

Global Priors' Council
Chicago

Keith Parkard
July 26, 1979
T-619

PRESENCE OF THE WAY

I was trying to remember when we wrote Winds of Change--the poetry of that song and its imagery of the Way, seem to be very much on target. Yet it has been around a long time. That is probably appropriate as we talk about what it is to be on a journey that is endless.

This is a talk on the Presence of the Way, as that which we have experienced in four shifts. The first is sociological. We have experienced a shift from individual greatness to an experience as well of corporate effectivity. In the area of theology that shift has been from the experience of using creation to do our missional agenda to discovering we are being used by creation. The third shift, in the area of myth, is the discovery that the presence of the Way is sustained by the myth, that we not only demand that creation change, but that we surrender to the change when it comes, even though it comes at times as a great surprise. The fourth shift has to do with implications of all this, the discovery that the presence of the Way is being the traveler on the journey and at the same time discovering you are called to be the guide.

I was pleased on arriving in Chicago to find that this building had been cared for. We had a strange ride from O'Hare Airport with a taxi driver who had decided to make conversation. He wanted to know everything about us. He looked at the four of us and asked, "Is this the whole clan?" And he asked where we had come from. He was fascinated by our work. He said, "I wish you were going a long way, not just to the city, because I would like to talk to you about what you have seen and what you have done." Then he launched into his own experiences. He had been driving cabs for 10-13 years in Chicago. He shifted to an Archie Bunker dialogue as he related how his images of life had begun to collapse. My husband mentioned he drove a cab for a few years. The taxi driver said, "No kidding! Then you must know Ravenswood. Remember Ravenswood? Remember how it was? Forget it. 90% black. Forget it. Fulton Road, remember Fulton Road? Remember how it was Greek with all those little stores? Forget it. Korean and Chinese now." As we approached Uptown he said, "I remember Uptown, the Aragon Ballroom, great evenings...but Uptown? Forget it. The highest crime rate in the city is in Uptown. Forget it."

What a delight when we drove up to this building looking so white and clean. All the curtains matched. I was proud to be getting out in Uptown. I noticed the evergreen trees outside the front door, and I thought, "How fine."

The driver helped unload our luggage and ushered us into the foyer. What a surprise for him. Everyone greeting everyone; people from all over the world hugging and embracing. The cabby's eyes opened wide. I thought to myself, "The old images of the way life is? Forget it!"

As we look at the happenings in the world over this past year, we can see that in society there has been a shift in style from an individual greatness to corporate effectivity. The happenings in the Middle East: although Sadat, Begin and Carter have been figure heads, it is as if they are moving with a corporate consensus and it has required their individual greatness. It has at the same time allowed them to demonstrate what it is to operate corporately. There have been other events. Time will tell what the revolutions in Iran and Nicaragua are pointing to. One thing is clear: a surging

forward of corporate style and a corporate consensus are present in the world today.

We have discovered that presence of the Way is not only individual greatness but corporate effectivity. This building is presence--as it has never been before--presence of the human spirit. Is it the tapestries, the Ur images, the moon shot? I could not help noticing that the grid banners of the 24, which two years ago held the central focus, are no longer in the center of this room. They have been replaced by creation's picture of the whole earth.

I am glad to see that white triangle at the center of this summer's symbol. It was the critical part of the three campaigns symbol (the one with the three wheels). I always worried that it would be lost because it was so tiny. For me that triangle is the appropriate image of the Way. I am glad to see it bigger. When it was so tiny it seemed that only very special individuals could fit through it, only people who carried brief cases, wore wedge blades or black berets or blue shirts and who spoke in Christian poetry. Remember how we looked for those people? We used to say one iron man in every region. Now we are talking about regional armies! You should see the magazine published in Rio with pictures of the metro cadre celebration there. I always delight in seeing so many people from every nation in which we live. Behind each of the individuals stand thousands of communities whose consciousness has been broken open and whose care has been released--whole communities on the Way. It is good that that "wink" in the symbol is big, because whole masses are marching through it, on the Way.

Second, the shift in presence is theological. We have discovered that in using creation to do our missional agenda we are also being used by creation for its victory. We have experienced this shift in the past several years. Remember the three wheel campaign symbol? Sometimes the wheels like those on a watch, seemed to move in perfect precision and at other times as wheels within a grinder. At times we seemed to have been caught up in the center--sometimes ground up in the process--our lives have been used up and remolded by creation. In Chile, we translated the Winds of Change song into Spanish this year. It came out "Remolinos de Cambio" or whirlwinds of change. Whirlwind in Spanish is similar to the word for grinder--very appropriate in describing our experience. Do you remember when we thought the world was our oyster and all we had to do was use it for our mission? Councils were for reporting the number of RSI courses and the number of participants, the number of interns in the House and the number of dollars for self-support. Do you remember the inventions that we created--warboards, thousands of tactics cards, the electronic grid, galaxy churches, PCEs, LCXs and HRMs. It seems that all of that has been ground up in such a short time. We talked about being the paper-mache model of the New Social Vehicle and we sent ourselves out to build a movement to care for this earth, to demand that it move into the future. Several years back when we were assigned to Cleveland I had a three-minute insight that came like a flash, then left. What would it mean to have cadres in a city to raise up people to care for the well-being of humanity in that place? Then I read Ruth Wilson's address describing people throughout Mississippi in very local situations who were doing just that. I laughed in delight to think that our work has given birth to something beyond our imaginations. We are being used by creation.

I brood on that category a good deal these days--what is it to be used by creation and delight in that experience? I remember a favorite game with the minischool in Fifth City was to line up on the step wall around the chapel. We would ask each of them to leap into our arms. The scene and the response was always the same. When one of those kids decided to leap, all the others would shout out, "Do me! Do me!" We, and countless others are shouting out to creation, "Do me! Use me!" That is coming from all sorts of people across the globe--town mayors, state governors, agency representatives, even presidents of nations, shouting out "Use me! I want to be part of the wonder of creation!"

We have learned, not only to demand of creation that it change, but to surrender to a changing creation's will. We have come to know what it is to be endless peace, confident hope, spontaneous joy and the experience of eternity. It is as if we can watch ourselves participating in creation's drama and delight in knowing we are being used.

The first time I was pregnant, I experienced that our family was being used by creation to give birth to a new human being who could never be claimed as our own. This time, I experienced being doubly used. My pregnancy came about the same time our sewing industry in Sol de Septiembre was coming together. We were looking for new products that would have a guaranteed market. I sat, getting bigger and bigger. One day the women decided to test the market for maternity clothes. They asked to borrow the two outfits that I had, to explore the Santiago market. Meantime, they took my expanding measurements to make a complete wardrobe. When the clothes were ready, I could not afford to buy them. They were not for sale to me any way as the women wanted to market them in town. They also asked for my two original outfits to take to Santiago. On return, they reported victoriously they had sold one of my original outfits!

I was elated. I was left with only one outfit, but I was excited for them. I realized that I was rejoicing in their situation. They had won. It wasn't those women winning, it wasn't that village winning but it seemed to be creation winning. That I was used was a delight. I experienced a new sense of peace and hope. I realized that those women and their efforts, the fact that they were exploring the new, daring the untried was creation's hope. Somehow their doing that with my clothes linked me to eternity. In that awareness there was peace and joy.

We had a two day retreat this year with our staff. One aspect of it was conversation on Freedom at Midnight. We read the chapters in Spanish and English and reflected on the experience of Gandhi in the villages of India. We all laughed at the idea of his processions with his portable toilet. In the midst of that retreat, Mr. Dehti arrived on his Latin American tour. Wayne Ormsby from Jamaica who was with us, asked to be assigned to meet him at the airport. He had come to know Mr Dehti as a colleague in Woburn Lawn. As part of the retreat, we all went to see Man From La Mancha. Because we couldn't afford better tickets we had to climb huge flights of stairs to reach the third balcony. It was a special kind of humiliation. We longed to sit in the plush red theater seats below, but found ourselves on hard wooden benches. The humiliation turned to delight as Cervantes re-created Quixote and Sancho Panza and Dulcinea. We sang along in Spanish and English and discovered again the power of myth. Later in the retreat, I was assigned to lead a conversation and reflection on the history of the Order. After the impact of Gandhi, Mr. Dehti, Wayne and

Don Quixote, it seemed reduced to say that our history began in 1952 in Austin, or in 1954 in Evanston with a simple timeline. So we reflected on our first contact with the League. All of us experienced being linked intimately with Jesus, Buddha, Mr. Dehti and Don Quixote--intimately linked with those on the Way.

For years we have experienced the presence of the Way as travelers on the journey. Now we are discovering that while traveling we are also called to guide. I remember the day that we moved into the village over a year ago. How I hated to leave indoor plumbing and hot water. Everyone else in the auxiliary seemed to be elated with the idea of "camping out" and roughing it. I wasn't excited at all, and created a reason to hang behind--to take one last hot water bath. All the others climbed into the truck with our worldly belongings. Later, as I walked down the dirt road towards the village I thought, "How did I get here? I never bargained for this. All I ever wanted to do was to renew my local church." The presence of the Way is being on an endless journey. It is being a traveler--and also being a guide--beckoning others to be the presence of the Way. This past year we raised the question of internship with various families and individuals in the village. One young couple, after about nine months of deliberation, finally revealed their decision. Both Victor and Margarita and their two children had decided to become a part of the Global Auxiliary. We explained that would mean adjustments in their use of time, space, possessions and assignments. They said they were ready to do what ever was necessary. From that moment, their care was channeled, their corporateness intensified. Their courage was demanded. We reordered our corporate space which now include their house, their T.V., their stove with an oven and even their outhouse! Victor said he quit trying to explain to the neighbors why his house was moving piece by piece. We all laughed the day we moved the outhouse across the village. It seemed to spark all the images of Gandhi and his portable toilet, linking us once again as the presence of the Way.

Being the traveler, being the guide, beckoning others becomes almost electric. There is an urgency to invite others to share in the new life, to know the pain, the joy, the wonder and the depth of the experience. Did you notice the reaction of this neighborhood as we all walked down the street for the picnic the other evening? Did you notice how people were watching from their windows and doorways? "Are there more of you? Where are you going?" was asked again and again. I realized those people were gaping at life marching past them and were longing to join in. We passed an old lady on the street who dared to ask where we were going. "To a picnic," we said. "Why don't you come along?" She said, "Come along?" It was just like a stake event in Sol de Septiembre. She said "I am afraid of the dark." We returned, "We will walk with you. We will take you home." I thought, "This is crazy!" We were recruiting a lady from Uptown to our picnic. She was fascinated and I realized we were doing the natural thing. We were beckoning that lady to the picnic; beckoning her to new consciousness and new life; beckoning her to be among those who delight in the fact that creation is winning. We were beckoning her to be presence among those who are on the Way.