

HARBINGERS OF HOPE

I am trying to overcome the feeling of strangeness that I have this morning. I am not quite sure I know why I feel so strange except that last night when I picked up that songbook and saw the 19th Guardians Consult I started trying to remember when it was that I was last in a Guardians Consult. I realized that I had missed the last twelve. So I have decided that is why I feel strange this morning. As I look around and realize that there have been twelve Guardians meetings since I attended one, I see that it is different. I haven't decided yet how you are different. I am not even sure I will let you know when I have discovered why you are different. But I am convinced you are. I am also feeling strange because of several comments made last night about "Why are we here?" It's October. We have Guardians Meeting every October. It's been scheduled a little later than usual. That didn't seem to suffice as to why we are here. I think as I listened last night that it became pretty clear that our unclarity is because once again we have made a turn in what we are doing.

You can say it very simply. We are here to plan what will be the role of the Guardians and what will be the shape of the Guardians task in the next year which is the Year of the Region. That's pretty simple. Except what in the world is the Year of the Region? You who were in the Annual Appeal know more about that.

My assignment this morning is to talk about Prophethood. That is the third reason I am feeling a bit strange. Prophethood is a term that has come to us out of very ancient tradition. It has within it many kinds of mistaken images as well as positive ones. For many Prophethood has many of the overtones that we are trying to live down in our public media these days. But none the less, I will take up the task of trying to say why it is in this moment in 1980, with a new future out ahead of us, Prophethood is the style we need to take on. I think the subtitle of this talk is "Prophethood: Called to be the Harbingers of Hope." I like the word "Harbinger". I looked it up in the Websters Collegiate dictionary. It says that a harbinger is a courier that goes ahead and arranges the lodging. I think it is like for the king. I kind of like that. It brought to my mind several things out of our past decade of work in the seventies. We set out to create, to catalyze, to get a vision of a New Social Vehicle. Underneath that we were quite clear that we were also trying to create, motivate, formulate a New Religious Mode to sustain and create that New Social Vehicle. That job is done, that is, in terms of what we set out to do. We did not set out to create a Global New Social Vehicle of some kind that all men could settle down in utopia. We set out to catalyze a new vehicle in society to freight Profound Humanness and to create a mode that would carry the religious or spirit depths of people in a secular age. We also articulated at least ten years ago that at the heart of that was the question of style. I suspect the eighties are about the job of saying what is the style of those who live as the ethical presence of our times. That is communicated to me by the term "Harbingers of Hope."

I want to go back and rehearse, because I am still unclear and I think we are corporately unclear, what is this business of hope. We articulated in the fifties and sixties "Faith." We decided around 1971 or 1972 that we would take that understanding of faith, put it inside us and walk into the world. That was the era of acting out our Faith in the World. Hope somehow

comes to me as that type of phenomenon. One day I am hopefilled and the next day I am not very hopefilled. That is because I mean by that word hope a kind of projected feeling of hope. I do not think that is what we are pointing to. I will put it this way. It has now dawned upon all of us human beings around the world, and is gradually seeping into every village around the world, that we live in the World of Hope. Or to put it another way, there is a radical dawning upon humankind today that all the people of the world do in fact control the destiny of the world. We spoke of that many years ago as "Man Come of Age." People are controlling the destiny of the world--everyday creating it and deciding it.

In recent times, we are discovering that it is not all progress forever. In fact, there is a crossroads at which people are standing. We are standing at the crossroads deciding whether or not this homo sapiens species will decide to create its next stage of evolution or will become extinct. When people start talking this way I hear liberalism, doomism, hopelessness, despair, and "there is no future." If people are talking that way, then people are talking that way. I have discovered that whether it is in villages, ghettos, corporations or any other place, when people lose hope, they have lost hope. There is no future for those who have lost hope.

There are those who see doom because we have discovered as a human species that the globe has a certain limited amount of resources. You can say, "Well we will learn how to recycle." We have been recycling for a number of years. We look at the percentages. We discover that no matter how good you are at recycling it is thirty percent return. The world is in fact finding its limits. People are finding the limits of the world's resources and they cry "doom". There are others who look around at the political structures and the decision-making apparatus of society. They look at this decision making system and say "My! How fragile this is." If you don't believe it, just look at the United States' elections. Decision-making systems are fragile. You could even be more cynical and say they are inept. People are crying "doom". When you look at the cultural dimension, it becomes more unclear. Fewer people seem to be willing to speak out in that dimension. Yet when you look, sure enough there are those who are trying to cling on to their ancient and honored cultural traditions. They are seeing them come to an end and they are also crying "doom". On the other hand you look at those who have cast off those traditions and have turned to a brand new age. They have dared to create new educational systems, new family systems, new communities and whatever else. But they are also in despair and cry "doom". It seems like the masses of humanity are locked into a fog of superstition, ignorance, even rebelliousness.

And so there is no hope. If people have lost hope, there is no hope. That is all it is. What is this World of Hope we are talking about? I think that until every human being for himself, every human community for themselves, every nation, every part of the globe, and finally the globe itself, faces these limits, there is no hope. This is because it is living out of one illusion or dream after another. I looked for a verb that described illusion-making. I couldn't find one. There isn't a verb for illuse. I found the very hallucinate. Certain things out of our recent culture make that something going on, a lot of hallucinating. In fact you think maybe that is the case, maybe that is the only way to live, to hallucinate or to create illusions. I say the World of Hope begins at this point. It begins when the limits have been faced, not somewhere else. Human spirit, selfhood and radical integrity occur only where there is no hope. It is hope against hope. When you look around through those eyeglasses and you see the limits

of the resources, the fragility of our decision-making systems, the fracturedness and lack of commonality in our cultural systems. You want to say, "Now is the time for the globe to create itself." Now is the nevertheless of history. Some of you remember a paper we used to study. The second section which we did not study in the seminar had a long passage about Nevertheless --Nevertheless We Will. That I think is the beginning of the World of Hope. The hope against hope says something like this in spite of all evidence to the contrary I Will create the family for my time. All evidence to the contrary, I Will create the community. I will see a new paradigm. You see, idealism is hard to die. Idealism says you wake up one day and this ideal of a new society has collapsed on you. It dies and you create a new ideal. You live by that one until it dies. Then you create another one. No, this is not the World of Hope that I know. The World of Hope I know is when you face utter hopelessness and decide there is in fact a whole new paradigm. My best illustration of how that happened in recent history has to do with our response to the urban world. When we first came to Chicago, I was privileged to study for a year in urban literature, history and sociology. Particularly the literature of the turn of the century into the 1900's spelled out the most gross, the most painful, the most agonizing rejection of urban life. I mean we at the turn of the century did not want to be urban people. It was like we were being forced out of the rural into the urban. The crime rates and so forth we did not want. Read a novel like Sister Carrie to see this illustrated. A paradigm shift happened in which the same reality, the same settlements, the same high-rise conditions, the same ghettos all of that is still there and maybe more so, in fact a lot more so, now is seen as the most human place in the world to live. That is a paradigm shift. That is Hope beyond Hope come of age. It is not a panacea. It is not some utopia you arrive at somehow. It is simply a transformation of the same reality into a new direction.

Hope is the evidence of things unseen, an ancient poet said. When hope is the evidence of things not seen, the second aspect of Prophethood is the response that is the unfaith response or to put it more dramatically, the demonic response. It seems like in the eighties you are not just talking about people who will not decide to create where there is no hope. You are talking about a demonic response to the discovery of the limits of life.

That comes to me in four forms. One is "I'll wait it out." It comes when people just want to be left alone. If they are among ourselves, they are people who drop in around the edges. They don't realize that the solitary dimension of life, the aloneness dimension of life, is precisely that which creates the world. The solitary does create the world. So you have created the world you are going to live in by remaining alone.

Another demonic response is very prevalent today. It is all these particular little causes, like the cause to stamp "love" on soda pop caps. "My-cause-ism". My turf. My expertise only. It is selecting a set of particulars which take care of responding to this world because they really do not see hope for the entire world. There are few who would be willing to bear the whole burden. And yet the world is made up of particulars. It is not made up of some whole that you see without particulars.

The third kind of demonic response is "I'll do it myself." "I'll do it any way." This, I think, is a rejection of covenant. This is the rejection of the fact that society depends upon society. Human beings depend upon each other. It is either the rejection of the covenant of marriage, the family, the community, the nation. It is unwillingness to pick up whatever covenant it is that we are in. It is the refusal to face the fact that life is covenantal, the world is really made by covenant and nothing else.

The fourth demonic response is the response that comes and we get a little dose of it ourselves, out of taking some great wisdom and reducing it. That is what all demonic responses are. You take a hunk of wisdom and reduce it to some final reality. "I'll take care of myself." "I'll do my part." "I'll clean up my life and then life will be made whole." "I'll do a community demonstration in my community." But nothing more. Without care there is no society. It is care that goes beyond and is on behalf of.

Now the question is, this is a rehearsal of what I have said so far, "How now do you and I go about the job of declaring the hope beyond hope?" Or "How do you go about the job of declaring that life is createable in any circumstance whatsoever you find yourself in?" If the world runs out of energy in the next fifty years, we will create our world in the midst of that fifty years. How do you declare that hope? I think this is where the prophet comes in. This is why this is the time for the Prophetic. The prophet is one who is grabbed by hope. He or she is a channel through which the articulation is spoken. This prophetic requires the one thing that most of us do not wish to embrace, most of our time and most of our lives, that is obedience to the times we live in, obedience to the 1980's. I would much rather be back in the fifties. It was much clearer then. McCarthy was evil and everybody else was good. Those things are very clear. But the time of the 1980's. To be obedient to these years and not some others, to be obedient to our actual world we have on our hands, the Middle East, all of this, how do I be obedient to that world? Finally, the prophet is grasped more than by the times he's in, more than by the world he's in, by what the ancients have called, just the Great Beyond. How do you be obedient to that which is beyond everything else?

The prophet only speaks in revelations. Because it is obedience, the declaration of hope beyond hope, requires first of all a submission to God. I am going to use that ancient poetry. It is the only verbal symbol I know of to point to the final reality. Now, mark you, we have to go back and rehearse some of our common memory. If some of you missed it, let's rehearse it for you so that you won't miss it. "God" is not all of the Western values piled up into one which we fall down and worship. God is the reality that is in fact creating the one world we have all of it. God speaks in a thunderous voice and because he speaks in a thunderous voice, I like to say, his words are not too clear. It comes to you very concretely. When some female decides to get her knife into your gizzard, God is speaking to you, not the female, but God. The Black gets hold of your gizzard and he got hold of all of us. The eighty-five percent, the poor of the poor, the one who has no hope left whatsoever, the thousands starving in East Africa or the man on the train tracks in Chicago the other day whom people watched as he got crushed by a train. That intrusion of reality brings life. That is submission to God. The prophetic mode is the legacy of this community in history. We are not the people who are out to patch up the society as it is now. We are not people who are out to join with a world created yesterday. We are people who have decided through the world that is to create a new world. Therefore, if we find ourselves exploiting our own methods in order to be somebody in the world, we are doomed along with the others who see nothing by doom. We are doomed to sterility which the ancients used to call "hell".

We are a people who are in but not of the world. I like that ancient poetry. I am very much a twentieth century secular human being. If you don't know my history, I won't tell you, but you can find it out. Clawing your way into the secular world is the only human mode open to people of our day. We are in but yet we are not of this world.

We are those people who always stand out beyond the world as it is and proclaim the new direction. It is the declared word. We have said in our own particular community, and I think you can document it in the times we are living in, that those who look for the sacred quite often are looking in the wrong direction. The secular, the profane itself, is sacred. "Where is the prophetic in our society?", people ask. "I don't see any revolutionaries around any more." All I find are these women who just want to become more a part of the establishment that is. All I see are these Blacks who just want another hunk of what is going on. "Where is the real prophetic of our time?" You and I are the ones who have decided to be that. Not out of arrogance, not out of having some easy answer or panacea up our sleeves, but simply out of obedience to history as it is being created by the Almighty. Finally I think when you put it at this point, declaration is more than awakenment. I didn't think a few years ago there could be anything more than waking people up. Waking people up was a history long significant, important task that I did not think there was anything else ever needed. Now I hear something new ringing at my ears saying--beyond awakenment there is also declaration. It is not the same as awakenment. It almost comes to me out of the right side rather than the left side. Declaration is saying, "This is the direction we are heading." "This is the way we go."

I think that probably our public profile people are struggling with this issue. "How do you in the midst of our age, in our times, take all of the wisdom we have gained in the last ten or more years about the human factor of world development and declare it to the world?" It is going to demand a great deal of us. We are trying to create five great talks that we could give to any group of people anywhere in the world. I don't know what those talks are yet. We have had several attempts. None of them have finally come off as really great. Declaration is the demand upon us. It will require going almost everywhere to talk with any group we can.

We must remind ourselves of the wisdom we have had so far. Ethical presence is not built upon some morale principles, either the ones we inherited from yesterday nor the ones we ourselves are creating. Ethical presence is built upon the indicative foundations of just the way we are. Ethical presence is, in other words, being who we are. I think that's why as I look and try to discern who we are, I see that we are the Order:Ecumenical. We are a mundane, finite, limited creation of people. But we are that body. We do the work of two Institutes. What would it mean to be who we are in the midst of this world? Being all that we are. This is where that last phrase of the Niebuhr quote really gets me the most. How do we in the midst of becoming a global people, diverse in our historical and cultural backgrounds, how do we pronounce upon us all forgiveness? The 15-85% gap, it is like the moral issue has so transcended or moved through that dichotomy that is is an utter mystery to me. The moral issue is being who you are in the midst of this world, be you 15 or 85%, or whatever, in order that the whole world might be whole. Declaration is one of the three master strategies of our next four years.

The second strategy is manifestation. I would like to say, and I think it is true to our corporate consensus, that that is not the same as demonstration. Manifestation, how would you manifest in society, in the world today, all that we are? Not out of arrogance, but for the sake of the health of the whole world. We are saying, I think, that we intend to find out in the next four years how to make substantial, basic contributions to the social fabric of our time. This goes beyond demonstration that is the way someone might do it. This is substantial contributions. Corporations that are socially responsible; agencies who have learned how to work with the very

local, poorest of the poor people, and do development from the bottom up; schools that are socially relevant to the actual daily life of the people that are attending these schools; regions that are human living spaces whatever in the world that will mean; and something I want to call the religious core, the religious body, the ones who sustain all the people in the midst of this creation. That is manifestation. It is beyond demonstration.

The third master strategy of our next four years is formation. As we face the eighties, we have done Human Development Projects and Town Meetings and LENS and Forums all over and now we feel like we are completely unequipped but we do feel unequipped and in fact we are unequipped. For the job that is out ahead we are all unequipped. Formation strategy has to do with the thirty thousand someone talked about last July. The thirty thousand are all of those of us wherever and in whatever forms there are around the globe. Someone also pointed out that only three percent of that thirty thousand is the symbolic Order. There is another three percent who would be most of you in the room, the extended Order. Then there is ninety-four percent that do not even know they are the Order. I don't know whether that is the rubric under which we will do formation in the future. I suspect that in order to do manifestation and declaration in the world some kind of formation like that will be necessary, especially if we intend to go to the two million villages. You wonder what that phony little ritual was that we did this morning? Well, it is the very beginning, a very inadequate beginning maybe, but a beginning of a symbolic life to sustain the thirty thousand as they go to the two million villages. What is the study life that they need? What is the corporate discipline we need in order to go to the world? I look back in our common memory once again. When you feel completely inadequate and unequipped, one of the things you do is you look back in your common memory and see if there is any help. What I dug up was an old book we used to read by William Temple on Nature; Man and God. In the last chapter he talks about what it will take to provide the world with a religious mode that is adequate for the whole world. He says there is one requirement. He doesn't talk about intellectually understanding, ritual, worship and symbol. He doesn't talk about practical social methods that help you create such things. What he talks about is how do you and I in our day (and in the thirties he was struggling with the same issue about a world without a symbolic life and study life adequate for the times) become worshipers of God? As I think that is the most demanding claim that the twentieth century world has upon it. It has forgotten how to worship. It has no way to worship. It has no symbols adequate to freight transparently the depths of life, that people may grasp again who they are and go about their life. It is the greatest task of any group of people today.

I do not know whether that points to the prophetic or not. One thing a prophet is, he is never really sure he is the one to proclaim and yet he does it. He just does it. Then he turns to everyone else and says, "If that's not it, what is it?"