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PHILADELPHIA TOWN MEETING
PHILADELPHIA, PA.

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THE NEW HUMAN

It was in this great city of Philadelphia that the second Continental Congress met in 1775 to celebrate the great vision of what the future needs to look like. In my imagination, I can see them coming together in this town meeting to articulate the challenges to themselves, and then, I can see them less than a year later, meeting here again to sign the Declaration of Independence. Americans have spent two hundred years since that day building the structures and the institutions to turn this vision into an overwhelming fact. At the same time, the world has shrunk in time and space. This afternoon, we hope to get out the consensus of those of us gathered here about what the future needs to look like, out of concern for both our own welfare and for the welfare of all men everywhere.

Perhaps the most crucial fact about this century is that this world has become one. This is a fact that becomes truer every moment, and at the same time, it comes to me as pain-filled terror. The 5 o'clock news these days comes as an overwhelming burden of consciousness. It shows me that as an individual, I, my community and my neighbors, are indeed related to the whole world.

Inter-relatedness was most effectively and most dramatically illustrated during a global event months ago when we were experiencing queuing up in gasoline lines at stations and waiting, and waiting. At the same time, India's distribution of rice came close to being wiped out as fuel lines for transportation just broke down, and the train system, which is that vast country's lifeblood, was endangered. As Americans, we had our global wheat crisis. Isn't it mind boggling to you that the Iowa farmer has to take into account what the Peruvian anchovy market looks like so that he can decide, relative to the price situation and supply and demand, how much he can plant on his land?

Not only is interrelatedness a fact in our world today, but history has put us into a very complex kind of design. We live in a world that is extremely complex. It is a very different world than the one our forefathers, or even our grandparents lived in. We live in a world with a vast network of metropolitan cities that band the globe, and all have their attendant unsolved social, economic and political problems. American citizens in the last twenty years have generated all sorts of projects and programs to deal with the community problems and issues of human survival. Our common human experience, however, seems to be the sense that the same problems exist today.

The rise of technology, which is our gift to the world, raises questions about how economics is to be based on some sort of authority. Whom would you designate as an authority to deal with economic problems? Whom would be the authority in politics? Who would you put in charge of the global management of oil?

As we face these unanswered questions, we need to ask what is most viable economically, politically and culturally to care for situations such as the starvation facing 32 nations around this world, in both a local and a global context. Revolutions will emerge from the insights and practical planning of local man - the kind of planning that you and I will engage in today.

The future overwhelms us because we know so well that our individual destinies and the nation's destiny is the destiny of the whole world. History itself is in radical transition; uncertainty abounds and strain and suffering exists everywhere. Social structures such as the family are collapsing. Outmoded educational systems are not meeting the needs of the technological age. Economic systems are inadequate to meet the anticipated needs of the globe. Political conflict has become more destructive than creative. Man experiences a sense of dread about the future as he faces having to deal with what is to come with the old modes of acting and old solutions which no longer work.

In the midst of this overwhelming change in human life, terror is interiorized and man experiences himself as being in peril, or being afraid of humiliation. After his election to the Senate, John Glenn states that America today is passing through the dark night of the soul. I do not know exactly what he means by that, but I do know that Americans and all people around the globe experience this time of turmoil in their inner being. Because of this compounded set of interdependent relationships, we know that our every decision, like a leaf falling in a primeval forest, reverberates to the farthest galaxy. And we have become clear that pain and suffering will never go away because we are confronted with the plain fact of day-to-day engagement with no defined way to be.

The questions come. Why here, why there, why this, why that? A kind of paralysis sets in and cynicism gobbles us up. The endless task of reconstructing society not only feeds our cynicism, but it creates a sense of perpetual weakness. Furthermore, you know that this is the way life is going to be. My own wisdom is not going to go away. My own weakness might be transformed into creative power, but it is not going to disappear.

What's more, the vocational collapse that is taking place today is in open view. A friend of mine who works in an office says that everyday he feels that he is just going back into a maze; just making a wheel go around. His old story about being where he is centers around obtaining economic prowess and security, but he learned long ago that that story has lost its meaning.

A friend's husband just up and left. He wrote a note to her in which he said, "I won't be home for a long time." She reported his disappearance to the Missing Persons Bureau. They took her notice and said, "Well, we'll see what we can do but we have 50,000 men and women who have just disappeared." My image is that they are out there, riding around a tuna boat in Acapulco.

The vocational collapse means loss of a sense of significant engagement, and involves the experience of rebelling and saying "I will just not have life this way." The human crisis today involves the collapse of values and meaning in life. All of our values just seem to dissolve away. You find yourself asking What does it mean to be an American? What does it mean to be a black man? What does it mean to be a white man? What does it mean to be a laboring man? What does it mean to be a professional man? All of these are questions about values. The birth rate in the United States has now reached zero population. Obviously a lot of people are asking why have children? Why perpetuate ourselves?

These are not idle questions. They are questions that arise out of the very depths of our being. They are questions that rise out of the anguish of our lives, because we find ourselves adrift with no value or reason for the "what" of life itself. There is just no story that makes sense out of it all.

I have a young friend, about 14 years old, who comes from an upper class family. He has no problems about going to college but he completely lost interest in high school, which is not unheard of these days. He dropped out of school. He spent six months of idleness at home, and his mother and father were frantic. One day, he went down to a local tool place, which makes manifolds, and got a job. His parents were delighted but their delight turned to deep concern because he was never getting home earlier than 11 o'clock at night.

His mother decided to check on her son at the tool and die shop one night at 11, and found him there, not at a bar somewhere, as she had surmised. The boss told momma that John was a great worker and expressed genuine appreciation for what this youth was doing. The mother reversed herself and began to worry about his health. He responded, "Mom, don't you realize that I am saving 50,000 lives a year.?" He was making a little screw for safety belts. What had happened in that young fellow's life was the creation of a whole differently story of what it meant to be engaged.

Even more shocking than the crisis in the social structures of our times, is the rebirth in what it means to be human that is taking place. Something is bubbling up. We have been shocked by the intensification and radicalization of humanness, as we stand outside ourselves, looking at ourselves, wondering who we are and how in the world we got there. The social crisis, while it creates the new human spirit, is also creating men of boldness.

Do you get excited reading about the younger leadership -men between the ages of 20 and 40-- in Congress who are putting into practical, concrete action all the dreams and ideals they have had but have not fulfilled. Were it not for two world wars, we might never have become global, without the death of Martin Luther King and John Kennedy we might still be pushing individual responsibility off on some of our leaders and especially, were it not for Vietnam and all of its sorrows, which are still painfully present to us, we might not yet understand the kind of burden of care that has come upon us. Without Watergate and all of its disillusionment, we might still not see that a new way of operating is called for today.

A whole new creation of social morality from top to bottom of society is required today. This new creation takes place in the midst of life itself. This new spirit is emerging right from the nitty-gritty of life. I like e.e. cummings, the poet. He affected me a great deal with one passage which says, "There's a hell of a good universe next door - let's go." When you dare to look deeply into every moment, you see that it is precisely there that the new kind of human creativity breaks loose. You begin to experience intentional engagement.

I would love to follow trends in education right now. I would love to go back to the PTA meetings I used to sit through. Now I can see that intentional engagement is just an everyday encounter at the office and in the community that breathes surprise and wonder into that encounter. You begin to see that life is about care. Care is just part of the burden of being born into the world and that is not new.

What happens is that care extends itself out into the whole world. Life is filled-full with care, It appears in the midst of life, when you find yourself engaging in the situation. I was staying at a hotel last week, and it was one of those days when nothing seemed to be right. The doorman turned to me and greeted me with "Good morning. It is a BEAUTIFUL day." I sort of looked over my shoulder, because it was raining. "Well, he said, responding to the look on my face, " it is the only day we have."

Today we are celebrating 200 years of our forefather's care for us. It is appropriate that as we sit here today, we ask the question of what kind of citizen the future demands. What kind of citizen is it going to take to build the fantastic inheritance that you and I have received? What our forefathers in this country thought they were about for 150 years was to form and celebrate the colonies. Lo and behold, something new broke in. They had the phenomenal awareness that that was not their task at all. What they were doing was being a nation. Well, today another phenomenal awareness has broken in. You and I are about building this nation and articulating how this nation is going to participate in building the global society of the future.

I am proud to be an American today, although I went through a period of my life when that was not so. We have built in an amazing short time span and with amazing creativity a great nation that is taking our gifts, particularly the gift of technology, all around the globe. There is a deep kind of pride for me in that.

Building a new society is nothing new to us Americans, and whatever that new citizen is that we are thinking about, it will not really be new to us. His struggles will be just everyday kinds of struggles. I like to make lists and I recall that the Boy Scouts once made a great list of qualities that should be part of the citizens. That list included things like being cheerful, brave, reverent, and obedient. If I were to list the qualities of this new global citizen today, I might want to say that he is as humorous as Jack Benny, as hardheaded as a Midwestern farmer, as bullheaded as a south Texan, as thirsty as a homesteader, with as much nerve as Patton, as vocal as Louis Armstrong, as missional as a GI in World War II, as human as Helen Keller, as resourceful as a businessman.

I would be answering the question of style in creating this list. What kind of style is the local citizen going to have to move into? How will I engage in society? It amazes me to find TV programs and movies are raising this question. I think of The New Centurions or the TV programs which portray an everyday kind of occupation, create a hero and show the kind of style that he takes upon himself to pull off his occupation. Even the Johnny Carson Show, the Dick Cabott Show, and all the talk shows are asking this question about people and their style, and airing opinions on it. I even believe that in a unique way "As the World Turns" is raising that very question.

First, the global citizen is one who stands present to the situation in his community and affirms it as it is. My community has a large American Indian population. Their pain and suffering is so intense that what I really want to do is shut myself off from it and not have any involvement in it. I want to detach myself from that struggle and seeing what needs to happen.

The global citizen discerns the trends as he stands present to the suffering. He operates with a trust in his intuitions. He trusts his sense about where the

where the deep current is that is moving into the future. This means that tomorrow's citizen will have to be an informed human being. This is really difficult in the kind of world that we live in. Knowledge however, helps you to discern what trends are unhelpful and need to be blocked and what trends need to be supported. This means that we have to forge out corporately forge operating screens like the triangles up here, to give us clues about what is going on.

The global citizen, secondly, is one who takes this vision of what ought to be and translates it into practical action. What we will be doing this afternoon is precisely that. We created a vision and defined the challenges. This afternoon we will take the challenges and put those into proposals for practical action. that put care into some kind of focus. It is amazing to me that the caring in our community in Chicago has broken down all age barriers. When the community begins to care the male/female dynamic, which is the givenness of life itself, comes alive. The dynamic principle of the male is the one who thrusts out, and the dynamic principle of the female is to be the conserver. These are just diverse roles and creativity breaks loose when they meet.

People are deeply concerned about the aged, about relevant education for their children. Sometimes that concern dissolves itself into some very well-intentioned program that is no significant solution to the problem. In our community of Uptown, with a population of some 40,000 people, there are 99 different social agencies at work, trying to care for that community. Yet nothing much is happening, at least not to merit all that expenditure of time and money.

The global citizen will work corporately in the community to focus in upon what care needs to look like. Then the citizen will take on the lifelong task of strategically implementing this practical vision. This means that the new citizen is a methods expert. He is a tactical thinker with the methods to get from creating a practical vision into working it out in the concrete situation.

Practical action is that which is necessary to unblock a situation and move into the future. At least 15 minutes before my husband arrives home from a long trip, I rush up to the apartment, clean it all up and hang up the clothes, wash the dishes and make the bed. That is tactical action. Tactical action in Uptown required the building of an international kind of community significance. One day a huge billboard appeared in Uptown which proclaimed "Uptown is a great place to be alive," and it was written in four different languages." That was a tactic to move into the future.

There is risk involved; even the risk of death of some of our most cherished ideas and actional plans. One hundred years ago Edmund Ross was part of the Congressional jury trying Andrew Johnson. He found himself in the humanly impossible situation of casting the deciding vote on that jury. Ross commented at the time that it was the experience of looking into an open grave, yet he finally did what was required for the future from his perspective and cast his vote of not guilty. This is not new to us. It is part of our heritage.

Finally, the global citizen functions within the system on behalf of all men. The disestablishment person, the protestor, will not be able to create the new world alone. The establishment person, who just keeps structures going, cannot create the new world alone. Both are necessary dynamics. The global citizen rides the tension or stands in between these two.

I do not know quite how to explain this, but he becomes the disestablishment when the particular situation he sees is blocked for the future by the establishment. He becomes the establishment when he sees a situation jeopardized for the future by a hand grenade of the disestablishment.

A new age is coming into being. Who are my heroes? I have to say first that we live in a time of no heroes. Maybe it is a sign. It is a time to go back and remember old heroes. Ben Franklin was one of mine. In the play "1776" which some of you may have seen, Ben Franklin is at the Constitutional convention, sitting down in a chair, and staring at the back of the chair in front of him. On the back of that chair was a picture of a sun half-visible on the horizon.

Franklin sat there and brooded for a long time. Finally, he got up and said, "Well, I have decided that the sun is not a setting sun but a rising sun." I would like to suggest that in the midst of the kind of world we are living in we dare to announce that we are living in the time of the rising sun, that a new future is being created and that this land is your land, and this land is my land, and this land is our land, and that we will create this land for the future generations.

--Lyn Mathews