

THE POWER OF CORPORATE VOCATION

Eventually, I am going to read "A New Heaven and a New Earth" by D.H. Lawrence because that poem is all I know about the Christ event, which in my opinion is the equivalent of the Kingdom of God. I am not asking anybody theologically to agree with that. It is probably incorrect, but that is what I am going to do.

Now let me read you some of the scriptures that we were reading yesterday afternoon. This is St. Paul speaking in Second Corinthians:

"We dare to say such things because of the confidence we have in God through Christ. . . . Wherever the spirit of the Lord is, men's souls are set free. But all of us who are Christians have no veils on our faces, but reflect like mirrors the glory of the Lord. We are transfigured. . . ." (I am going to add something here. . . . We are transparentized; we are transrationalized.) "into ever increasing splendor, into his own image, and the transformation comes from the Lord who is the spirit. This is the ministry which God in his mercy has given us and nothing can daunt us. We use no hocus pocus, no clever tricks, no dishonest manipulation of the Word of God. (Paul comes out here as a man of primary integrity, doesn't he?) "We speak the plain truth, and so commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. If our gospel is veiled, the veil must be in the minds of those who do not believe and prevents the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, the image of God, from shining on them. For it is Christ Jesus as Lord whom we preach. Not ourselves. We are your servants for Jesus' sake. . . . This priceless treasure we hold, so to speak, in a common, earthenware jar to show that the splendid power of it belongs to God and not to us. We are handicapped on all sides, but we are never frustrated. (Listen to the problemless life come out here.) "We are puzzled, but never in despair. We are persecuted but never have to stand it alone. We are living always, exposed to death, for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be plainly seen in our mortal lives. We are always facing death, but this means that we know more and more of life."

JUSTICE

One of my colleagues gave me permission to grind axes, so I decided to title this lecture, Axes I have been Grinding. First, I have been grinding the axe of hating the trend toward bureaucracy in our Order. When I realized that I was grinding my axe on the bureaucracy, I discovered that that was not the bureaucracy's problem, that was my problem. We are all in the same boat, aren't we? That was my problem, "the bureaucracy", and, of course, a bureaucracy, as a colleague told me out of his vast corporation experience, functions to fill up a vacuum. That is what naturally happens. And God invented that function and dynamic. I didn't invent it, nor did my colleagues. They were merely sucked into the vacuum. Then, I realized I have been grinding the axe of a similar trend-- the trend toward elitism. Finally I got down on my knees and prayed, "Lord, we must deliver this Order from elitism!!" And the Lord replied, "Joe, you are not

worried about elitism. You are just worried because you are not one of the elite." I thought I was worried about elitism, but when I finally had to come to terms with the fact that I was worried about not being one among the elite, then I remembered some old lectures. Do you remember those lectures we did in RS-I? One was on the dynamic of the church, and had to do with the Kingdom of God developing, or the People of God developing. You remember how it went: "History coughs up the elite, and the elite of history develop the images, and the images educate the public. . ." and blah, blah, blah. I had trouble remembering that old lecture because when I gave it, I was a person who thought his job was like General Patton's. Patton, you recall, said to his men, "No, your job is not to give up your life. Your job is to get those poor sons of bitches on the other side to give up their lives!" well, I thought my job was to get those poor participants in RS-I out on the point where they would give up their lives. As for me, I would sit back, dressed in my fine uniform and shine my pearl-handled pistol.

UNITY

Another axe that I have been grinding is the trend to non-collegiums. I have a very minor point here which has to do with the ontology of a collegium. You remember how we invented the ontology of the line? we demonstrated we must have margins on our paper? Do you remember that? Joe Mathews made a big speech on the Ontology of the Line and showed how, by putting a line around something, you invent its own creativity, or you allow it to be the significance it is. All of the brochures that come out now spilling off the page--I cannot stand them because you can see the people who drew them do not understand the ontology of the line. They don't grasp that to put a margin around something makes it significant. When you neglect to draw a line you are escaping from the demand to give to the material the significance that only you, as the artist, can give it. So you say, "Well, I don't care about the ontology. All I want to do is to make something that looks sort of pretty, like I used to like when I was an adolescent." The trend to non-collegiums was, in my opinion, caused by our not having a person do two crucial things when he led a collegium. The first thing is some kind of a gathering up of where you are. If it is a report, that's fine. But you gather people up to the point you arrived at the night before in your preparation. You say, "Now, this is where I face the contradiction on this issue; how could you folks help me move this rock out of the road?" wouldn't that make a good collegium? If this were a collegium, wouldn't you be pleased to have me say, "Now the place where I faced, last night in preparation, the fact that I could not move this rock out of the road was, blah, blah on the Kingdom of God. Come on now, you all help me out about this." Wouldn't that make just a tremendous every morning thing? A guy doesn't have to intellectually solve problems. All he has to do is describe his situation. He can get up and present that and then say to the group, "Now the second act of this venture is for you people to help get the rock out of the road." And if they can't help you that's all right. You can bracket the issue for a while and return to it sometime later. The Lord didn't ever ask us to move a contradiction that we cannot move.

This brings up another point that the New Reality turns upon--namely, consensus. Consensus is not total agreement with one another, as we have said for years. When we form a consensus, that consensus is reality. There isn't any other reality but our consensus. You may say to me, "You're off your rocker, philisophically and epistemologically," but I maintain that that is what reality is. Reality is what we decide it to be. Consensus is rationality; is logic. I don't mean that, therefore, God grants you the privilege to carry through your

maneuver, or your plan. He sure as hell doesn't very frequently. But you are up against God when you are up against real consensus. That is the way His Kingdom operates.

Other axes I have been grinding: One of our colleagues announced in a talk once that we are all S.O.B.'s. My axe is to make a slight correction. It is not that we aren't all S.O.B.'s, which we certainly are, but that we don't stand before being S.O.B.'s. But if I make my decisions out of being an S.O.B., all it winds up in is self-depreciation. The point is, therefore, that we stand before our forgiveness as Christians. We are forgiven for being exactly who we are. You are a forgiven S.O.B. And all the women's movement people can complain that I need to say daughters of bitches and all, but I am not caring about that right now. I am a forgiven son-of-a-bitch and Mary Work is a forgiven son-of-a-bitch, just as she is, and when she makes her decisions out of that context, she has a stance that is entirely creative and worthwhile. The way I understand our Order is that all of us in the Order got together as forgiven sons-of-bitches and knowing we were forgiven, we promised each other one thing: that we were going to do something about the 15-85% dichotomy, which is, for us the contradiction in the ethical life of being human in our time. We promised each other, took the vow, that we would be loyal to that cause, and we had confidence in that mission, as H. Richard Niebuhr puts it. And therefore, loyalty to your promise (like loyalty in a marriage, or loyalty in any vow that you take) is all you are being asked for. Can any person still claim loyalty to the promise that he made, implicitly--not in literal terms--to the vow that he took to all of us, when he came into this outfit? Does anyone have loyalty to that cause? That loyalty is the base of the Order. We know that because we know we are sons-of-bitches; but we also have a relationship beyond all of that, a basic relationship to the mystery. We mysterious ones, or we who don't know why we are here or where we are going, we have got together and said, "This is the thing, the 15-85% attack." You and I not only see the 15-85% as that war ground, that death ground on which we all are staking our lives, we also see something else. Now help me out a little here, because you have got to see Kazantzakis walk in, in the guise of Zorba the Greek--to make my point. Kazantzakis, in "The Saviours of God", you all remember, was trying to say, "This, too, is a mask, or face, of God." If you really want to look at it, does God care about the 15-85%? Show me where? Do the big fish still eat the little fish in Lake Michigan? Aren't there plenty of roaches in this building? Who in the world knows what rhinoceroses were created for? You used to say that the "squeeze play" in the Bultmann paper was what you meant by the term, "G-O-D". Have you changed your mind?

God does not give one hoot about your 15-85% dichotomy! Now if we can hold that just for a second. Don't get mad at me yet, because that statement is attacking an idol for some people. I was going to say that some knowingly and wittingly held it as an idol, but you can't have an idol as an idol knowingly or wittingly. That is impossible. Some of our people, bless their hearts are just like I was in Sunday School when I thought God's face looked like those effeminate depictions of Jesus Christ; a woman with a beard. Now these people relate to our work on the 15-85% as if it were God! That is not God, that is a face of God that we have created! Now, that doesn't have anything to do with the implications of what you do after one is clear about that. Because you have still got the face of God to deal with. But unless we ourselves face the fact that we are facing our own creation, a paper-mache image of God, we will not have our freedom left. Don't you know that every time somebody says in a reverent tone "15-85%" how guilty you feel? It is fine to feel guilty, but don't you know God has already

long ago forgiven you for your relationship to the 15-85%? That is my basic point. If Bonhoeffer's tension between freedom and obedience still means something, what God really wants is for you people to be free to decide the face of God you are going to hold up as that before which you stand. But if we don't realize that the 15-85% is just as much our creation as the golden calf was for the Israelites, we are doomed, because we are people who are uniquely blessed. The people in this Order are uniquely prepared to respond to the mystery of life itself, The Mystery of life. We are uniquely prepared. We can raise the question! Other people can't because they aren't prepared to, at least in this sense. Behind all of this you encounter just total, absolute mystery.

ORDER

I was going to say something about the third act of the play Our Town. Put yourself for a moment into the mood of the third act, and see us sitting here around these tables as if we were tombstones. You know, one tombstone, and another tombstone, with our names and dates on them. Here is old Bruce Macomber's tombstone. What would you do without Bruce Macomber? I never knew him until I went to St. Louis, and until recently someone referred to his religious house as the best religious house that they had ever seen.

When I visited Bruce in St. Louis, it seemed to me he never talked about anything practical. He would introduce a conversation with the question, "What is an arch?" How many of you have ever seen the arch in St. Louis? It transcends everything. It arches all the buildings, and it is unbelievable. Sometimes the pilots on the airlines flying over the city would say, "There is St. Louis and there is the arch." You would look down and you would be shocked although it is still miniscule because you are so high. But there is this arch, which I cannot figure out and evidently Bruce couldn't figure out, why anybody would ever build something like that. It is the most absurd thing I have ever seen. Some people jokingly respond to Bruce by saying, "Well, that arch is the hook that the Martians are going to use to draw the earth away." But every person with a serious mind that he talked to was immediately immersed in mystery. What is an arch? And what is that arch over the city for? That encounter was one of the greatest spiritizing events of my life. I could raise up every one of you, each of your tombstones, and talk about those particular points, where for some unknown reason the mystery has grasped you. I never found out what an arch was, and Bruce never did either, as far as I know. It is just pure mystery.

I was thinking also about tombstone Carlos Ollison and his relationship in a very concrete situation in Ivy City. I happened on an evening when I saw Carlos get mad. Now you don't know what mad is until you have seen Carlos get mad. His madness was controlled, as far as I am concerned, by the Mystery of life. Some young person in that project had several times that day that I knew, and several times in the previous week that other people knew, literally stood up against his prior. He was very indirectly and very shrewdly trying to disestablish his prior. He didn't know that, however. His defiance was naively innocent. Earlier in the day, Carlos had assigned this young man to do a particular task with local people. Later the young guy says to Carlos, "You didn't assign me exactly," and he had discreetly found a way out of the work. With the local people listening in the hall, Carlos blew his stack, so well that you could see Mountain Rivera and Mohammed Ali just coming out of their corners. He plowed into that young guy. I was sitting at a prize fight in my imagination:

"There he gives a right, and a left, and then another right, and then he pounds him." The amazing thing was the next day the young man was a different person. He was thoroughly obedient. To every request he responded, "Yes, sir, Carlos." He had become a different person because of that beating up! What I am trying to say is that the mystery of life as it touches anybody, Carlos or Bruce or anybody, is the mystery of life, and you never can tell how it is going to come out.

It reminds me of a poem we used in CS-I, the first line of which is "God waits to decide what the future will be until you decide." If that doesn't touch into the mystery at the very center of your existence, I don't know what does. I can't go through my whole list of tombstones, but we are a family, a fine family of S.O.B.'s, aren't we? Once we as a group appropriate that, we have real power.

Where have you experienced the Kingdom of God in your reading lately? Fiction, novels, non-fiction, poetry, songs, dances, movies, games, records? That would be my workshop if I were going to have one.

The thing I am proud about in our Order is that we have survived Joe's death. At the beginning of the GRA, I was very worried about our Order. I thought, "How can we survive?" In the first place, I only ever went to a summer program to hear what Joe said at the last. I didn't really care what anyone else said. Wasn't that true for all of you? But we actually have made it through this summer without Joe. It is not because we are without Joe, it is because Joe is more present with us now than ever before. That is not some kind of sentimentality that I make up to try to pretend Joe is still standing around here. But he is very present in our common interior councils. I remember when he came to Perkins School of Theology in 1952 where I had recently enrolled. We were preparing for a spring banquet and some of us talked Lyn into letting us steal his tweed sports jacket. We put it on a dummy which we placed in the middle of the table and over it we hung a big sign indicating a balloon, like in the cartoons, which said, "All that is, is." The attending professors were muttering to themselves, "Well, that seems to be rationally true," or, "That statement is irrationally absurd." And all that sign said was just exactly what Joe stood for: the simple, affirmation that all that is, is. In this life that fact is all that you can depend upon. Could you ask for more?

VISION

Brian Stanfield brought it home for me one morning when he did a witness on the Kingdom of God, in which he got out old St. Paul who said how we are all--toes, toenails, etc.--in the Body of Christ. I inferred that the Kingdom of God is being in this kind of body. It is simply that for me to be in this body, I've decided. is the New Reality. That may sound audacious to some of you, but I think that is because you have some utopian idea about the Kingdom of God. This is the Kingdom of God. Here it is. Tashkent, Nairobi, Mexico City, Odessa, Canton, Lagos.

Long ago when we were raising the question, "What is faith?", Joe would answer like this: "There is a town in Texas called Waco." "What is faith?" we would say. He would respond, "Well, if you haven't been to Waco, you haven't been to Waco." Now there is a town there that is called Wacahatchie. We would whisper, "What is faith?" He would reply, "If you haven't been to Wacahatchie,

you haven't been to Wacahatchie." That was so powerful that it began to cloud all of our rational screens. We saw that we weren't talking about something rational or irrational, not about something that could even be subjected to a screen. We were talking about, "If you haven't been to Waco, you haven't been to Waco." That is all there is to it. This was, in my experience, the beginning of the use of the indirect phenomenological method. Here is my moment of pedagogy: The phenomenological method is, "If you stand and look where I look or to where I am pointing, you will see what I see." That is very simple. You may call it "bubblybug" and I may call it "week-y-dy-week", but you will see the same thing I see.

It is the only method that will deal with what Tillich calls "History's Products". History produces nothing but failure, over and over again. You know that. All of you winners should leave the room. History produces failure, because everything dies. But it also produces, on top of the failure, the absolutely new. I am using Tillich almost word for word here. It is not the "sort of new", like pink curtains as a change from blue; it is the absolutely, unheard of, never invented before, new, that history produces. Therefore, if you bring to the absolutely new some understanding by which you are going to interpret it by saying, "Today is going to be like yesterday," you are not going to face the absolutely new at all. Instead you are going to find a way to build yourself an illusion. When history is constantly producing the absolutely new on top of failure upon failure, the only kind of method you can use is one that brings someone to stand where you stand to look at the absolutely new as you are looking at it and requires that both of you describe it. That human method is the means by which you have discourse without argument. It is the phenomenological method. I am talking about "Paradoxical Participation" by which I mean the estranged (as Tillich would put it) participate in the infinite to which it belongs. Do you hear the paradox in that? The estranged, the finite (how our fathers have struggled to talk about "in but not of") the limited in the infinite. This is the mystery of our community, and we are the only people that I know of on the face of this planet who know they participate in this.

PRESERVATION

Do you yearn for the time when our Order will become really, honest to God, inclusive? Inclusive of everybody! I was reading a book by Thomas Merton called, "Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander," and I thought, boy would that make a good title for my lecture.

Thomas Merton says that the great temptation of Christians is to somehow not love the brother, your fellow beings, because of some little teeny weeny thing you have got in your own heart. Why in the world would you love Don? Don just doesn't look good, he is ugly. Or, why should you love old, neurotic Art? All of these things are little miniscule reasons why you finally give up on loving people, or don't ever try to love them in the first place. Or, are not concerned for them comprehensively. You and I cannot force the reunion, which is the Kingdom of God. We can not force it. All of the speeches, all of the things that you can do to keep a guy from speaking, none of that will force the reunion of grace. But we can get one another ready for the Kairos, or the Kingdom of God.

I wish I could get people ready for the breakfast conversation in the morning. I guess I have another axe to grind: the breakfast conversation when the leader calls for the news part and usually somebody reports, "Oh, ain't it

awful." (That's what I call the report.) "Okay, tell me some more," says the leader, "about 'Oh, ain't it awful'." The reporter elaborates, "Oh, ain't it awful, awful, awful." And then after that continues for awhile the next guy says, "Oh, but this happened and it's nice." He then reports, "Oh, ain't it nice," and elaborates, "It's nice, nice, nice." "Oh, ain't it nice!" everybody says. And the first reporter says, "Yes, but my point was 'Oh, ain't it awful' and look at all the support I've gotten." The the "Oh, ain't it awful" guys and the "Oh, ain't it nice" guys go to it. It turns into a real comedy. If we could recover our breakfast conversations as events conditioned by the mystery of life, maybe we would all sit there and not say anything, but just wait on the Lord. The grace of the Kingdom cannot be forced. But we can make ourselves ready for it.

DESTINY

I am going to tell you one more story and then sit down. The story I am going to tell you was reported in TIME and NEWSWEEK a few years ago. I always use it in Town Meetings because the kind of talk that I try to give in Town Meetings is one that produces a State of Being in the people. The intention of the first talk in a Town Meeting is to bring the people to a point of consciousness whereby they will have sufficiently jumped over all of their prejudices to be more than willing to meet with a group of people and entertain any kind of new notion that others might present to them in the workshop on the vision and contradictions. This is what I call a State of Being talk. The illustration that I have found most successful is based on a series of interviews with a number of people who had faced certain death and survived. Some of these people had been bitten by poisonous snakes and normally would have died shortly. They represented all kinds of cases like that. All of these people testified to three things, the three acts, they encountered in facing certain death. The drama was best described by a fellow who fell out of an airplane. He didn't have any parachute, and he fell down, down, down, down, down. He hit the ground and accidentally, somehow or other, was providentially saved; mysteriously saved. He got up and walked away. You can imagine, if you had been the news reporter, how you would want to know what had happened on the way down to the ground. Well, all of these people who had faced certain death and survived for miraculous or mysterious reasons said, that the first thing they experienced was "NO!" Just like when I am assigned to run the elevator or wash the dishes. They experienced, "NO! This can't be. This is not in my screen, it is not in my plan. I had planned to go from Chicago to Atlanta. How can I be falling out of the airplane?" A great big "NO!" sits in the person's imagination for some time. The second response was, "Well, it's going to be and it's obviously there. There is the ground coming at me, and here am I going toward it." They testified that the next act was one that we often hear about: the experience of one's whole life in review. They witnessed a panoramic vision of their whole life. They further clarified that it wasn't their whole life, but a review of various times of significance. In the midst of this review even painful things that had happened to them in their lives were given back to them as glorious by contrast. And then came the third act, which is the one that really intrigues me; I liken this third act of certain death to our consciousness as an Order and as a Movement. It is when one has seen the "NO!" that he has said to every single thing, and then has seen the panoramic wonder it is to participate in Being Itself; it is then that Being "lends itself to you for a little while", or "You rise from a dark abyss and you go to a dark abyss." The third act these people all testified to, without having collaborated (they were interviewed separately) was that what you experience

after the great panoramic view is your own great, enthralled ecstasy at having exactly what you've got! That is to say, your splat. The ecstatic "YES to your own most personal, individual, unique, unaccounted for, hateful, lovely, and whatever else you want to call it, death. The guy who fell out of the airplane said, "I just wanted to go splat!" And he was even a little disappointed when he survived! This is what I think is our Order's constant overarching potential: not to be in the state of saying, "NO, NO, life can't be this way," not to declare, "Oh, ain't it awful or nice", but to say "YES", ecstatically to your own giving up of your own life for the sake of the Mystery that made you free and allowed you to be. What a vocation.