

Continental Youth Presidium

18 February 1980

Claiming Youth's Consensus

As some of you know I'm an old school teacher and the emphasis now is probably more on the old. I have been thinking about the crisis in education I have experienced as an old school teacher. The '50x, when I was in college, were a quiet bunch of years; I was at University of Illinois and can remember when I was sitting down at lunch with a black guy and word got back to my parents that I was a "nigger lover." And that's what the '50s were like at the University of Illinois; it was a very conservative campus. Anyway late in 1958 or '59 I began my first teaching job in a fairly tough high school on the northwest side of Chicago near the airport. I taught English, and I didn't know what I was doing. I taught five classes of English a day and the last class of the day had 41 students. I remember one day I had to leave the room for something, and when I came back, the chairs were all pushed back and two boys were going at it in a fight. One was a little kid, whose name was Phil and he was fighting this other tall kid. Have you ever tried to break up a fight? Anyway I tried to break up this fight. Finally I got my purse and hit this kid over the head and when he let go, the other kid hit him and broke his jawbone. We had to take him to the hospital and it was all because I hit this kid over the head with my purse. I was very discouraged by that.

In the '60s I did a lot of teaching. I taught in rural, suburban, and ghetto neighborhoods. At that point in the rural we had a bunch of drop-outs and I taught remedial reading. The kids had to pass this class before they could graduate. I got most of the real, tall good basketball and football players, but they were not too bright. And they had to pass. I got one football player named Johnny Harris who was really a good guy, but one day I found out that Johnny Harris wasn't in school anymore. He had set his house on fire with his parents in it because he wanted to collect some insurance money. He was mean. I went to visit him in jail. I think I was one of the few people who went. We lived in a little town then. In the '60s in the suburbs I became a counselor because the times called for guidance. I was supposed to guide all these students into the right directions. There were a couple of girls who used to come in and complain all the time and they kept coming in and saying to me, "I'm going to kill myself." And I used to think they were ridiculous. Finally it got to the point where I couldn't stand these girls anymore so I referred them to the psychologist because I got scared a bit. You know something, in the next three months those girls had taken an overdose of pills and they were both dead. They were sophomores in high school. This was in the early '60s and this was a time when the hippies had begun. People were wearing no socks. I couldn't understand why kids wouldn't wear socks. And their shirts were out. Then, when I went to the ghetto to work, I felt I was at "dress-up day" because all the kids got dressed up at Marshall Highschool. At Marshall Highschool we had 4500 students enrolled and we had room for 2500. But it was all right because we only had 1200 there a day; we had a 63% drop-out rate. School just didn't mean anything at all. And those were the years during the riots. After the riots I came back to work and found out that three of my kids had been shot dead; they were looters. I had 600 kids in my counseling load then. Three were in jail. And there were four we never did find. There were kids just disappearing. You couldn't find them; you would go to houses and their

mothers didn't know where they were. Most of them didn't have fathers. That was my experience of the crisis in education in the '60s. Kids thought school was absolutely ridiculous and spent most of the time on the streets. That's when I began to get a clue that maybe school really was absolutely ridiculous. What could we do about this?

Now in the '70s I thought it would be a lot different. And in the '70s my experience was mostly with drugs. I taught in a Spanish-American school in Denver. I taught a vocations class. All these kids were about 17 and they had to take this class to graduate too. I was making up the curriculum as we went along. I used CS-I, RS-I, anything.. These kids all had dropped acid, they were all drug freaks who had either gone out and come back or were on their way out. Then I thought maybe in an international school, a really posh, plush, lush, snazzy, expensive school it would be different. So I went to teach at this posh, plush, lush, international school. It was really expensive; you couldn't get in without paying \$3500 and the only reason my kid got to go was because I was teaching there. Anyway there was heroin. You could buy heroin for a dollar and a half per lid. I had kids who were really stoned, not only stoned but absolutely out of it; pretty soon, I could tell the difference between the casual users and the regular users. My job was to deal with that; I learned you couldn't talk kids out of drugs. There was a drug program going on, that was great, but I watched a man beat up his son in order to take some heroin from him. I mean he beat him up in the principal's office because the kid wouldn't let us search him. So his father beat him up. The kid was suspended from school. He was bright, but in the next year he was found dead from an overdose in the desert in Arizona. I had three or four more experiences like that.

The reason I'm saying this is that I have to rehearse this journey to myself because of the questions you've seen people raising: "Who am I?" "What do I?" and now it's "Why bother? Why bother?" I probably would have gone crazy except for youth; they've kept me honest. In this youth presidium the question of "How do you do this?" or "How do I do that?" has been raised. I think more and more that question is being raised these days. I have had the privilege of living for 14 years with the youth of this Order. It has been fantastic and the great privilege is that it's like a family. I know it sounds a bit sentimental but I heard one of the groups here say, "...it's like we're brothers and sisters by decision." Whether you like each other or not, if you're in a cluster together you're like a brother or sister. Well the youth are like my kids. This sounds a little strange, but I used to babysit Patty and Cari Boivin, I used to babysit Heidi and Jay Zahrt, I used to babysit Mark Shinn, and on and on. On Joe Mathew's 21st birthday I took him out for a beer because he was broke. You remember stuff like that. I'm speaking on behalf of the adults of this Order when I say you are our kids. Last year I lived in Houston with youth, they kept me sane. Steve Gibson, when he broke his collarbone, was like Jack Lush breaking his collarbone. We rushed him to the hospital, thought he was going to die, and all that. And when crazy David Rose, smart David Rose, forgot to turn in his college application three times and he'd call and say, "Hey it's on my bed could you bring it to school?" I'd bring it up and I'd apologize to the counselor and say, "Well he just forgot." You could hardly find his bed let alone his college application. Anyway it was like he was my own kid. There are other names like John Wainwright, David Marshall, Tim McClelland. There is a serious responsibility there. Now this is just to say that I stand here on behalf of the Order and it's been a great privilege. I don't mean to be sentimental but I think finally what I want to say is that we would bless the consensus you've made over the past couple of days. I've had the privilege of sitting in the

cubicle for the Panchayat when they've been gone. And for the past couple of days I've gotten a lot of overseas calls. And when people call in they always say, "Well, what's new?" So when Jon Jenkins called in from Caracas and asked, "What's new?" I said, "Well there's a youth presidium." And he said, "That's great, say hello to them." Neil Vance calls in from Brussels, he says, "What's new?" I say, "There's a youth presidium." You could say a lot of other stuff, but the youth presidium--that's great. George Holcombe called in from Hong Kong, "What's new?" People call in and want to know what's happening and they're excited and that's the truth.

The blessing comes in four ways. First of all the blessing comes in blessing your consensus to corporately resolve to care. You just made this corporate resolve--no cynicism, no big fights. There has been a serious note here. I was amazed; I thought it would be all flip. Now how are you going to act out your care? Nobody makes you care. Sharon Rafos doesn't make you care. Your House prior doesn't make you care. Your mom doesn't make you care. Who makes you care? Nobody. In the plenary yesterday afternoon you had a knock down drag out session on CYFs. I heard somebody say, "By God, if she puts up that we're going to do 10 CYFs, she better mean it!" It was like that yesterday. This CYF thing got serious yesterday. "Put your body where your mouth is" was what it was like. That's being on the Way. It starts with just caring. It's an adventure--all the way.

Second of all, I, on behalf of the Order, bless your consensus to be destinally elected. That's your decision, to decide to do what you said you were going to do. What you say you are going to do is scary. It's going to take courage. I think the first bit of courage for me shows up in the fact that this presidium happened. I was in the first one in 1971. It was after the summer program. We had kids all over--in the basement, in the attic--we had 90 to 100. Jim Hamje said maybe it was the first time where we seriously decided to work together and get this business done. It is going to take courage day after day. It's the long march wherever you go. This doesn't have anything to do with the Order. You don't have to be in the Order to care. You have decided to be elected to care for the rest of the world. And maybe it's for the rest of your life. Wherever you show up you'll act out that care. You might be the only one; it's going to take courage to stand up and do that. I think this has to do with leadership. The decision to be up front in a CYF takes a lot of courage. I went to a youth forum at a high school in Houston, Texas. I was in the background and David Rose was the pedagogue. We got the delinquent kids. I went to the truant office and got them all pulled in. Here we are on the stage of an auditorium, a really great place to have it--on stage--it was echoing, it was cold, and they were throwing things at each other, and calling each other names, and here's David Rose up front having a youth forum. I thought they're going to kill him. He was the only white kid in the room and he was up there doing this youth forum. I thought that took a lot of courage. At the end of the day the vice-principal came up and said that this has been the best these kids have ever acted. And I'm going oh my God if I ever get out alive! To do youth forums today takes courage even if, and especially if, you're a youth. I said, "David you could get killed." And he said, "I know, but what else is there to do?" China is in a dilemma now because all the leaders are old. They never grew up anybody young. Our nation is in the throes of deciding whether to train young leadership or not. And young ones are having to make the decision: Is it worth it to get up front? Because when you get up front they throw snowballs and these snowballs have rocks in them and dynamite and you get hit even if you're a nice person. So I say it takes courage to go ahead and decide to do this. And I say constantly that it's the young ones in this outfit who have decided to be up front and have decided to assume

responsibility. Paula Philbrook and Paul Schrijnen are taking major responsibility. Larry Philbrook somewhere in India, a guy by the name of Gavai who's a young Indian, who's a Human Development Project leader, many more Indians, in Malaysia and Indonesia there's Rachmat, Saetardja, Soepomo and others who are under 20 and just deciding to be leaders in a village. Geoff Nixon isn't very old, everybody thinks he's old, but he's just running around doing stuff, deciding to be responsible. The Bishop girls; and in Latin America, people from Chile and Venezuela; and in Africa in order to do Kenya and Zambia it's the young ones--they're doing it so keep them in your prayers.

Thirdly, I'd like to bless your decision to be in covenant. And I think this covenant, and this has to do with corporateness, is with all of life. You have discovered the great secret of life and this is what Teresa said in her witness, "It's real funny I never expected any rewards, there are no rewards, but" she said, "when you give life, you get life back, it's really strange." This is the secret of the Church. You have found out that by ourselves we are crummy, but together we are a great force, and we effect things. I was on the team that worked on Youth Roles this weekend. I couldn't have done that by myself, Cindy couldn't have; we all worked together and did it. What we have discovered is team work, and that you get more done when you operate out of a team. You have had the unbelievable privilege of living with some of the most disgusting people in the world. Do you realize what a life experience that is? As a counselor I used to listen to kids who said, "I don't like my teacher, she's terrible, and therefore I'm flunking." And you know they're right, she was a terrible teacher. At first I'd say we've got to fire the teacher, but there were a lot of teachers like that. Then you begin to say to this kid, you've got to figure out how you're going to win with this teacher. And what it means to be corporate is you figure out how you're going to work with this son-of-a-gun that you're not especially in love with but you've got to do things together with. That's what you know. You are really lucky. Most adults don't know that. They still think that they're perfect and everybody else ought to be perfect. So I bless you in your great wisdom about corporate action.

Finally I would like to bless you in the practical impact of your consensus. This has to do with creativity. I could go to the girl scouts or the boy scouts--they could write a document, they could even work on a team. Hitler's youth, in 1934, wrote a lot of documents like this. But the difference is that I think what you're deciding to do is deal with society's contradiction. That's why an HDP is meaningful to you, I think. When you're dealing with society's contradiction, you are inventing humanness where there isn't any. You're doing away with inhumanness and inventing human life. And so if we'd have been in Germany in 1934, and been 15 or 16, you and I would have had a different opportunity on our hands. Our vision would have been as broad as Germany. It would have been as deep as the Aryan race. Now I want to remind you of what you said in the practical vision. You said the vision of the future has to do with being a global citizen. "In the next 20 years youth will see themselves as global citizens rather than citizens of particular nations." What does that mean? I don't know. But it is a heck of a lot more than when I came from southern Illinois. I didn't know what global meant. The globe for me was southern Illinois. I had never even heard of the word Africa. Times have changed. You said something about people getting educated with effective skills. That doesn't mean memorizing anymore, it means equipping people so they can get things done in society. That's your practical vision. You said thirdly, that you would build a new ethical sense and that it had to do with obligation. In 20 years people under 25, that won't be you any more, but between now and the next 20 years you in this room, that says good-bye to me because I'm going to be in a wheelchair by

then, but you in the Student House will have figured out the new ethics because the ones we have now are like marshmallows. If you don't do this, I don't know who will. And you're saying fourthly, that in the next 20 years you're going to get involved in politics. Youth will be involved directly in politics, not just carrying somebody's campaign sign and getting paid \$20 a day, but you're going to have an office. The last one you said was something about a global network. Around the world you would have a network of people who would be involved in waking people up to their own care and acting out of it.

Now CYFs might be flaky for some of you. But right now when you go in and you do a CYF you are enabling other people who haven't gotten any further than their nose, because they just didn't know how, to think broadly, to think about the world rather than just Ohio or Mississippi or Arkansas. You are beginning to build a new ethic in those CYFs because you're making students decide, "Okay, what do we think the future ought to be? What do you think ought to happen?" And you're enabling them to use their own wisdom. You are inventing that. CYFs are important not just because they're a strategy of the ICA, forget the ICA, not just because the Order thought them up, forget that. They're important because they're putting into the hands of youth, for the first time probably, a way to think--giving them a tool and a context that will enable them to live a full human life instead of just a narrow one. And if you don't have zeal for CYFs, I don't think they'll ever come off. But just think of Germany in 1934, there weren't any CYFs around for them, they would only ask the question about that nation, they'd only ask the question about what it means to be an Aryan race and how they'd get rid of anybody who isn't. Thus, World War II--it's not that simple though. I bring you great blessing from the Order and am excited by your document and wish you well.

When you get back to your Religious House it isn't going to be easy. It is going to be hard because many of you are the only one here from your cluster. Well, you're going to go back and you're going to try to convince the others. You're going to run into problems. But you're not alone. This is not just your struggle. We adults in the Order want to put wheels under your proposals, we want to enable these proposals to come off. It's not just a thing that youth experience. When I go back after I've been to a council and I try to convince somebody, it's the same lonely battle. So I wish you well in your lonely battle, but don't forget that we're behind you. You've got to be able to call on the rest of us which you will, and kick us and prod us, and remind us about the vision of the future which we've all built together.

TOASTS TO THE FUTURE

Let's take a few minutes and claim some promises for the youth revolution. I'd like to claim the promise that we get out one corporate thrust and shove it into the future and get something moving here and get some change happening. Here, here.

I claim the promise that we'll have hundreds of articles flowing in like the one you've got on your plates. Here, here.

I claim the promise that in the future we will have a network of not only youth in the Order, but youth in every community across the world that are all colleagues in the task of creating the future of the globe. Here, here.

I claim the promise that in Rochester, the youth will do the area newsletter out to the clusters. Here, here.

I claim the promise that the youth of the West will be a sign of hope

and a demonstration of practical care for the youth of the Third World. Here, here.

I claim the promise that you'll figure out how to have a large group of youth here together this summer and work and play. Here, here.

I claim the promise that our goals shall be met and we'll dare to dream more dreams. Here, here.

I'd like to close this out by claiming one more promise, that we see a few of these faces around this summer beating out some more of this and that we see a lot more faces too. Here, here.

SEND OUT

Before we send ourselves out of here let's sing two songs: the old "Battle-hymn of the Revolutionary" and the new "Youth Marching Song." Let's all stand up. ...Three and a half weeks ago when we first talked about doing a youth presidium I remember sitting down to a blank sheet of paper and asking myself questions like, Why do we do this now? What would we do? And then on the other side of this, seeing this document--and my knees are shaking folks--this really represents power. I would send us out to take with us the possibility and the excitement of this weekend. Things are going to be rough, Kay's right. We're going to run into all kinds of red tape, House priors, but I feel a hell of a lot better knowing that there's a network of youth around the world who care and who are ready to lead. I would send us out under the rubric of creativity, that we be the people who dare to dance in the toughest situations in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.