

PAIN-FILLED TURNING
A Talking Paper

The series of Panchayat talking papers on the mission and foundations of the Order have enabled us all to have the courage to continue the dialogue on the future of the Order and the pain-filled turnings required of us all to be an adequate response to our times. These papers have come to us as a breath of fresh air; sane, archaic, rational and comprehensive, subtly challenging and audacious.

The most recent working draft, The Foundations of the Order is masterly in its comprehensive sweep and bold underlying tenet that unless we swim strongly as an Order to catch the third wave that is sweeping over us, we'll get left behind and become an interesting but ossified relic of early 20th Century resurgence. It seems that in coming to grips with the awesome task of putting form on the Pluriform Order there are a number of dynamics that demand objective honour if the good ship Ecumenical is to keep off the rocks, out of the shallows, away from collision and on track. These entities are in dynamic inter-relationship.

One is the journey - being on the journey: the experience of always going through it and never going under; dying, and yet alive; destroyed and yet preserved. This entails the habit of self-conscious reflection as in meditating, contemplation and prayer - phenomenological solitary living, submitting to the Big Think, The Big Feel, and the Big Resolve of the Other World modality. Living the spirit deeps on behalf of, in readiness to expend them in declaration, corporate conversations, talks, and the exterior lineaments of authentic religious style.

Then there is the depth appropriation of ontic screens - RS-I, The Other World Charts, the New Religious Mode, the Dark Night, Long March, Hope beyond Hope and Profound Humanness - to name a few. Knowing the names on the maps is not the same as being on the journey, but the maps are indispensable in being able to name what on earth is going on.

A third element is the arena of engagement which is inescapably bound up with assignability. There is no substitute for "going through" the experience of the desert, the trial by fire; going through the physical, emotional and spiritual hell in doing the cruciform deed. Many of us are so self-protective that it takes an objective assignment of the corporate body to call forth our courage to respond to the necessary. Without the continual summons to go beyond ourselves, the journey becomes abstract and introverted.

A fourth element is our corporate unity in pluriformity. This is the Team, the consensus path, the avoidance of cliques, status discords and divisions and the capacity to live in and honour the tensions and all men and women. This is the greatest mystery of all, cutting across religions, cultural lines, likes and dislikes, race, class and nationality.

How do we maintain the ultimacy - the eschatological history-long, world dimension of our self-story and style? How do we get everybody trans podanus and evade Pharaoh's chariots and the lure of the tried and true childhood modes? How do we build the vehicle that will sustain the ecumenical pluriform Order in its task on behalf of society without breaking to pieces under the strain?

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None of us really know the answer to these questions, but we do get intuitions of something of what it will take.

The appropriation of the ontic maps of socio-spirit reality seems to be one key to getting us through the present symplectes of secular professionalism on one side and archival religion on the other. These models such as The Other World Charts, the NRM charts, the Dark Night, the Long March, KS-I, even the Social Process, hold the trinitarian tensions; essentialist and empirical, creator-creation, this world, the other world, self-society, ensoi-pour soi that can preserve us from a multitude of reductionisms, illusions and cul de sacs. More important, they point to the emergence of a new mythology, profoundly secular and profoundly religious. Out of an Einsteinian understanding, the screens are the method that allow us to see through, (if we will and the mystery permits), the awesome, shuddering wondrous depth of living as a human being. No one who uses these charts often can tell himself he is a mere volunteer, social worker or ICA employee. We are driven by these charts to grasp anew our ultimacy as "the religious". We get clear that our ICA mask is just that! a mask - one more alias of the Scarlet Pimpernel or the Blue Fox, needed to get through the guards.

The journeying of people through their security walls, certainty barriers, fixed moral convictions and bigotries and hangups does entail the strong contextual grounding of our ontological screens; but for most people it seems to take a "nipponized bit of the old sixth avenue el" to break through the defense mechanisms. Most of us just have to be put in situations where the mystery of life gets more than a far chance to beat the gunk out of our systems. Prejudices, dilettantisms, the Good Life and abstract liberalism die hard. For a lot of us we just had to get our noses stuck into the flies, dust, heat, thirst, hepatitis and malaria of Third World villages before we got a chance to see a hint of transparency and be delivered of a few of our ancient prejudices and bigotries.

Without the experience of being demanded to do the impossible, go beyond the barriers, walk barefoot through the coals of hell, do the thing one most fears to do, there seems less opportunity of 'going through the wall' and expressing transparently the living truth that birthed religious symbols. It may be that pushing one another's journeys (without sadism or masochism) is just as important as solving the symbolic riddle as liturgical experiments. Putting new symbols on shallow religious experiences is not necessarily an advance, if what is symbolized is still a shallow reality.

There is no substitute for demanding radical cruciform expenditure from each other, whichever way we look. Various theories of "catalysis" that let us off the hook of cruciform engagement have got to be just plain wrong.

The Regional Consult has been a great tool for us all in this connection.

However much we are engaged in the wilds of Davao, Maharashtra, Kenya, Egypt or Denmark, however clearly we think we have seen a way through the transpodane rapids, however lucidly and passionately we live out the reality behind our ontic screens, there remains the issue of unity. One enters the territory where patience, kindness, non-competition, non-puffed-upness are king. An order made up of one person who stands in the solitary splendour of his or her "rightness" when everyone else has left in disgust, is hardly an order. We must all hang together or we will all hang separately. The more we find ourselves acting out of ontological indicatives, the more intense the journey, the more constant and radical the engagement, the less likely is the divisiveness, irrational conflict intolerance and bigotry that spell out radical uncorporateness. Accusations, ultimata and unilateral lobbies are rarely on the side of angels. All of us have discovered at some time or another that throwing ourselves whole-heartedly into the mission is the only possible response to many of the apparently insoluble riddles, doubts, uncertainties and questions that gnaw at our corporate and individual vitals.

Some of us find ourselves delving again into Bultmann, Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Niebuhr in between the latest Ludlum and Follett. What elusive insights are we after? Does Bultmann's Commentary on the Acts have an answer to how to journey the Buddhist Auxiliary at Jawale or the Muslims in the Bombay Nexus, or the Hindus at Chikhale? Once one has experienced appropriated and named the truth about life in any one of the 64 States of Being on the Other World chart, he's got it. The chart of the Other World, we are agreed is our greatest single invention. It describes rationally, analogically, conceptually, phenomenologically, the Kingdom of Being, the Interior Mansions and the stuff of transcendent mundanity. However many of us find ourselves bemused, puzzled, even confused by it, we know, loyally, that it is very spiritual and very helpful - but we are not quite sure how. We know we should make more use of the charts than we do, perhaps, but what really is it all about? It sometimes seems to us that we could do ourselves and society no greater favour than to claim the phenomenological turf of this chart to our own. Then the four sectors, whether Muslim, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist or agnostic get the chance once again to be in touch with the deep well-springs of Being and Profound Humanness. We do not have time to do Bultmann's demythologization job on Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism. Some time Moslems, Hindus and Buddhists may get to it, but in the meantime we can introduce our colleagues to the phenomenological method, first through art-form, then the Corporate Solitary, and then a full-blooded methodological forcing of the Other World through the medium of the Charts. They are Pearls of great price hidden in a field. This summer it is time to dig up the field, polish the treasure and give it to the four sectors.

How do we allow ourselves to be led by the hand through whatever droughts, fires, drynesses, deserts and delusions to an appreciation of that immense subtlety that Teilhard calls the Divine Milieu or the noosphere? Engaging wholeheartedly in the external task of the Order must always be the main tool for journeying one another, but the reflective dimension goes hand in hand with this. The Corporate Hero that goes out on its circuit or Consult but returns without the boon of learnings or spirit residue is a poor kind of corporate hero. Some of us - all of us - seem to be going through a phase where we are spiritually

tongue-tied. Or maybe we are going through a cold time when it takes time for a spirit to warm up. Long silences are commonplace in conversations. Entropy slips into the room and suddenly one is talking with a half empty collegium room. So many things- missional concerns - are vying for our spirit attention. Our being seems to long for a time when we can lock the doors, put our feet on the table and be gradually moved into a profound dialogue on the deeps. There are probably more deeps being communicated by letters and writings at present than in our structured conversations. This is not to say that we are reneging on conversations. We loyally try to do justice to the journal conversation and round table, but sorting and collecting our spirit gems just seems to take longer, perhaps because the spirit arena has become a lot more subtle, paradoxically, in this time of Declaration. We long for extended time on a topic and it needs to be a slow warm up in low gear and plenty of anti-freeze fluid! The strange thing is that when a small group (a team or part thereof) start talking, they can go on and on. With the whole corporate group though, it just takes time.

We seem to need collegium times and Roundtables that deal with our topic in three different ways. Trying to deal with "The Foundations of the Order" paper in a 35 minute collegium was just too much. But a Roundtable on it might be quite an experience.

Reflecting on the journey is one thing. Making the stages of the journey is another. We have already pointed out (Family Talk on the Order) the value of the Order Classes, the faculty ratings, and the passage rituals from intern, fellow colleague etc. The exercise of the panchayat ballot reveals the need for rescuscitating the full range of Order classes and affording the occasion for a group to take final vows as a radical sign of committed vocation.

The radical expenditure of self in the care of the world is the most profound exercise of individual freedom. For us in the symbolic Order the arena of our expenditure is inextricably bound up with corporate assignments. This year on the subcontinent we have discovered all over again the power that is unleashed over 26 weeks from objective, rational flexible programme assignments freely obeyed. How we, with our freedom, allow our bodies and families to flexibly respond to real missional need wherever and whenever, seems to be both a mystery and a miracle. Certainly our global effectiveness as an Order depends a great deal on this kind of readiness. Francis Xavier took it a bit too far when he said relative to assignments, "I am a corpse in the hands of my superiors", but every now and then one thinks maybe he had a point. How we get distance and detachment into this business of annual programmatic assignments is still a real challenge. Certainly, we seem in no danger of becoming a bunch of robots. One does wonder, though, what people have against the subcontinent? Wherever you are the struggle seems just as elemental. India is a fine place to be alive. The obedience which comes to us first as a burden does carry its gift with it. We will find ways corporately to conspire in giving ourselves permission to be obedient in a brand new way to the necessities of history and the will of corporate consensus. As long as we are prepared to take any assignment we can make our own assignments. Perhaps it is time to call our hand on this.

We are one body. It is finally our corporateness that is our gift to history and society. This unity is based on a common task, common symbols, common ontological ground and common consensus methods and the dynamics of primal community. It is a miracle in today's world, whether in the

experience of brokenness or wholeness. One senses that the next three years will test our unity more than ever before. Keeping one story straight on the ultimacy of our secular-religious identity will be our challenge. Sustaining our consensus in missional priorities will be another.

The three essential issues we as a body are facing are basic in their simplicity. Who are we? What do we? How be we? We are going to have to learn how to stand at the centre of the multifarious yin yang if we are to maintain our precious unity in pluriformity and it will take a lot of fast nimble foot work. This summer is the right time to make a number of moves.

On the question of who we are, we need a thorough recreation of the ground of our religious being. The common experience of a course like CS-I or a socio-spirit retreat is right on target. "Our self-story cannot be archival", nor can it involve a mere creative tinkering with the old unchanging foundation. The story of our identity is ever ancient, but also ever new.

At the same time as we move on recreating the essential ground of our identity we can move with well calculated boldness in the arena of symbolic life - as far as our corporate unity will allow and then just a few steps further. The short course that we have 500 years to do the symbolic life is a great short course for distancing on and defusing of potential blow-ups. But time was speeded up and we don't need to wait 500 years if we can do the job with integrity in five years. We can go as fast and as far as the consensus traffic will bear. What we will be dealing with is a "pain-filled move through a history-long bias towards a Christian poetry and Christian mythology". That has to go on hand in hand with the regeneration of our ontological roots to fit us for dealing with the third wave. How we get both distance and patient urgency into this will tax us dearly. If we have to go back to our Daily Office to ensure we are grounded archaically, then we do it. As one of our Muslim staff at the nexus said "If the Daily Office sustains everybody else, how can I have a problem with it, if I go to Chicago?" On the other hand, in places where we don't use the Daily Office, we seem to have found that a Tagore or a Kaunda or Lao Tzu doesn't blow us out of the water. We find ourselves sustained.

The challenge of experimental liturgies is not merely that of finding the right poetry. It is also a matter of finding the right mode for the 21st Century. Quite frankly, those of us who use the Tagore ritual round the breakfast table do miss some of the old cultic elements - the drums, the clapping, the architecture, the sway and the rhythms, to say nothing of time for prayers. The Tagore ritual is not sterile, but it is a bit stark - a bit like a speeding car going through a rural hamlet: if you blink once you miss it. How we get resonance, distance, the numinous, the cultic, and at the same time the mode of the Third Wave into our liturgy is as big an issue as finding the most helpful poetry. We have just got to keep experimenting til we hit the mode that gets the temple vibrating with the being of the Third Wave.

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On the issue of our identity as an Order, we here in India need ways to come clean with our national staff on the issue of who we are. They stand in many different kinds of positions on the issue. "Why do we study these papers?" (The recent Panchayat paper on the foundations of the Order) "What have they to do with Phase III?" or "What are you all trying to hide from us?" or "What on earth is the problem with all this ritual stuff?" or "You're trying to get us to become Christians. We know!" The opportunity offered to 50 of our young national staff to participate in the Panchayat balloting was a breath of fresh air and they had no problem with doing the voting. But it would have been great if we could have get together a special context for the occasion and its significance. Strangely, it took us by surprise, but a welcome surprise. Thoroughly secular ways to talk about the Order and time to do it in seem to be what our 'blue shirts' and 'blue saris' are asking for. Most of them are beyond pretending they are social workers or voluntary service corps.

The second question "What do we?" is bound up with mission, polity, consensus, corporateness and the assignment process. One issue here is how every house holds both the intensive and extensive dimensions of the task. There are so many interesting (and profitable) consultancy silos to burrow in to. Any of them could swallow us alive and we would find ourselves in Summer '84 wondering about the sad demise of the extensive. Whatever happened to covering geography?

Second, is the issue of local community. How do we keep permeation opportunities married to the earth mission of local community? How do we keep our preoccupation with the 'four sectors' bonded to the innocent suffering and patent contradictions of the villages. Living in a village is an experience none of us can afford to be deprived of. It is one of the acid tests of authenticity for our time, just like moving to the West-side was in the sixties. The village drives the truth of our times into our being, like salt, faster than anything else. One is never the same. Airy-fairy idealism, liberalism and status - good life propensities do not survive long in the Third World village, to put it a bit over dramatically. Either they go or you go. Quite apart from this, the further we abstract ourselves, the further we are likely to remove ourselves from the immediacy of the innocent suffering we are out to deal with. Arresting centrifugal and diversionary tendencies while offering enough time for exploring permeation opportunities, consultancies and the parameters of 'absorption' will be a challenge.

Another challenge in this arena is the courage to believe in our corporate grasp of what is finally effective and necessary. It's a big temptation to throw corporate Leo overboard and do something immediately and spontaneously effective to vindicate one's creativity and somehow deal with the longeurs of the Endless March. "It will take patience, love and silent striving", Tagore reminds us. The passion for instant results, taking on 'cushy' local projects that are already fully funded, the interpretation of catalysis as a slick capacity to use the telephone to get others 'off their butts', the sly use of Patton's word about getting the other SOB to die his death, can all be ways of avoiding the awful truth of cruciformity, and the devastating mundanity of the ceaseless round, the common task, and the terrible constancy of daily fidelity to the necessary.

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One more challenge is that of trusting our revolutionary corporate polity, while continually re-inventing its meaning and mode. Sometimes we hear ourselves saying "I don't like meetings", as if this were a virtuous posture. At times when we find ourselves saying "I don't like meetings" we are not being quite truthful. We do like meetings: as long as they are with those who won't intrude on our pet axes, who in fact aid and abet us in sharpening them. We do like meetings as long as we are in the cockpit and our opinions are getting full support. The meetings we don't like are corporate meetings where our model: are in tension with other models and we are required with humility, gratitude and compassion to flex, bend, change, and even get shot down to get a corporate consensus made. How we avoid privatism, the lobbying of axes, the closed door meetings and the smell and whisper of the cabal and coterie must be one of our major corporate concerns.

The third major question, how be we? cannot of course be separated from the issues of transparent knowing and doing. The most profound insights in our being will come out of our transparent wrestling with the day to day mystery of mundane corporate reflection and our empirical engagement in blood-drenched ditches and the encounter with knotty sociological contradictions. The data for the New Religious Mode comes out of the fire of self-conscious and reflective expenditure as we rub shoulders with many different kinds of people in many different kinds of situations. Contemplation, divorced from the cauldron of concrete expenditure under the guise of re-emphasizing the 'contemplative function of the Order' is a cop-out. Those who come to us, as Toffler remarks, out of the "need for community, structure and meaning", will of course be received, but they will find that we are not a cult. Any fellowship, order and being they find in this Order will be discovered to be finally linked to the cruciform expenditure of self on behalf of the moral issue of our time.

Once we've got this straight, the other side is how we continue to equip ourselves in the spirit so that we continually plunder a huge palace of its spirit riches on behalf of local man. What will become of us if we do not enable one another and our colleagues in the four sectors to live in the steady radiance of the Other World, rather than in a moralistic dog kennel (to paraphrase J.K.).

How do we keep on catching each other off guard so that the deeps keep bubbling? How do we sustain a rich texture of expenditure, study, planning, celebrations, cultural events and genuine missional collegiality in even the poorest of our houses, so that prospective interns are drawn magnetically to be a part of this steady engaged radiance?

We in Bombay Nexus this year decided corporately that our Sankli Street second floor was not a 'dump' but a gracious demonstration of intentional, precise congestion on behalf of a crowded city and continent. We said that if the fullness of life cannot be had amid the beggars, heat, urine and pandemonium of Byculla, it cannot be had anywhere. We have had lots more celebrations than ever before. We have spent months at a time in the village. We have battled and connived over the directions of Phase III, but everyone wants to be assigned back here next year. We believe we have begun to experience a little of what we point to with the phrase 'primal community'.

The rich times of interchange we have experienced through colleagues from London, Brussels and Chicago have helped us on the way and kept us the track. In the midst of the scatteredness and intensity of doing the mission we can take the means to occasion the deep experience of being, effulgence and collegiality that keep on distinguishing us from the social agency, the slick professional and the cult commune. We can't afford to postpone or relegate such experiences to special summer events in Chicago. These have to keep showing the way that every House can develop the spiritualized Midas touch which turns the mundane experiences of Life together into avenues to the Other World in the midst of this world.

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