

THE NEW HUMAN

About six months ago, I put three nickels, 15 cents, into our milk machine, and nothing happened. My usual response to that kind of situation is to pound on the machine, and wait for something to happen. As I looked up at the machine, I noticed a little sign that said, "Milk - 20 cents". I was a whole nickel short! So I cursed the machine and walked away, completely victimized by the tyranny of the economic in our time.

Nobody asked me if milk needed to go up a nickel. I was sure that I had read something in the newspaper not too long before that about price increases for milk in the stores, but that had something to do with the middle man. He is that invisible guy who sneaks into the supermarkets and gas stations at night and raises all the prices. Well, nobody asked me. They asked the middle man.

Not too long ago, I visited relatives in Washington, D.C. They have a status symbol kind of 3-level back yard. I remember sitting down in their fantastic living room full of furniture all covered with plastic. And I recall a scene from a movie. Dustin Hoffman notices someone standing in the corner at a cocktail party. He goes over and whispers in the man's ear, "The word is plastic." and the guy just walked away very puzzled and perplexed.

I sense that this is what has happened to our values, our traditions --all the symbols that add up to the good life. Before they collapsed on us, they turned to plastic. Do you remember your first plastic meal? It came in a little plastic tray. Do you remember when your favorite T.V. program just turned to canned laughter? And plastic? Do you remember the morning you woke up next to your spouse and you had drawn a great big protective plastic shield over all your body? Do you remember when that happened? You could still see each other but you could not hear a thing.

I went to basketball games with some of our students last winter. Whenever the action slowed down, we heard organ music in the background going "Ta ta ta," as a signal to the crowd to yell, "C H A R G E !" The organist was trying hard to whomp up some enthusiasm for the Chicago Bulls, the home team, and the effort just fell flat every time.

Then a fat fellow came out of nowhere, it seemed, to cheer for the team. He was wearing a knit shirt that just barely came to belt level. He started to pace, up and down, back and forth, back and forth. He started to clap his hands and pretty soon the crowd started to clap with him. He clapped faster and faster until, pretty soon, he had a whole crowd of tired cynics and sophisticated teenagers on their feet, rahing for the home team. After he got this big "RAH" out of the crowd, he jumped up and threw his hands in the air and his big stomach flopped out between his shirt and his belt buckle, but he had catalyzed something in that group.

You might wonder what all this has to do with the new human, since that is what I am supposed to be talking about. It seems to me that he is the fellow that looks at plastic values and traditions and says, "This is not just plastic. This is possibility." The new human is the person who embraces the present structures as they are collapsing around him.

He is the one who is out to affirm life as it is on this planet where he knows there is starvation, underdeveloped nations and a global gas shortage, where garbage is polluting and clogging the streets of New York City, where there is crime in the streets and crime in the computer room and signs of fiscal bankruptcy in Europe, Latin America, New York City and Japan. There is a violent split in the church in Europe, that is just crying to be healed. We have all been participants in the humiliation of leaders like Nixon, Willy Brandt and Indira Gandhi. We never use the word "statesman" any more.

At times like this, we hear a little organ music in the distance and see an organ player out on the stage of history steeped in PMA (that is short for Positive Mental Attitude, or something like that). You realize however, that this is still not adequate. The organist comes - "Charge", and nothing happens. But here comes that fat guy right behind the organist, with an additional set of tactics to add to the situation. He starts pacing up and down, the organ begins to keep time with him and he starts to clap. In the midst of all this activity, he is saying, "You see all the c'lapse; (pun on claps) that is our possibility."

Now, you might think that the New Human is somebody who has flipped out. Well, you are right! He has flipped his rationality, maybe into another world and back into this one in order to breathe new life into collapsed structure and deflated spirits. That is his job. I bumped into just such a person in the ladies room. I was groping for the mirror early one morning, and this woman smiled broadly and said, "Good Morning." I got ready to grump out some reply when she looked me right in the eye and said, "Isn't it great being a woman." Well, she transformed my entire day.

Isn't it great to be a man and have hair grow on your face - just so you can cut it off? To smell of locker rooms in your own unique fashion and be able to run down the street without looking silly, bouncing all over the place? And isn't it great to be 92 years old attending your fourth Town Meeting, and able to tell the universe where to get off while you embody the style of being in the world, yet not of the world.

The question that comes to me is "What kind of citizen is it going to take to call the new world into being?" Think about some of the first Americans who are right across the street from us at this very moment pickling their brains in a tavern called The Reservation. In this room, you see manifestations of other fantastic human categories. As you look around, how many categories can you list just to decide what it means to be a global citizen? How many of you in this room would call yourselves tall? How many of you would call yourselves short? How about western? How about medium? How about brown? Or yellow? How about eastern? How about Phase I? Phase II, 20 to 40? Phase III, 40 to 60? Phase IV, 60 to 80?

We do not have to go any further than that, but humanness does, doesn't it? How many plumbers do we have in the room? The new world is sure going to need a lot of plumbers. How many of you are in the health field? How many of you are in education? How many of you can sing?

Do you remember the old story of the little boy who never said a word until he was about five years old? He came to the breakfast table, he looked across the table at his mother, and said, "Mama, you burnt the toast." She jumped up, ran around the table and gave him a big hug and exclaimed, "Willy, why didn't you say something before now?" He replied, "Well, up to now everything has been okay."

You wonder how long it is going to take before the consciousness of society is awakened to effectively focus on the needs of the whole globe. What kind of tactics will local man need to call forth authentic human community? I find myself terrified at the portents of practical action that we have created here in the last few days. One song in our plastic songbook starts with "We've only just begun..." The new Human knows that we are on a march, a 40-year march of care. Isn't it great to be alive today with the possibility of extending and expending all of your selfhood in total global change?

-----Dawn Lingo

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