformulation and spiritual remotivation, so that one cannot even talk about the work of penetration apart from those other strategies, and that one overall strategy tells us that those people in her office are going to be cared for when the local churches in the parishes where they live are renewed and begin to assume responsibility for those people's lives.

The Penetration Division, like every division in our order, is a concrete assignment, and is a place where we wrestle with the Lord, much as Jacob wrestled with the angel; and I'd just say that as we've been wrestling in the concretion of the task of enabling the courses across the continent and around the globe to take place, we've been struggling with that kind of concrete angel, and we have refused to let it go until it blessed us--until it revealed to us something about what's going on in humanness today.

I want to talk about that blessing, or what's going on in humanness today in relationship to course participants, under the categories of present situation, intentional response, spirit struggle, and future demand.

First of all, we could talk about the present situation in course participation in terms of enigmatic encounter, or that which is going on with everyone that shows up in an RS-1 course, or any of our courses, is the experience of encountering that puzzling irrational mysterious other in the midst of life. The way that has come historically, it seems to me, is in terms of the moon walk. We talk in the God lecture about Sputnik as being a sign of the new age, but I don't think that was really internally appropriated by people in this nation

at least, partly perhaps because Sputnik was still an offensive symbol coming from Russia, but the moon walk was an internal appropriation of that, as if after the moon walk nothing new could go on, or that nobody could be surprised any more, or that there was no new experience to be had. It's as if after the first moon walk, any other trip to the moon is going to be boring, or after the first heart transplant, any other heart transplant is just going to be boring. I think that the assassinations a few years ago--three in a row--left their mark on the depth psyche, and it's the absurd mystery of life that every man has experienced and is experiencing himself in relationship to. Then the third thing I would mention is the fact that the war in Vietnam just won't go away. There's a won't-go-away-ness about that that's just an utter absurd mystery that men live before, and it's like nobody can understand how it won't go away, but it just won't go away and it seems so absurd, and it's that absurd won't-go-away-ness which has impacted the depth consciousness. And I think that that which is the sign for me of the mystery as every man is experiencing it today has to do with what's coming through the movies.

If you listen to the opening conversation in RS-1, the movies that are mentioned there or later in the course or in comments on the side are Joe, Love Story, WUSA, Five Easy Pieces and Patton--these particularly seem to reveal where the edge is, which could be talked about as having to do with coming up against the enigmatic encounter.\*

Then, in terms of the internal response to that, there's a paralysing lucidity which is present, and has to do with the fact that there aren't any surprises. Everyone is just lucid about the possibilities of life, and about the contingencies that he's up against in the midst of life. There is no surprise in that, but just a weighted-down-ness, a kind of paralysis in the midst of it; a heavy serious kind of mood.

Last week, teaching in a PLC, the mood of the participants was from the very beginning so heavy that you just had to struggle to find ways to lighten it so that they could even deal with the issues of the course, because they just came in with that weighted down kind of heaviness. It seems that that's going on in all of our courses, that people show up in the courses deeply serious, as if they've been utterly beaten up by life. They're afraid to laugh, and yet they're tired of being cynical. They know that there is no escape from their lucidity, that nothing they do will free them from their lucidity. They know that they can decide to escape and/or to hide. They know that they can intentionally decide to do that but that they can't escape from the fact that they know that they are escaping and hiding. It's that kind of lucidity that's going on.

That kind of lucidity has driven people to the psychotic edge, and people show up at a course in the way they show up at anything in our society today, which is that they are about ready to fall off the edge into the psychotic abyss. It is as if people have been so shoved by the raw edge of life that they've been just hanging on by their fingernails to existence itself. There's always the possibility--and pedagogues who are experienced are beginning to realize this--that in any course somebody could go off on the deep end, and you know that's true for every participant. That's part of the frightening paralysis that confronts the pedagogue.

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See appendix for more detailed analysis of spirit shift in terms of movies.

In terms of the spiritual struggle there is a tragic negation of life going on. The image here is that of the Greek tragedy once again. I think of that line out of Five Easy Pieces, where that rather sick girl gets picked up on the roadside, and all she says for hundreds of miles is "everywhere you look is just crap--crap is everywhere--nothing but crap--look at all the crap on the side of the road." And she talks about the pollution and all the garbage and everything, just crap everywhere, and she just jabbars on and on. She says, "I don't even want to talk about it," and she just keeps on talking. . .

"Life is just full of crap" is the word. It's put more crudely yet in Joe. Probably the most significant line in the movie is the one where Joe and Compton are walking along the street, and Compton talks about how he moves papers around upstairs in that big building from one place to another, and Joe says, "Did you ever just stop to think that life is nothing but a big crock of shit?" That kind of word, it seems to me, is the word that is pervading the civilization that we are part of. That is how people show up today. Whether they articulate it in that kind of a crude form or not, that's the assumption they are making about life, that life is just a pile of crap, and that's the way it is. It used to be that when people showed up for our courses that it was sort of like "the church is a pile of crap, but there are secular movements, or there are great things going on in the world," and so forth. But today it's like everybody shows up as if everything's a pile of crap--churches, secular movements--there's just nothing that isn't just a pile of crap.

In the midst of that kind of a sense after life, there is a negation that is going on, which comes in the way people relate today to the movie in RS-I and to Guernica. There's a new kind of struggle going on there as the reports week after week come back from the courses; and part of what's being said there is that people by that time in the course, having been shoved up against their contingency in the God section (there is a much deeper address in that section than we think is going on sometimes), just overwhelmed by possibility in the Christ section, which is the word that they can live in the midst of that contingency--after the possibility of the freedom that is just even more overwhelming, they hit Guernica and they hit the movie, and you hear people round the edges saying things like, "I just can't take any more of this." Or people get up and walk out, or go for a walk outside and cool off and come back. It's as though they're not really angry at you, but they're just angry, or irritated, or can't stand it any more, or can't take it any more. People begin to go to pieces in the midst of that situation because they are experiencing the tragic raw edge there. And perhaps you could talk about the way in which people will intentionally decide to be naive in a course, and they're very clear that they're going to be naive, but they're also very stubborn that they're not going to let you shake them out of that naivete in the midst of the course. It's as if they've decided that the only way they can deal with it is to pretend to be naive, even though they really know they are just pretending to be naive.

And then there is a kind of open lucidity that says "Why bother?" as a basic stance before life. Whereas a year ago you had people wanting to get up and take over the course, you don't have any of that go on now. You just have a sort of sitting back. You almost want to call it apathy, but it's not quite that.

There's a "what's the use?" or "Why bother?" in the relationship that's taken to much of life.

In relationship to that, I want to mention the new sense of mysticism, or the running after the mystical dimension or the irrational dimension of life. People will be in that opening conversation, and you ask someone to give you their name and one thing that grounds them in history, and they give you their name and say "I am a Sagittarius," or "I am an Aquarius." The whole astrology thing has to do with a feeling after the irrational in life as has the E.S.P. psychic research going on, or the drug culture itself, which has found its way into many established adult cultures. College students tend to be taking obscure courses. It's as if nobody takes sociology or history or any of the things that really have to do with life, because life is a pile of crap. So you take courses in knitting or something obscure and absurd that in your own lucidity you know has got nothing to do with the reality of the situation.

To put it another way, one experiences everyone as showing up as ethically robbed by the situation, or ethically emasculated, to pick up on Bonhoeffer's phrase. We have burned ourselves out on social action, and now people say, "It hasn't done any good, . . . I don't have any power. . . don't try to challenge me into doing anything now."

That which holds this category most powerfully for me in what I see going on and what I hear happening is what I call stoicism, and it has to do with maybe just too much detachment. It has to do with a kind of intentional self-conscious kind of floating, and the reason that's perhaps a clue for me is because of seeing some things going on in my own life in that whole area. For example, lately every time I've gotten on a plane to go to a course, and get up into the air, I don't want the plane to crash--it isn't that kind of death urge--but I don't want it to land either. I just want it to stay up there and be on an eternal plane ride or something. Maybe that's a different way to say what we've said all along about floating, but there's a sense after a kind of detachment that I'd point to there that is too much detachment--a kind of stoicism that says, "I've been beaten up and bruised, and experienced myself rubbed raw, and had salt poured in my wounds until I can't take any more, and I've decided I'm not going to let anything get to me anymore, or I'm just going to be detached, so detached that I don't have to feel anything finally, or I can back off from the way that I really feel and not feel anything."

I've found myself lately in teaching courses going through all of the right motions but having trouble in really feeling anything in relationship to those participants. Then I reflect on that and realize that I don't want to open myself up to struggle--not again, not again, not again--with the struggle that is going on in those participants' lives. So I was getting myself really detached, so as not to have to experience that.

Finally, with the category of future demand, it is transparent style that's the issue, and that has to do with what the future demands in terms of a pedagogical style. When we began in the early days of our training, the pedagogical style was just the overpowering style, and that was what was needed. Then the emphasis began to shift to what I would call intellectual preciseness, or just to get all the unclarity and fog out of our lectures and seminars and

inject clear theological preciseness into every aspect of what we were doing. And then in relationship to the shift in the times we talked about gracious presence, but it seems to me that the issue now is a million times deeper than gracious presence.

Shinn has helped me out here in talking about powerful weakness as a way of getting hold of it, and Wolf Friebel and Wes Lachman helped me out in our division recently, talking about how it is that the pedagogue who has power is the pedagogue who has clay feet. That is to say, he is the pedagogue who doesn't pretend before that group of people to be invincible, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, but who dares to have clay feet, and yet to stand there and be the pedagogue as one who has clay feet. Or it's like when your clay feet are broken and shattered, you dare to be the one who stands there on the stumps of your legs and keep being the pedagogue; or you do not try to hide the fact that you struggle the same struggle. In fact it's precisely the fact that you struggle that struggle which gives permission to participants to struggle their struggle. You dare to be the one who stands there with clay feet, but you stand there, and it's that kind of powerful weakness that we would point to there.

And then in relationship to that I would mention the passionate guru. It seems to me crucial in terms of cutting over against the stoicism, the overly detached stance, to develop the spirit tools and prowess in what Kierkegaard and our study of the Jesus method have helped us to see as indirection, where in a seminar or a conversation you don't hit someone right between the eyes, but you have the spirit prowess to both passionately care, and yet to use the tools of indirection, which enable them to have a whole new way of appropriating the life that they have on their hands.

And then the pedagogue is a symbol of structural promise. What is so true in every man's experience today is that he sees no possibility precisely because he sees that every structure has collapsed, that there is finally no structure that enables one to be sustained in the situation that we have today, and that the only way he can relate to life without adequate structures is to say that life is a pile of crap. And yet he sees in the pedagogue one who is a structural human being, who is sustained as a structural human being, or he sees the possibility of structures that will sustain him as well.

One of the things that I've experimented with a little bit in the Church conversation is throwing the question about the image of the Church in the context of a question like, "What's an early image out of your life which you associate with the word 'Church'?" This immediately begins to spiritize that conversation, and then to go on to ask, "What is the gift of that church to your life?" as the next question, and then, "What's the problem of the Church?" is a sequence which I've found has just pulled the plug on the kind of cynicism or church-beating that we've seen going on in the past.

Ignore that illustration, if you like, but the style of the pedagogue, it seems to me, has got to be that which releases people from cynicism. It has to be what we've pointed to as the resurrected man, who just stands as a symbol of life. My image is that what it means to teach RS-1 is to be like Jesus standing there outside Lazarus' tomb. He's standing there, and he says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life". It's that kind of stance. The pedagogue is the one who stands in the midst of the course, and says, "I am the Resurrection and the Life". He be's the Resurrection; he be's the Life; and he calls forth, "Come on out, come on out and live". It is that kind of transparent style that is called for.

SPIRIT ANALYSIS OF TIMES  
IN TERMS OF EDGE MOVIES OF 70/71

The movies provide a crucial way of coming at what is happening in penetration in terms of a spirit analysis of what's going on today.

A year ago, Easy Rider and Midnight Cowboy were the kind of signal films. In those movies you were left with life on your hands after experiencing absurd contingency--that is you, not necessarily the character in the movie; at the end of those movies, you've experienced absurd contingency and are left with your life on your hands.

Then there was a kind of subtle transition, and I'd point to movies like MASH, Catch 22, or They shoot Horses don't they, as a kind of lucid rebellion against contingency, where the death urge itself just gets clearly said in the movie. Now in the movies like Joe, and WUSA and Five Easy Pieces, and perhaps even Love Story, life is contingent, and yet you relate to it tragically. Whether you say life is a pile of crap or whether you relate to it in a detached kind of stoic way, you relate to life as the tragic one. And then on the other side of that, you've got Patton as an image of life as meaningful destiny, which is to say that in contemplation, meditation, and prayer (not to hold him up as a hero or anything) there is an alternative way to relate to the contingent life you have on your hands. It seems to me that that says something about what it is that's going on in the life of human beings today, that there is a struggle with the contingency that they have and no way to finally appropriate that except as tragic existence, and yet a smattering after the possibility of an authentic religious existence, which is of course toyed around with in a number of ways in our culture today.