

## THE LIFE OF SERVICE

My name is Robert Rafos and I'm from Chicago, but don't ask me what I do. During the past months, I have been introduced as the Financial Director of the Institute of Cultural Affairs. I have also been introduced as the Business Manager of the Institutes. I've been referred to as the spokesman. And then, in the Academy the other morning, I was introduced as the godfather. And there have been a sundry number of other names that I will not mention.

These last few days and weeks I have been inundated with a number of images. Just last night watching television, the six o'clock news featured a report about a small town in Nevada. They were interviewing people who had lived in this town since the early fifties when they were doing atom bomb tests above ground. They were reporting the responses of the people there because the cancer rate in their particular town was twice that of any other town or city in the state. Children who had been born and grew up during that period of time experienced two and a half times the state average of cancer. The reporter asked one woman the question, "Do you trust the government?" The woman answered with obvious deep pain, "You know, they told us it would be okay, and we believed them, but I don't trust them anymore." And then she said, "I don't like not trusting my government. I don't like not trusting what's happening."

The other day I got a phone call from a reporter near one of our Projects, and it is no secret that we have been getting a lot of phone calls from reporters these days. At the very end of the conversation and a thorough series of questions and answers, the reporter made a comment. He said, "You know, I have been to your Project. I have talked with the local people in the community and I've talked to your staff, and they think your staff are wonderful. They like what's going on, but. . . ." And I said, "But what?" "But they don't understand why you are doing this. They don't know why anyone would want to come to their small town and help it."

That comment along with the woman from the news broadcast exposed to me the fact of the deep suspicion and distrust that exists among local people today. You can rehearse all of the reasons why. It's just there. It is people experiencing themselves as being cut off from the future—experiencing themselves as being cut off from the possibility, the greatness and the potential of their own lives and their local communities. People shut out the future and begin to limit themselves to what they can perceive and control. This leaves them no opportunity for hope and possibility, for trust in the future.

And then along comes a little thing like a Town Meeting, or a social demonstration project and it is like raindrops of water falling in a desert when flowers begin to grow. People experience being released to the future. People experience the possibility of hoping and trust once again, believing in themselves. And that gets at what we're finally about. What we are about is releasing hope and possibility for local people. What we are about is the life of service.

In that symbol with the three circles, the bottom circle on the left with concentric circles is pointing to profound awakening. The circle on the bottom right with the spokes is pointing to profound engagement. The life of service comes from intense participation in both engagement and awakening. The one on the top that we don't talk about a lot is about profound service. But profound service is not something additional. Profound service has got to do with profound awakening and profound engagement. I think that is what we are beginning to discover as we do Town Meetings and social demonstration. Maybe that is what this Month of May is all about—doing effectively what is profoundly called for in our particular moment in history.

Why is it that anyone would want to be engaged in a life of service? I don't know. We have been accused of a lot of things recently—being a cult and a sect, being religious and so on. I got curious so I finally went to the dictionary and looked the word up to see what it meant. If you look at the Latin derivation of the word “religion” or “religious”, you will find that it has to do with binding or uniting together. If you look at the Greek derivation, it means to be concerned. Well, that speaks. If what it means to be religious is to bind yourself together with those who are concerned, then I guess I am a religious, and I guess you are religious, too. Being religious has to do with service. It's got to do with caring. It's got to do with willing to engage and expend yourself, and there have been testimonials after testimonials about this during this weekend. How do you honor a Mr. Dethe? Finally, you just can't. Mr. Dethe just decided.

That is always the way it is. I don't know why you ever experience it or how it happens or what happens, but at some moment you are forced to face the decision about what you are going to do with your life. That comes to you as a very singular, unique, solitary question. It doesn't ask you what your family is going to do with your life, or what your colleagues are going to do, but what are you going to do with your life? You find yourself having to make your own decision. What is my life worthy of? And out of that, you find yourself deciding to place your life in service and there is no defending that. Why do you people get on airplanes and drive in cars to come to this place for a weekend to work for 40 out of 44 hours? You sleep in army bunks in crowded dormitories, the food isn't that good, and you pay to do it. You are in the middle of Chicago—Uptown Chicago—not downtown Chicago. Why do you do it? I don't know.

Several weeks ago Dr. True and I were in Spokane on business and we had the opportunity to talk with another reporter. We decided to be cool about this whole thing. When we came in we would say, “Dr. True is from Chicago. He is a medical doctor,” and that is the way we would leave it. And if the reporter asked, “Is Dr. True with the ICA?” We would say, “Yes, he's with the ICA,” but we would not lead off with that. We wouldn't lie about it, but we wouldn't tell them to start with. We sat down and we introduced Dr. True, the doctor from Chicago.

“What kind of a doctor?”

“A medical doctor.”

“Are you with the ICA?”

“Yes, I'm with the ICA.”

“Are you with the Order: Ecumenical?”

“Yes, I'm with the Order: Ecumenical.”

“How much money do you earn?”

“\$70,000 a year.”

“What do you do with that money? Do you turn it all over to the Order?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Why?”

I was waiting for what he was going to say. I mean I wanted to know why. His answer was, “I can't think of anything better to do with it.” Later on in the conversation, the reporter said, “I want each of you to answer this question independently of the other.” And then he kind of edged forward on his chair and looked at Dr. True first and said, “Why do you do what you do?” and he said it as if he was going to hear the profound deep secret of life. “Why do you do what you do?” And I laughed! I mean literally, I laughed.

Do you remember in our film when the man from Egypt was talking about El Bayad? The question was, why do you care? I don't know why you care. Why do you love? There is no why for love. It just is. There is no defense. Finally, the only defense you have is your decision and your actions. An old colleague who comes from the Bible whose name is Paul said, “Your sole defense, your only weapon is a life of integrity.” What does that mean? A life of integrity is a life of service. It is the decision to be of service, the decision to place your life in the moral issue of the time. What is the moral issue of our time? To dare to stand and be a part of and associate yourself, to identify yourself, with the 85% of this world, all who experience their future, their expectations, their hopes and dreams cut off—that's what it means to be a man or woman of integrity in this day. The only

defense that you have is the life that you have, the decisions that you have made and the actions that you have taken. There is no why for the life of service—there is only service.

On the other side of that decision, you experience this life of service and of caring as an identification with the 85%, and that has nothing to do with wanting to be poor. The suit that I am wearing is a new one and it doesn't look like I want to be poor, and most of you don't want to be poor. So, what does it mean to identify with the 85%? What does it mean to experience the life of service? It's difficult to describe. A couple of days ago I read a letter from a colleague. The colleague happened to be from Pace and was talking about the fact that it was certainly a different universe that she was experiencing—40 awakenment events every month. In the past week, she had done 19 and put 1,200 miles on her car alone. There was another team on the road doing the same thing, week in and week out for eight months. My colleague wrote, "I have never felt so exhilarated in my whole life. I have never felt so overwhelmingly exhilarated." That's the experience of the life of service. It is a whole new kind of happiness, to understand identification with the 85% is to associate yourself with the moral issue of our time. The life of service gives you a kind of happiness, a kind of fulfillment that you've never experienced before.

A long time guardian came to Hong Kong several years ago when I was there. He had just been to Sudtonggan for two weeks. There are many people in this room who went to Sudtonggan for the Consult. You remember how good the food was and the five star hotel accommodations, and the mosquitos and the heat. But here's this guy from a nice suburb outside of Richmond, a professional, an engineer and he's just spent two weeks in that fine location. He showed up at our doorstep like a little kid on Christmas morning. We couldn't shut him up. He was bubbling and dancing and talking and it was, "When can I give a speech? When can I do a collegium?" The enthusiasm and excitement that rippled through his being was incredible. That's the experience of the life of service.

This past summer I was with the group of our colleagues from India. There were some Indian nationals as well as a number of people who had been in India for several years. Many were from other parts of the world, primarily from the western world—Canada, Australia, the U.K. They were the strangest group I have ever been with. Here they were—I mean they didn't have much. There is nothing virtuous or pious about it, but they didn't have alot. You know you get six dollars a month over there. Most of them had sores on their feet from walking through mud in the villages. They had no fancy clothes. They were all pretty thin and yet they were just an incredible bunch of human beings. Every time they talked about what was going on in India, their faces just lit up. When assignment time came around, I didn't hear a single one of them ever talk about going somewhere else. They were favored by the contentment of the situation. They were favored by not desiring anything more. I don't know what that means other than they experienced the profound depth of life in terms of serving and out of that had a whole new kind of happiness and appreciation for life that is hard to describe.

We have been starting to raise the question of how you begin to describe the attributes of the life of service? What are the qualities with which you cloak or garb yourself in relationship to experiencing the life of service? We have turned to the Beatitudes. I think one of the reasons I was chosen to do this spin has to do with the fact that I have been referred to as "our most crusty old secular cynic. No bit of religion in him at all." And frankly, just to verify that, I had to go to the dictionary to find out what beatitude meant. It has to do with blessing. We have been experimenting with the Beatitudes in terms of the scripture and they come from Jesus. First they came to me as a tremendous paradox: *Happy are those who are poor. Happy are those who are hungry. Happy are those who are thirsty.* How could you be happy if you are hungry, poor, thirsty, etc.? I mean I did not understand. Then I tried to get inside of them.

*Happy are those who mourn or cry.* It has something to do with the fact that when you cry, you feel a pain. You cry because you feel pain. When the pain becomes intense enough, when the pain becomes deep enough, you cry. You mourn. Happy are those who feel the pain of human suffering to such an extent that they mourn and finally act out of that. Is that what happened to somebody like a Sadat? Did he finally feel the intense

pain of the suffering and the separation between peoples and between nations so deeply that he finally decided to act out of that pain? Well, happy it is indeed then if you experience that kind of weeping that motivates you to action and to serve.

*Happy are those who are hungry.* Hunger is to be ravenous. Happy are those who are devoured or feel gnawing at their bowels a great hunger. I will never forget my visit to Koh Du E Ri in Korea. It was a little over a year ago right after the Human Development Training School had been held in Jeju. There were ten villagers who attended the School from Koh Du E Ri village. After they came back they started the Project right away. The Consult was nearly a month away when I showed up and they were building buildings and plowing fields and meeting to plan their future. Our people came by every now and then to see what was going on in the Project. The experience in the midst of that, the burning intensity in the eyes of those Korean people, those local villagers, was like they were hungry to see their community and stand tall. They were hungry to see their nation have a whole new future. Happy are those who experience the ravaging hunger of people being oppressed and who are finally moved to stand up and act on the other side of experiencing that hunger.

*Happy are those who are thirsty.* I remember a fellow in Hong Kong named Frank Richards who is a businessman. A guardian who came to Hong Kong had a business appointment with Frank. Frank had never heard of us. About three minutes into the appointment, they had the Sudtonggan document out and they were talking about social demonstration and everything else. That night, Frank came over to ecclesiola at he Nexus in Hong Kong. Frank must have spent ten hours that day experiencing the wonder of our colleagues. It was like Frank was a sponge. It was incredible. He was thirsty for the spirit care, the nurture, the fellowship or whatever was happening to him relative to that moment. He was thirsting after the excitement and the fulfillment that our colleagues personified. And you could tell by talking to him for just a short period of time that you were meeting another man of service. What he was desiring, experiencing and thirsting for was a life of service. This hasn't one thing to do with joining the Order, joining the Institute of Cultural Affairs or joining anything at all. It has to do with thirsting after caring. Caring only finally shows up in a particular place and in a particular set of relationships, and you have seen and heard of Frank's engagement since then.

*How happy are the persecuted.* I could spend four hours on this one. How happy are those who are under attack. It is hard to comprehend until you step back from your immediate response and you begin to ask yourself why you are being attacked. An attack has nothing to do with the ICA, nothing to do with some strange religious organization who may be affiliated with the ICA. It has nothing to do with any of that. It does have to do with the doing of profound awakenment and profound engagement. We are touching the raw nerve ends of the contradictions that exist in society. There are people who do not want to trust in the future, who don't want to care. When real opportunity is offered, some become violent and vicious. They react and attack. Well, happy are those who finally decide to move on the major issues in society. Happy are those who are under attack because they decided to deal with the human suffering of our time. If we were just bland, a vanilla organization, we would wonder why we are in being and what we are doing. We're dealing with the lives of communities of people in despair, people who have experienced hopelessness. To release that is painful. Happy are those who experience themselves as being persecuted and under attack because they wish to release this hopelessness.

*How happy are the humble.* They are able to see their own defects and limits. This is a crucial one for me. I don't know how to say it without sounding depreciating, but unless a community and an individual can acknowledge the pain they are experiencing and the cause of the pain, there is no way to deal with the separation and the suffering that exist. There are alot of towns we have ridden into where the stance is, "We ain't got no problems here." We know that is not true. "Humble" has to do with having the ability to acknowledge that separation and suffering exist, not assomething that is bad or naughty, but just objectively there. Once seen objectively, it can then be realized as a limit, and then within those limits can be perceived as possibility. It becomes a jumping off place. Happy are those who are humble and experience their own limits, their own weaknesses and out of that build a new future.

*How happy are the poor.* This is the hardest one that I had to do. What does it mean to be favored with the contentment of poverty? That's the definition of happiness—to be favored with contentment, to desire nothing more of the situation or the conditions. It has something to do with being detached and unencumbered. Now, maybe that's what happened to my Indian colleagues last summer. They experienced that detachment, not as anything that was particularly helpful, good, or nice; or, because you did it, you were being given five gold stars or something like that. It was as if they experienced the detachment, the unencumbrance that allowed them to participate in and experience the human life in the rural villages of India. *Happy are those who are poor.*

*How happy are the merciful for they are forgiven.* How many times in the last six months I have found myself saying, "If we only had some other character in that post, or in that Project, or in that House, things would be different. If I had four other people to work with other than the four that I have, we could really do something." Do you see the kind of arrogance that breeds? When you begin to see and understand the characters you have to work with, it becomes a mirror, and you begin to see who they've got to work with. "Merciful" has something to do with being able to say "yes" to yourself and to your situation. Out of that comes a new understanding and tolerance of yourself, others and your situation. You begin to see that your colleagues will fail, just as you will fail. Happy are those who experience mercy, or garb themselves in mercy, for they can see the possibilities in the midst of failures and neuroses and create a new future out of that.

Well, that's what the life of service has to do with. I experience that these Beatitudes, this kind of happiness, is almost like a drivenness. When you put these on, they propel you, they drive you, to act and respond. Beatitudes are the garb that you wear to guard yourself in the life of service. I don't think we know about the life of service yet. I think what we've got to do this summer is to pull this whole experience apart and look at it from a lot of different perspectives, to begin to perceive what it does mean to be in a life of service. What does it mean to care? What does it mean to forge the "garb" or the qualities with which you guard yourself in this life of service?

This is a strange time. The reports of this particular Guardians Meeting have been profoundly addressing. It's like we have rung a bell of possibility and something has begun to converge at this particular moment of history. We say that a lot of the time, but there seems to be something new, really new, breaking loose. A quote from *The Journal* that I find very helpful as we go forth once again to participate in the life of service: "There is needed a broad and compassionate comprehension of the history shaking transformations now in mid-career, of the hope they embody and the price they will exact."

Take care of yourselves.