

THE PROFOUND LOVE FOR THE WORLD

If I speak with the tongues of men and even of angels  
but have no love  
I am no better than blaring brass or a clanging cymbal.  
I may be inspired to prophesy and to know every hidden truth.  
I may have faith strong enough to move mountains.  
But if I have no love I am nothing.  
If I give away everything I own piece by piece  
and martyr myself but not in love it does me no good.

Love is patient, kind and envies no one.  
Love is no braggart. It is not snobbish or rude.  
Love never insists on its own way. It is not touchy.  
Love finds no pleasure in evil but delights in truth.  
Love will bear anything: its belief, its hope, its  
endurance will never end.  
Love never fails.

Prophets? their work will be over.  
Tongues? they will fall silent.  
Knowledge? it will all pass away.

It is only part of the truth that we know now and  
only part of the truth we can fortell to others.  
When wholeness comes the partial will vanish.  
When I was a child I talked, thought and reasoned like a child.  
Now I am a man and have put my childish ways aside.  
Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror.  
When wholeness comes we shall see face to face.  
Now my knowledge is partial. Then it will be whole  
like God's knowledge of me.

In a word, there are three things that last forever:  
Faith, hope and love. But the greatest of them all is love.

I Corinthians: 13

I have a strange compulsion, these days, to climb the highest mountain, and from the top witness there before God and all mankind that I, as the Church, am falling profoundly in love with this world.

All of us within the Church, and any sensitive human being

not self-consciously a part of the Church, is well aware that on the horizon is a faceless form, slowly coming into our moment of history, which will shape that moment of history as nothing thus far directly related to it has been able to do. All of us are aware that that which is coming (though in any detail it is faceless) is the new sociological form of the People of God: the new sociological form of the Church.

I find it exciting in a very quiet way; it seems to breathe silence, I suppose, because of the profundity of its effectivity. Most of all, it is painful, for the only form of the Church we love, even though it is outside of us, is crumbling away. The only form you and I have ever known is, before this coming-ness, crumbling away. Revolutionaries in the Church (God forgive us if we have ever done it unseriously) have had to caricature the form of the Church that begat us. I used to call it a "cigar box with a steeple on it." But even the very thought of the crumbling of that institution which, however inadequately or pervertedly, brought to me through the eons of history the good news of the Christ happening, is terribly painful.

I called my brother, a bishop of The United Methodist Church, on the phone just before I went on my last trip, and "spun" these kinds of things to him in a little more detail. I suddenly noticed a great silence on the other end of the line. (It's the same kind of silence that is in my heart these days.) Then he broke forth in a passionate, but quiet, voice saying, "Joe, Joe, don't say these things. A lot of people who hear them will be hurt." Then, for the first time in my life, he actually hung up on me: he said, "I've got to go now, goodbye." I did not have a chance then, obviously, to tell him that the same kind of pain was in my heart. I remember two or three years ago while in Bavaria, I went to see Hans Kung, the Roman Catholic renewal theologian who helped to create Vatican II. I was shocked then to hear him say that at any moment the whole Roman Catholic Church could absolutely crumble, not from anything without, but from within.

Now of course the revolutionaries in the Church have a secret: it is the secret of the metabolic happening. It is the secret of metamorphosis. The way I like to talk about that is with the grub worm and the butterfly. Now to those of you who are overly academic I am well aware it is the caterpillar, but I like the term "grub worm." I remember reading a story about a butterfly meeting a grub worm. The butterfly was a bit older obviously, than the grub worm. The butterfly said, "Hello, Henry." And Henry said, "How'd you know my name was Henry?" "I'm your sister, Mary." "Get off it!" Can you imagine? You look at a grub worm, and then you look at a butterfly, and some character comes along and says, "That butterfly is a grub worm!" Well, when the grub worm gets in that chrysalis (this is the most shocking thing), it literally disappears. Then the butterfly crawls out, (or however they get out).

Now, when you apply this to the Church, the pain experienced by me and my brother, and anybody who cares about the Church, reverses that process. It is like a fine butterfly going into that cocoon and coming out a grub worm. But that is not the way it is. It is really a grub worm going into the cocoon and passing absolutely out of existence, and coming out a butterfly.

When you deal with this image of metamorphosis, however, in the midst of the pain is excitement - almost overwhelming, wonder-filled expectation. I have always admired Paul for saying (I am sure with his tongue in his cheek) that he would really like to go to heaven and be with Jesus; on the other hand, he felt he was needed in this world and so he could not make up his mind which he was really going to do.

I think it may be a fair statement, with some qualifications perhaps, that for some time I have not cared too much whether I lived or whether I died. That is not entirely true, of course. For I discovered, somewhat recently, that I was filled with fear at the presence of death. But a funny thing happened to me: I became aware I was not afraid of extinction. You would think a man as old as I am would not have had to learn this all over again. I discovered that what I was frightened of was the unknownness of death. Then I remembered that a long time ago I took a course called RS-I, and in that course somebody got it through my skull that that Final Unknownness was my Father. Isn't that funny? And before the one who is your Father, you always experience fear and fascination - overwhelming dread.

It is like that with the Church. For, when the present form of the Church dies, I know I will never be the same again. Yet, there is a strange wonder about it, as there is with death itself. I am trying to get said that I do not want this "cigar box with the steeple" to pass away after I have spent most of my adult life storming that windmill. Now that it is at hand, I do not want it to go away. And yet, on the other hand, I know that we are alive in the times when the most crucial dynamic of history - the People of God - is going to be something; concretely, sociologically, entirely other, exciting. It is still faceless. No one at the moment can read the form - and yet that is not entirely true. With a great deal of humility if someone asked about the form of the church coming to be, I would very, very quietly whisper, "We're it. We're it."

I have been thinking of four things which point the direction. First, the Church is in the midst of a profound journey into the world. Secondly, it is in the midst of a radical experience of transparentization. Third, the Church is in the midst of an overwhelming preparation to love this world. The Church is falling in love with this world. Lastly, on the other side of love of the world, the Church is in a state of incubation which is going to hatch a

capacity to directly address humanness in this world. I suspect that this trek is going to be more magnitudinal than anything since the children of Israel left Egypt, or a babe was born in Bethlehem.

The early Church, matured within the Hellenic world, got itself in a position of becoming competitive with God's world. Now GOD'S WORLD is the only world you and I know anything about. It is the world we get born into and the world we get died out of. It is the world of our sufferings, our pains, our joys, and our glories. It is the everyday world of work, and decisions, and longings and heart-aches. It is the world of the countrysides and the cities. It is the world you and I have lived in all of our lives. It is the only world there is. That is God's world.

The Church found itself in competition with the world God created, and forged a world of its own. It built its own poetry over against the poetry of the world of God. It created its own rational interpretations, its own philosophy over against the philosophy of the world. It created its own morality over against the morality of God's world. It created its own institution over against the institutions of the world. It called upon men to join her world over against joining God's world. And, finally, the climax of all of this, oh, so subtle, was that she was able to strike a knife into the center of man, forcing him to decide whether he was going to be a part of God's world or the world that the Historical Church created. I am clear that in these two thousand years in which that has happened, it had to happen. For when you lived in a two-story worldview, this was very likely what you were out to do sociologically, though I would prefer to avoid the fact that it was necessary and essential. In the 19th Century, that other-than-God's world the Church created as God's was challenged. For when you build a world that is other than this-only world, then you can not avoid challenging the center of mankind to decide your world over against the world in which they live. As long as such an institution was able to grasp that it was the Truth without having to demonstrate it, it was a fact of existence. When man stumbled across the fact of relativity and invented the concept of ideology, then the church was in the "market place" with all other ideologies. What I have described here is what has brought about the wonder and the miracle of the Church making a journey to where she has always been - right in the midst of God's world.

Now, in our life-time, in the dynamics of defining the Church in its local manifestations - the congregational dynamic, the cadre dynamic, and the guild or parish dynamic - the congregational dynamic has been overextended, crushing out the dimensions of primal spirituality and love of this world. That is what happens when any historical institution attempts to build a world which competes with the world God created. The church's journey into the world where she already exists will be manifest in the rebalancing of these dynamics.

In the rest of your life-time the emphasis is going to be on the Guild - the secular man, in the midst of the world, who knows, and who cares, and who has become the unbelievable deeps of consciousness or humanness itself. That is what I mean when I say the Church. It is in the midst of making its home - setting up its tent precisely in the midst of the secular world, the only world any man has ever or will ever know anything about. I am speaking of the world of God.

Perhaps I ought to say a word about LOVE. A part of the metamorphosis is that the Church is literally, passionately, falling in love with this world into which she is moving. We have spent our whole lives dealing with the category of Faith. In renewal that is where you always begin. None of us here - to the degree that we have cared and participated in the renewal of the church - has dealt with any other rubric than Faith. RS-I is about Faith. That is what we have all been concerned with - the meaning of Faith. I got said to myself in those early days that perhaps at the very heart of the perversion of the Historical Church in our day was the misuse of the word "LOVE". I was going to hang that word out on the clothes line to dry while emphasizing the category of "Faith". I remember in a talk I made about a year ago, I said to myself that the category of LOVE had been redeemed for me out in the sunshine and I was ready to reel it in once again. Between then and now it seems that the whole universe has moved.

Do you remember that unbelievable ending of the 13th Chapter of I Corinthians, where St. Paul says something like this: "You folks are always worried about your children: you're worried about your marriage; you're worried about your spouse; you're worried about your work; you're worried about what is going on in the world. Now listen to me. In life there are only three things of significance. Did you hear? Only three. One of these is faith; one of these is hope; and one of these is love." Then he added, "But the greatest of these only three-things-that-are-finally-significant-in-life is love."

All my life I had been taught to read this morally, which is exactly what Paul was saying "No" to. It is not moral love in loving your children and loving your neighbor and in loving your nation. The thing that really bothers me most in these recent years, however, is why he did not say that Hope was the greatest. When I began to see that he was speaking ontologically, not morally, then my respect for Paul went up, for I think I finally saw what he was talking about.

A year ago, when I had such a fine talk with the Moslems in Teheran, Iran, I had to go aside and lay out for myself what I called the Achilles heel in pure mysticism. It was in writing about that that I began to see what Paul was talking about. This theology of Hope is nonsense. In one sense there is no theology of Hope, there is only theology of Faith (if you will allow me to be a bit

reductionistic), and the theology of Love. Grasping the meaning of Faith is to appropriate one's own selfhood, within the context that the Mystery is that alone which is Hope. Man's hope is that he receive the life already given. Camus said that the last struggle of man was with Hope: that there was no possibility of authenticity or selfhood until finally you have seen absolutely, totally, and completely that there is no hope whatsoever in the temporalities of history. He did not live long enough perhaps to grasp what Paul understood in the fourth Chapter of Romans when he spoke of the hope against hope, of the hope where there is no hope, the hope in God. Authenticity or selfhood is inseparably bound to the hope of the mystery or the hope of God. Richard Niebuhr used to say to me, long years ago, "God always fulfills our hopes, but it is never our hopes that he fulfills." A man who wakes up does not hope his own hope, he knows he has no hope. He only hopes the hope of the Mystery, or being itself.

Pure mysticism is where the self and God collapse into one. There is the Achilles heel. A man of faith has to grasp that like a knife and intrude this world. That is love. There are only three things of significance in this world: one is faith in selfhood and one is hope in the mystery and one is love of this world, but oh, the greatest of these is love.

Now all the rest of your lives, whether you want it or not, you are going to be consumed with the rubric of love - the love of this world: that is universal concern and sacrificial service. For you understand that profound love, divine love (if I may say that), is not some quality inside yourself, nor is it an emotional or sentimental relationship with your neighbor. Now, I am not against internal qualities or sentimental relationships with your neighbor. But this love has nothing to do with that. This love is deed, it is action, it is happening, and, it is universal. Your children play a role in this love but only on the other side of your having fallen in love with the whole world. Only then does this love have to do with your children; precisely because your children are a part of this world, not because you bore them. On this last trip around the world, I learned more about this strange love.

For a long time, you and I and others have talked about this world needing a new social vehicle, and about how some way or another we wanted, with a passion beyond passion, to concretely and practically participate in bringing into being such a new social vehicle on-behalf-of-all mankind. Lots of people - both our friends and our enemies - never believed that we meant it. Now it is coming clear to me. In the post-modern world, this profound love that is deed, this love that is universal, manifests itself in potentiality or possibility in three different ways. One is building PRIMAL COMMUNITY. By primal community I have to use the symbols close to my heart: I mean 5th City. Wherever a man of faith is, he is busy creating primal community, where he lives on behalf of all mankind.

For ten years the citizens of 5th City struggled and paid with their lives to create methodologies relative to practically reformulating primal communities. How many times have we dreamed together about how 5th City must be around the world? And then, last March in a meeting, I saw a series of grids of forty or fifty 5th Cities that have been begun throughout North America.

How is it you build a new social vehicle practically, tactically? You may have to say it was in the New Testament all the time - you love. But in this post-modern world, you love tactically. You build primal community.

The second way in the post-modern world, if you want to love Christianly, ontologically, humanly, is you BUILD SOCIAL DEMONSTRATIONS. The People of God do not build the New Society, they catalyze it. Wherever a man of faith is, his life is always engaged in a concrete practical social demonstration of the future. Jean-Paul Sarte taught me that a man of faith lives in the present by taking a great jump into the future and then turning around and pulling the world up to where he is. That is what I mean by catalysis.

The thing on the journey that shocked me was in Majuro of the Marshall Islands. Some of our people were there for a year and absolutely transformed a whole people in the Marshall Islands by moving in on the very sign of their unfuture - business firms that were bankrupt. In one year they made those firms solvent and productive, releasing a sense of hope for the whole island. Now they are inviting some twenty laymen - oceanographers, educators, financiers, businessmen, etc. - to sit down in September with the leaders of this emerging people and give them the methodologies whereby they can build the battleplans of their own future. That is what I mean by a social demonstration or a catalytic act of love in the post-modern world. In Korea, President Park wants to have a New Village Program in which community reformulation would go on in every village in Korea. I intend to see him this Fall, and the work you are going to do this Summer is going to prepare the manuals and the documents we need to take to Mr. Park to lay before his government. This is what I mean by social demonstration.

In Hong Kong the polity of the whole city-state has been redone by dividing them into thirteen different districts. Old leaders were taken out, and young leaders put in. Each was told he was to have a community reformulation project in his district. We have seen five of them. When several of your colleagues went to see one of these thirteen men, he opened his desk drawer, pulled out a model, and asked, "Is this the sort of thing you're talking about?" It was a model of 5th City. This is what I mean by social demonstration.

In the Philippines, President Marcos wants to create one hundred and twenty-two 5th City projects in a year's time. He is the

greatest thing that has happened there for ages, but he has to get to grassroots man or he is not going to last. This is what you are going to be working on this summer.

I went to Ooombulgurri, which is our experimental work with the Aboriginal people in the North and West part of Australia. Three years ago I went to a little city in the northern part of Australia called Wyndham to see the Aborigines, who had left their land and come into the city. They lived in filth like I had never seen before - sitting in dust three inches thick with their eyes dropped to the ground in abject humiliation; drunk 24 hours a day on the dole Australia gives to them, because there was no way for them to stand up and be men. I talked to them about going back to their land, which is 3-1/2 million acres of fine, fine land they had left. We gave them some hope and showed them some plans. They agreed to go. It took three years for your Australian colleagues to get the government to permit them to return. They had been there three or four months when I was there a month or two ago. You would not believe what I saw. I rushed to the preschool first, then to the elementary school. Previous to their return, the children had not been in school for five years.

Then I went to their gardens. Before, the men had not worked for three years doing anything. They now had a crop of peanuts which they could market. They had vegetables growing that were placed on their tables. They were in better housing that they had fixed themselves. Most of all, the men stood up straight and looked me in the eye. Three years ago they would not have had the guts to call me anything. This time, they looked me in the eye and called me "Joseph". That is what I mean by social demonstration. The federal and state governments of Australia sent inspection teams up there. They were so excited that one team stayed over three days until I got there, to talk with me for fifteen minutes before their boat had to go back. The Australian government has invited us to prepare a manual on how you do such a thing, and have asked us to teach their own people who work with other Aborigines. This summer you are going to be preparing such a manual. This is what I mean by social demonstration.

The day after tomorrow this world which we have been over against and which has been over against us, is now, without knowing it, opening the gates of the fortress and beckoning us to come in and serve on their terms. This is what I mean by love. This is the strategy which is going to enable those people who care; those people of universal concern and sacrificial service. You do not love the world on our terms, you love it on their terms.

The last form of this love I wish to call THE ORDER. I have known for some years that history has always been carried on the back of religious orders. I mean by a religious order any people of faith, hope, and love in any form who bind themselves together with colleagues who live out of faith, hope and love in any form whatsoever. That is



what I mean by an Order. It is on the back of such people that history is catalyzed. So it was in the beginning, so it is now, and so it shall ever be. Therefore, I would not be caught dead outside of the "blue". If it had been pink, then I would not be caught outside of the "pink".

The power of a body of disciplined people who operate together in concern for mankind is beyond description. It is the power of the presence. There is no one in this room who does not know, whether you misuse it or use it well, that you are a presence. And that presence is LOVE. No wonder the church of tomorrow is going to be able to directly address more than the few little souls that come together in the cigar boxes with the steeple on the top. Once again they are going to speak to the masses of humanity about the deeps of what it means to be human.

This summer assembly, I believe, has tremendous significance for us, for the church, and for the entire world. If I have been able to get that across to you, then it is with a great deal of pleasure that I take my seat.

-Joseph W. Mathews

