

LECTURE

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My presence for Bridges of Saint Paul's today is a testimony to your foresight, your sense of need, and determination to be well-informed participants in the Christian community.

My presentation shall be in three monographs entitled: Perspective, Probing, and Programming. I dare not promise to do justice to any one of the theses offered, but lift them up to you in such a way that you will be forced to wrestle with them personally and in your future dialogue encounters. You need not agree with my premises. But I beg you to receive them for scrutiny with an open mind for examination and your disposal.

PERSPECTIVE

The whirlwind of political and social change could engulf us and leave us dumbfounded if we don't stop long enough to gain a spiritual perspective.

A perspective is defined as the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance -- to view your own task in a larger framework -- being able to seek the right relationships of the part to the whole.

We cannot seek a true perspective in a vacuum. What we see will, to some degree, be conditioned by the historical context of our lives. It's inescapable. As much as one would like to escape from the past, any effort of masking will eventually reveal itself. Therefore, seek to understand the forces of the past so that they may be used as instruments of understanding and power in our efforts to negotiate the present.

A spiritual "perspective" is needed for participants in the Christian community to focus and target their efforts in an environment troubled by conflicting influences, which have a direct bearing on whether stated goals can be achieved.

Without a wholesome "perspective", one can easily become narrow-minded, possess tunnel vision, lose sight of the primary mission, and yet at the same time, feverishly, religiously, and fanatically work hard to accomplish a narrow part.

Many people in the church community suffer from a "perspective crisis" - a state of spiritual disfunctionalism -- which has been wrought by fragmented and disconcerting church organizational experiences. When a believer is unable to relate what is seen with the human eye and felt by the human heart to his/her concept of the Body of Christ -- the results is often a state of confusion and hurt which can lead to hopelessness and spiritual atrophy.

Our point of view or "perspective" -- a right relationship of the parts to the whole -- will depend upon "what we are standing on" to seize the view and "where we standing when the view is taken". A true "perspective" can only be realized when we permit the spirit of God to lift us up high enough out of self to gleam the vista revealed by God.

Ezekiel, (though a member of the priestly aristocracy of Jerusalem) was a mystic, a writer of elaborate design -- certainly one with a rare combination of talents. He possessed a distorted spiritual perspective as long as he remained comfortable and secure away from the masses confined in Babylonian captivity. God ordered him to the river of Che-bar near Tel-a-bib to see the real condition of his people. After remaining there seven days, his spiritual perspective changed. Ezekiel states, "I sat where they sat, I was so astonished". It was then and only then could he relate all the elements of his training, secure status, and spiritual undergirdings to the will of God. God spoke these words to him, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel" (Ezekiel 3:15-17).

After the baptism of Christ, God led him up into a mountain to capture the true view of his ministry. Though the devil sought to distort the view, Christ was very clear as to his perception of locational values, heights and depths, the grandeur of temples, and the awe of the mountain peaks. He knew not only where he stood, but upon what he stood -- his

foundation for his existential essence. " Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God". His perspective was congruent with his sense of destiny.. (Matthew 4: 4).

A true perspective is dependent upon a clear understanding and acceptance of the forces and context of our history. Denial or ignorance the past cripples one's effort to search for a meaningful perspective , free of superficial masks dictated by cultural accommodations. This leads us to examine the black church tradition to ascertain what kernals of history may be fruitful in our efforts to gain an healthy "perspective".

THE BLACK CHURCH TRADITION

The black church tradition rooted in slavery, is rich in incarnated theology that reflects the context of its development. Theology -- are systems of beliefs and manifestations of God. All theology arises in a context, an historical setting, a culture, a people, at a certain time and place. Theologians don't create theology. They seek to define what already has been experienced.

Christ, the incarnate one, was born in this context of history. He was a poor Jew. Under the tyranny of Rome, most Jewish families could be considered poor. His people was an oppressed people subject to foreign rule. He spoke Aramaic. He argued and differed with the Jewish church of his day. His family followed all the cultural traditions of his day, including weddings and funerals. He was flesh, not abstract. His life

emerges from the Jewish tradition. To understand Christ's words apart from that tradition is difficult, if not impossible.

The black church institution has provided windows of opportunity for creative growth for the entire race. This rich tradition has provided the country top political leaders, scientist, educators, artists, and physicians through its black church schools. Jazz, blues, and gospel are rooted in the creative worship experience of the black church. The black church provided the only forum of participatory democracy for centuries. Blacks exercise more power and influence in church than do the ranks of the masses. Without its platform and collective voice, few, if any, black politicians could get elected to public office. However, none of the above is the genius of the tradition.

BLACK THEOLOGY

Black folks were taught the Bible by white christians whose catechism embraced only those passages of scriptures that provided a universal God. Lessons were taught that would justify the institution of slavery and leave them submissive to their masters.

However, blacks burdened with the chores of the cotton fields under the blues heavens, sorted out those truths taught them by their masters, took the matter into their own hands, and with a leap of faith, entered into a direct relationship with God. They systematized their own rationale for divine encounter. Their theology was rooted in a holy encounter that

provided them with a wholesome "perspective" They possesses a sophisticated "world view" wrapped in the confidence that all things work together for good for those who love the lord.

Blacks were not dependent on elaborate rituals and liturgical aides to worship God. God grabbed them and penetrated their entire being. God empowered them to be able to endure. God equipped them with coping mechanisms in the midst of pain and suffering. God expanded their minds with the vision of a better day for their children. God guided them with gleams of heaven in order that they could envision a day having shoes, a home, streets and a table that they would welcome them since they were not welcome at the masters table.

Our emotional, colorful expression of God stems from that sense of history. Soul started when the slaves exposed their insides to God through faith, and were saved. With this sense of security, they would emote, shout, sing, and run for joy.

This is blackness. This is the "particularity" of our faith that is rich. We offer up experiences through a particular vessel. We must affirm our history and dare not be immersed in any coalition that dilutes our particularity of praise and strength. Let us not seek to overcome our blackness but come from our blackness to gain a "spiritual perspective". Do not allow society to assign you a history.

Our blackness is not the rock. In spite of our blackness, we found the rock. Black tradition is not the rock but the context from which that rock was discovered. The rock was discovered when God redeemed his children with the blood of His Son. The rock is Jesus. The rock is not the church organization with its elaborate design of rules and polity. The rock is not the petty politics played by the merchants of power and prestige. The rock is not manmade elaborate catechism, incense, and controls inflicted on its believers. All else will the ebb and flow with the tides of history.

Therefore, I appeal to you as you seek to gain a "spiritual perspective". Seek to make sure that your theological is congruent with your liturgical comfort, i.e., lifting hands, singing, shouting, and giving testimony. Theological forces a walk of non-conformity. A shout without penetration of self to make in a decisive way is noise. Experiencing the Holy always has emotional dimensions. Rock shows generate emotional dimensions as well. The tragedy is that when we come to church to worship, we are looking for somebody to give us a reason to praise God. We seek external stimuli from the right choir singing or deacon praying. But when we wake us worshipping God, the theological will fall in line with the liturgical and we will leave service another way.

Look at two groups who worshipped the new born Jesus:

- Luke 2:20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

- Matthew 2:11-12 And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his Mother, and fell down, and worshipped him; and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.

And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Both groups saw the baby Jesus and worshipped him, both the Shepherd and the Wise Men. The Shepherd's theology ended when they departed from the presence of the Christ child. The Wise Men praised him. But when they left his presence, they refused to follow Herod's Way. They went another way. The Wise Men's liturgy was congruent with their theology. In order for the black church to be true to its tradition, it must be faithful to the wholeness of its people.

PROBING

Let us now reflect on the shout and the person. Those who shout or emote can experience an emotional high -- but if you don't understand the shout -- if the shout doesn't penetrate you -- if the music is not an expression of the soul that can't hold its peace, the shout could be

merely a conditioned emotional response to a known stimuli -- an escape vehicle for a deeper emotional disorder. Let us probe.

May I suggest that part of our problem comes as a direct results of conflicting signals about "pride" and love of self. Self-hate is often manifested in the membership of church groups. It reaches the state of madness.

There is something in the institutions of our life style that produces illness and madness. All of us have been affected by the culture in some fashion. The pathology of black social life produces madness. Living the duality of two warring ideals in one dark body still takes its toll on the black psyche. Dr. W.E. DuBois expressed the complexity of the problem over a half century ago:

The Negro is a sort of seventh son.
Born with a veil and gifted with second-sight in this
American world -- a world which yields him not
true self-consciousness, but only lets him see
through the revelation of the other world. One ever
feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro: two
should, two thoughts. Two unreconciled strivings:
two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged
strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.

Psychologists have suggested that many blacks, who are frustrated by the "majority society syndrome with its xenophobic behavior" have developed an "aggressive psychosis" which manifests itself in their own institutions.

The black church has always acted as a depressant and provided healing gifts. It has been a place for articulation and interpretation of black suffering. Its genius has been its ability to identify and label madness and then offer spiritual therapy. May I suggest that we probe further and dare not gloss over the problem of madness until we have looked at its many sides of manifestation.

Whitney Houston says so well, "Give them a sense of pride", for to love yourself is the greatest love of all".

I then turn on the radio and hear the preacher exult that "pride is the source of all sin. He quotes scriptures and leaves me with a negative connotation of "pride".

Then the picture in my mind is as clear today as it was forty years ago when my father put me and my trunk on the train in Lexington, Kentucky to go to college in Richmond, Virginia. His last words were, "carry yourself with a sense of pride". These words rang so clearly that my definition of "pride" served as a positive reinforcement. To tell the truth, my behavior was much better away in school than it was at home in Lexington.

I want to suggest for your thinking that the source of sin is not pride, but the lack of it. God did not create us as sinners. Sin is not our natural state. Natural state conforms to one's creative design or intent. We are born in and to a world where sin has been institutionalized and will soon galvanize its newcomers into its fold.

When one accepts his nature as sinful, it then becomes the controlling force in life. They can glibly state, "I'm only human".

We are born proud and holy. Our nature is to be lived in harmony with its creator where He can authentically promote a holy relationship. This is the theological encounter. I have find no scripture that invalidates this premise. (Read Genesis 1:26-27).

" And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (27. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female."

Sin is not natural. Sin is a distortion of our nature. It is a violation of our nature. Sin is living beneath the potential of our capacity.

Sin is a lack of pride in yourself. Where one is always trying to prove who they are or to acquire something in order to validate that they are somebody.

A lack of pride forces us to manipulate reality -- we see people as instruments to be used. Insecurity reflects a lack of pride -- we must constantly pull someone down.

A lack of pride leads to madness - insanity - pretentiousness.

Real pride seeks not to manipulate relationships -- but move the relationship to a comfort level for creative exploration of the dynamic forces of a healthy relationship.

A person with real pride realizes that relationships are not used to find out who you are, but rather an opportunity to offer enough space for others to find out who you are.

Let us further suggest that we must love, not despise ourselves. Why are we so mad at ourselves and each other?

Does not Christ admonish us. "Love thy neighbor as thyself". Love of self is a necessary commitment of the love of God. The quality of the love of self sets the standard for the quality of love for your neighbor. If you don't love yourself, you can't love God or your neighbor.

When one loves themselves, they will love their bodies as God gave it to them. They will stay in touch with their bodies. A lack of pride leads one to desecrate their bodies.

if we truly love ourselves, the women we love will be treated well. We offer and receive love. " If I violate her body, I violate my body. This leads us to changing the discussion of sex in the church. As long as we teach that our natural urges are dirty, we will treat them as dirt -- but when we teach a sense of pride in the youthful body, they will cry out "don't touch this sacred merchandise".

Christ begged us to lose our false self and regain our real self. To be born again is to reclaim one's natural self. Boastfulness, self-centeredness, and arrogance all reflect a lack of pride.

FROM MADNESS TO NORMALCY

The black church must direct anger and madness manifested in its community. The church has become too soft with entertaining comfortable liturgical productions on Sunday mornings. We lack authentic anger and we ignore the holocaust going on the the Harlems of our world.

I encountered mad junior and senior high school students in the classroom. Their anger and hostility blocked their information receptors. The most exciting anticipation of their day was to attend a pending school

fight. This madness is so pervasive -- we cringe when watching the evening news reports -- our souls singe as we watch black rage manifest itself in crime and human degradation. Disproportionate representation in our penal institutions is the results of permissiveness, spiritual debilitation institutionalized religious indifference.

Although each of us is wounded in some way, we must be true to the black church tradition and be faithful stewards of healing. May I suggest that we can move from madness to normalcy by taking the lead of the Samaritan on the Jericho road (Luke 10: 30-37):

And Jesus answering said: A certain man went down from Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way; and when he saw him, he passed on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was in place, came and looked on him, and passed on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him

to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out a twopenny, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves?

The Samaritan - wounded - endured racial prejudice - segregation - cultural isolation - suffered religious bigotry - life for his people was hopeless.

The Wounded - Robbed Man - left for dead by a calculating thief - robbed of his strength and resources.

The Priest and the Levites - The preacher - God's representatives - the religious establishment - yet they were trapped by the law and customs. Trapped churchgoers - insulating our insecurities with self-serving Bible quotations - by inflicting personal conduct codes on others - by injecting societal standards on the church body for prestige sake.

The Samaritan refused to allow his woundedness inhibit him from risking his being to bring comfort to the wounded victim - he was liberated from

social demands and taboos. He was himself - silly restraints were not closing in on him - he was free to embrace the power of love in action - he refused to be chained by pains inflicted on him by virtue of his birth.

I want to suggest that the Samaritan was able to move from his wounded life to heal because he had unloaded unnecessary dead baggage of pain and guilt -- thus, space was provided to be creative and feel the pain of his fallen brother. The Samaritan's suffering created an opportunity for him to use his space .

We too can move from our wounded state to serve this present age if we are prepared to allow the blood of Jesus to purge our conscience from dead works. (Hebrews 9:14):

How much more shall the blood of Christ
who through the eternal Spirit offered himself
without spot to God, purge your conscience from
dead works to serve the living God?

Dead works can be anything that sets restrictive boundaries damming up the flow of God's redeeming love from being manifested. Our service in the church can be dead works if the saving power of the blood of Jesus does not free us to be led by the Holy Spirit.

JERICHO ROAD

Will we leave our brothers and sisters on the Jericho road of dehumanization? Will future historians record masses of our people left on the Jericho road by persons unwilling to be stewards of wholeness. Can the church recover its understanding of the healing dimension to witness its power to make the wounded whole?

Space can only be created by radical love. Space for Jesus was created by radical love. For God so loved the world He gave his only begotten Son --

With space growth is possible; the mind can be positively developed

Rosa Parks moved her madness to righteous indignation and created space for the civil rights revolution.

Jesus Christ took his anguish to the cross to clear space for those who would follow him through the portals of suffering, pain, and death. On Easter Sunday morning He arose to declare that nothing stands in man's way to love and redeem his brother.

Bridges - the church of today and tomorrow must rescue the perishing by using all the resources and skills at her disposal. Remember the Master's Words at the day of judgment.

I was a hungered and ye gave me meat

I was athirst and ye gave me drink

I was out of doors and ye took me in
I was in prison and ye visited me

Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit
the kingdom prepared for you from the
foundation of the world

In as much as ye have done it unto the
least of these my brethren, ye have
done it unto me.

Amen, Amen, Amen

BTRIDGES LECTURE NOTES 4/2/90
ST. PAUL BAPTIST - MONTCLAIR, NJ
(Please - these are notes only)
Charles H. Smith

Paul Tillich's - Theology of Culture - he deals with the anxiety and despair about existence. Salvation brings healing. After baptism - we give indication to follow thru. Pay attention to character formation, moral development.

Action bears claim to our being - to our seeing - to our outlook - our perspective - these determine the quality. The content of our character is the basic issue - the cardinal principle.

THE BODY OF CHRIST

Many-faceted relations between Jesus Christ and those who belong to Him

- their relations to Him as **Member**
- their relations to **one another** in him

Paul's basic idea is that there is only one body that this body is the **church**, and that it is the body of Christ (Eph 4:4)

- There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope upon your calling

Verse 13: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

In Christ, God **justifies** men and women, and announces them **righteous** before him; in response mankind commits in confidence, in trust, and in faith - By faithfulness, we are again **justified, sanctified, and glorified**.

Oneness in Him is inseparable from the work of **one Spirit** which supplies **Power, Hope, Peace and love** throughout the whole body:
Romans 8: 9-11

9... But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.

10..And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is Life because of righteousness

11.. But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead **shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you.**

14... For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the **sons of God.**

17... And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ

..... **if so be we that suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together**

Holy Spirit

The anointing of the Holy Spirit - characterized by tongues- Christian - finding its rootage in Christos - OT concept of the Messiah- Jesus Christ is the **Anointed One** - Everyone who is a Christian is an anointed One (Various Rituals) - We live under the Label of the Anointed One and must live by the character implied in the **Name**, the **Label**. **There are ten dimensions of this life.**

Ten Possible Dimensions

1. Establish a unique Relationship - there are no **Clones in the Kingdom**. Christ had a unique relationship with with God. So do we. To develop the character in the church - we begin with each person's uniqueness - a clue to our Divine acceptance of people - as to who they are - this removes us from the task of justifying who people are.

2. Nurture in the Community of Faith - we are part of a nurturing community- to understand that I am a part of that community is rewarding.

3. Readiness for Vocation - We are not to be a **Sponge** - **But a Channel of Grace** - individual members and groups can be a channel of grace to be used in His Service.

4. Action of the Impulse of the Holy Spirit - we will begin to discern the will of God for our lives - a reorientation must take

place and we thus must become accountable to God- a frame of reference for our lives

5. Sacramental Grace - something happens when we redirect our life to the will of God. God abounds in Grace. It provides God an opportunity to reveal the unlimitedness of His Grace.

6. Divine Appointment - The word inside - approval- called - sent -

7. Empowerment From On High - runs from God down to us and empowers us to transcend to heights unknown

8. Suitability Testing in the Wilderness of life - there will be struggles, methodology will be tested, mission will be revisited

9. Ministry of the Angels - when we are hurting, things get bad, something or somebody comes to comfort and minister to us.

10. Bearing Witness in the community (neighborhood, work, family) as to what Jesus can do and what He is doing in your life. (Marketing your Faith) - come back to the community of believers (Church) and Testify

Each one of these dimensions affects the other. They are not static but real. We should ask the question, **What is the Holy Spirit's Agenda for me this year?** Each of us experience a different dimension at different times in our lives. **Do not impose your experiencing dimension on another person.**

Christianity & the Critique of Culture

Culture - the Totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, by-products in a particular community- the broader society

1. Characterological - look at Jesus - he knew how to measure his character - Phillipians 2:5-11 Look at this mindset, Predisposition reflects Character.

Are the ills of our culture reflected in the Church? Do we scramble, grasp, to hold on to a sense of righteousness? - Problem- Is it easier to affirm yourself if you are married or single? or divorced? educated or possess a GED? does it matter whether you are from UPPER MONTCLAIR OR MONTCLAIR or NY? **DO YOU HAVE TO GRASP TO VALIDATE YOURSELF IN THE CHURCH COMMUNITY?**

Jesus did not have to grasp - He took upon himself the form of a servant- with compassion and care. Could I Be the Messiah?

2. Ack not to look at Jesus alone - but at the Community around HIM -
Acts 4th Chapter- **Christian Ideal - vs Actual**

**Illustrate: What is the truth about life in America? Exhibit A -
Cosmetic fixings will be smeared - America must examine how
much it shares its wealth with the least of these.**

Paragigm - Norm - The Kingdom Of Heaven (God) like at the request in our
prayer. Disciples lived between two kingdoms

Images of the Kingdom:

1. **God's Affirmative Action Plan**
2. **Banquet of Love**
3. **Shalom, Jubilee, Justice**
4. **Forgiveness**
5. **Household of Trust**
6. **Jurisdiction of Divine Will**

God has visited our brothers and sisters---- with the gift of these children. They come today to present them to the Lord & His people. It is befitting:

The parents of our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ took him in His infancy to the temple to present him to God

Jesus said- Suffer little children come unto me for such is the kingdom of God

So these parents have brought their children in a time of innocency into the church to present them before God and also to consecrate themselves to the Holy responsibility laid upon them

Parents - Do you pledge before God that to the best of your ability, you will continue to care and rear these children as children of God in a Christian Home, attend to their physical needs, intellectual development-- so that your child may grow in stature, and in favor with God and man?

CHURCH - You are the salt of the earth, the Light of the world, a chosen race, of the royal priesthood, God's people. Will you take as your sacred obligation, along with the parents these children in sheltering arm
Remembering

As ye hath done it to the least of these,
Ye have done it unto me.