

Bishop Seraphim Sigrist

Journey

(I)

**Dear Friends, Fathers and Brothers and Sisters,
I would like to share a few brief thoughts, indeed really only very small points, or may I offer them as "vectors"?, starting from the words about Abraham in Hebrews 11.**

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Hebrews 11:8-10

We could go through scripture showing the importance of journey as form of the life of faith but in fact also this is just what Hebrews 11 does, saying of this whole history.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The Jews were sojourners in the land of promise...and the churches are always described as "in" for example Corinth or Ephesus, that is sojourning in, rather than "of" the human city.

As to "sojourning" we might think of the words of Malcolm Muggeridge, long time editor of the British magazine Punch, that this world is like a second class hotel ,good enough so that one realizes amenities exist but not so good that you would want to stay there forever.

This is in a light tone but it does introduce the small point I would like to share,that of the permanent and therefore contemporary and both social and personal relevance of the vocation of journey.

Even more concise than Hebrews is the saying attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of Thomas.

"Be Wanderers!"

(II)

The philosopher Gabriel Marcel expressed it this way,

***"a stable order can only be established on earth,
if man remains acutely conscious that his condition
is that of a traveler."***

(III)

This applies to the churches in this sense, that when the built up historical structures ,which are intended to be tabernacles of the journey, become regarded as permanent and absolutely fixed then the focus of church life becomes their maintenance which ,with the passage of time, can become like the struggle to maintain a castle of sand at the beach.

Systems begin to crack and strain as our time makes clear what of Tradition is indeed the Tradition with a capital "T" and what is the small "t" of human traditions.

Thomas Merton expressed this in a story from Tibet when monks were escaping the invasion in 1950 of the Chinese communists, and they came to a river with their yaks carrying all the monastery possessions. The abbot swam across the river and escaped to a new life, but the others remained with the treasury on the yaks, not knowing how to get them across the river and were captured.

Merton says simply:

"If we are planning for the next twenty years to be traveling with a train of yaks, it probably is not going to work."

(IV)

Another possible vector is that suggested by the words of Dr Michael Allison of NASA.

The future is not closed. There are fields of forces whose interactions are somewhat predictable. But how they will interact is not. Even a small number of people, firmly committed to the new inevitability on which they have fixed their imaginations, can decisively affect the shape the future takes.

The time has come to see the advent of spaceflight as a continuation of the Exodus journey and the post-Easter commission. Living as spiritual amphibians between the world today and the world to come, we must become again an un-conformed but future-directed people, with a special vocation as sojourners...

(V)

In "Living Between Worlds" Philip Sheldrake discusses the old Irish monks who traveled by sea, often without any fixed destination except wherever the wind and waves and God would bring them to, and yet who brought with them their faith and their culture.

"The Celtic wanderers leaving the security of their familiar religious and social contexts took their culture with them... given the fluidity of our contemporary western culture, a similar flexibility may need

to characterize the spirituality of our own time."

(VI)

These suggestions of vectors perhaps indicate the contemporary and future need for an awareness ,like that Marcel speaks of ,of the human individual and social vocation to Journey and sojourning both in the Church and in the larger society.

But it begins of course with individual realization and that perhaps of small groups, who are free to travel inwardly, to cross the river and leave behind the train of yaks.

We might say, and perhaps it is important, that to be fully portable a Tradition and a culture must be internalized. Then the swimmer of the river will not need the yak as St Brendan and his monks at sea needed no wagons. The internalization of, and the conscious taking responsibility for, Tradition can be described as a key to the vocation the Holy Spirit seems to propose to the churches today.

...

Perhaps one might separate "Tradition" from "traditions" by saying that all that can be carried in the hearts of men and women is Tradition and must be realized and internalized and that which requires a yak to carry is "traditions".

...

One of the Desert Fathers, being asked why he had no Bible, said "I sold that Gospel which commanded that I sell all that I have and give it to the poor."

But in fact the Bible, and one may say also the Creeds, beginning with those "faithful sayings worthy of all acceptation" (I Tim I;15 for example) which are embedded in the New testament, that these

things can be and must be internalized and realized and so also there is no possibility to leave behind these things. No need to sell the books.

The vocation is two sided, to be wanderers but also to be wanderers bearing the Tradition. The Torah. The Gospels. The "faithful sayings."

...

Perhaps for the conservative the task can more involve setting aside and for the liberal it may more be the call to receive, and to both to internalize.

(VII)

Pavel Evdokimov spoke of "interior monasticism".

Internalization of Scripture and Tradition as the task of interior monasticism...

To become Torah, Gospel, Tradition.

This may be the core of an asceticism for our time and the time that is coming. An asceticism which will be otherwise as multiform as are all the individual vocations of the members of the traveling human and Church family.

(VIII)

Further, the author of Hebrews says,

if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

Blessed, we may say, is the one who has gone so far that there is now no question of turning back...who has committed fully to the journey of faith as Abraham did when he stepped out of the world he knew into a future only knowable in God.

So we find our contemporary history both individual and also ecclesial and social is not separate in principle and vocation from that shown in the Bible, and as Marcel says, the way to a humane future is on the path opened by Abraham.

To enter into the historical vision of the Bible is to enter this path.

These brief thoughts to your conference with my fraternal prayers,

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