

ORDER POLITY: THE EXPERIMENT OF THE EIGHTIES

CONTEXT

In January of this year, the Panchayat resolved to do research in a number of arenas preparatory to the Research Assembly and the Global Priors' Council. The arenas chosen were critical to our future life, and in all cases, arenas in which research and brooding is going on on many fronts this year, and has gone on for a number of years. This paper is an attempt to pull together thinking in the arena of Order polity. Most critical to this series of reflections were the Polity Document, the work of the Legal Commission in 1974, and reflections and lectures given by JWM in 1974. There is a new surge of thinking now taking place in this arena, which has occasioned the following. This paper intends not to answer the issues which concern us now, but to provide a perspective through which they can be responsibly approached. Although focussed on the polity of the Order, this paper is primarily concerned with the frame in which Order polity is considered.

I

1 The first factor which must be considered in order to discuss Order polity is why--on behalf of what--are we doing this experiment.

2 The history of the 20th Century has been the history of the global development of consciousness of consciousness. The image of the earth-rise as a symbol of the "global village" characterizes the new sense of ourselves that our century has seen created. In this latter part of the century, we, humankind, find ourselves struggling no longer intellectually, but in practical social mechanics, to put into form our renewed vision of humanness. This new vision began even in the mid-nineteenth century, as visionaries like Sun Yat Sen, Marx, Kierkegaard, Woodrow Wilson, Van Gogh and so many others foresaw the new era. Now, as a century has passed, their vision has developed and taken structural form worldwide. Nationhood has replaced colonialism, great experiments such as the mass market and the People's Republic of China have been established, human rights have become practical, measurable and enforced

across the world to an ever-increasing degree. Economic development, once a charitable concern for the poor, has become an institutional goal--staffed, analyzed and programmatically attacked worldwide. In many nations, like Brazil, Japan, Malaysia, South Korea, Taiwan and Venezuela this has been done with notable success. Even the seemingly--unavoidable propensity toward war is checked in social institutions like the SALT talks. Vietnam genuinely raised the question for many as to whether armed violence was a viable means of conflict resolution in our times.

3 The world has changed in our century at a faster rate than ever before, so much so that it seems more suitable to discuss the century by decades than as a whole sweep. Virtually every social form in which the average person participates has been either invented or totally re-formulated within the span of that person's memory, or at least within his lifetime. Even a farmer in a non-technological society, whose life-style approximates that of his ancestors centuries ago, participates in economic schemes and government rural development services which have been invented over the past ten to twenty years. He necessarily shows a level of political and bureaucratic sophistication which is foreign even to his parents on the same farm. At the very least, this one, supposedly "untouched" by the racking social change of the century, has had to create for himself and his family a story as to why they are untouched by the changes they hear of. The creation of this story has transformed the rural family as radically as would their move into the city. In sum, we all live within structures which we have seen created. From global systems like the UN and multinational corporations to the nation, the living units and even the family, it seems as if only Adam and Eve had so thorough a chance to live in the midst of the radically new.

4 The experience of our lives in our self-made structures is one of terrifying instability. We learn again and again that history has few lessons that apply to us. What has withstood the test of time in our midst? China, with its centuries of experience? Certainly not as the People's Republic. The family, the history-long basis of society? Certainly not as a unit in which husband and wife may consider functioning equitably and in which children are an option to be decided about. The global economy? Certainly not as a system which grasps itself as globally interdependent, with a finite energy supply. There is an authentic sense of sociological fragility, to the degree that we have a global distaste for symbolism of ultimate things. It is as if our national leaders and symbols, our flags, our religious imagery, our stock markets and great business houses were all a bit like inflated currency, which we must necessarily use, but which we inherently distrust.

5 This sense of instability is coupled with a profound consciousness of disorder at every level of society. There is at all times the vague disease of knowing that one's context could be utterly shifted, one's home robbed, one's relative arrested, one's family altered irrevocably, one's plane hijacked--at a moment's notice. Some resort to outlandish modes of self-protection, or great political campaigns, but the awareness of profound disorder is more radical than these surface symptoms: it is the continual awareness of change, which we live with all of our lives.

6 A real tribute to human consciousness is the fact that in the remarkable flux of this century, the majority of people do manage day in and day out to create their lives. We 20th Century people naturally long for some stabilizing factor, be it a moral revival or a new political regime,

and yet at the same time we are marked like Cain--children of this century of flux, who profoundly and thoroughly distrust anything which calls itself ultimate, stable, or a final solution. Our tastes run more in the direction of short-term doses of new quasi-solutions.

7 We who live today have been ruthless creators of new attitudes, forms and social style throughout our lifetimes. If you live in 1981, it is only because you are light years more capable than your most creative ancestor at living in, organizing and understanding social chaos. But 1981 finds our inventiveness pushed to the nub because there is a distinct sense among us that the "time has come" for the creative fruit of this awesome century. We believe that the components we are now building are the real components of the future. This is a type of task which none of us have ever seriously considered. We who create constantly temporal forms, attitudes and style, find ourselves cowed, scandalized at the prospect of doing a "final" job of any kind. At the same time, we have lived most of a century by pretty much the same vision and guidelines that our forefathers discerned in principle in the 1800s; the time has come for the new society; we know this, and yet the task seems simply a hopeless one.

8 In the arena of global economics, the fuel crisis challenges the globe, but underlying this is the question of how an economy is controlled. In describing U.S. society with its democratic, capitalist approach, Daniel Bell is concerned with the political base of economic issues:

No one 'voted in' the market economy and the industrial revolution, but today issues of direction of the economy, costs, redress, priorities and goals have become matters of conscious and debated social policy....

The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, p. 226

9) The United States under the Reagan Administration finds itself contemplating necessary economic moves, weighing these against their social cost. It is easy inside this nation to forget that everyone around the world, from nations to individuals, are in the midst of the same process at this time. The crisis that we all experience in this process is not merely relative to a short-term spending policy, but that we view our economic decisions now in the light of the construction of the society of the future. The struggle is with the creation of a viable system that maintains the social victories that this century has won. Whatever a country's GNP today, it finds itself in the situation of creating forms that honor its social intents, because the rise of local participation is such that no other economic schemes are effective. The challenge is the detailed creation of this worldwide system.

10 In the political arena, the world experiences a dizzying proliferation of power factors directly participating in decision-making. The rise of Local Man, and of a mass audience through popular communication media, has made raw democracy the unavoidable mode in even the most restrictive, non-participatory societies. Everyone participates in decisions of all sorts, but not everyone has a vehicle for influencing those decisions. Disorder has become a powerful force for influencing decisions when no other mode seems suitable, whether it takes the form of terrorism, riots, coups d'etat, or simply the form of disestablished styles of participation like non-voting or black marketeering. The real issue with this vehicle of influence

is that it is limited to the few, just as are the established structures. This disruptive stance is especially unnerving today because, as with the Iranian student captors of the US hostages, with the PLO, and with countless other examples, the disruptive elite has more immediate power than any recognized structure, and must be dealt with. Authority becomes a question of raw power, detached from symbolic concerns of any kind. Decisions become ultimately in the hands of a series of ad hoc elites who function by their capacity to negotiate a path through the maze of popular opinion, the press, ineffective established structures and illegitimate but powerful emerging structures. This crisis has to do with the creation of ways to provide not only participation, but power, in the hands of local people in such a way that it can be used peacefully. To date, our concern in this century has been for participation--almost at any cost. The quandary now is for orderly, equitable forms of power.

11 The cultural arena experiences today a resurgence of traditionalism. From Pope John Paul II's reaffirmation of the Church's 19th Century pillars to America's renewed interest in the military, India's return of Mrs. Ghandi, and the spread of Islamic social policy, there is a return to old visions. For the most part, however, the visions returned to are not foundational, ancient ones at all, but rather recent "good old days" dressed up to look like ancient foundations. There is a longing for the essential, the foundational, but it is coupled with the awareness that none of us have ever really experienced such a vision, basically distrust such things categorically, and might well reject it if we had it. Theodore Roszak's Person/Planet, M.Ferguson's The Aquarian Conspiracy, and to a degree Toffler's The Third Wave all get at this longing for the sort of foundational religious vision out of which societies are born, when the world around is experienced as a desert. And yet even Roszak can articulate only an image, the monk, on which to hang his hopes. This yearning, this putting of flesh upon the foundational vision of life which can validate social structures, is our challenge today.

12 Order polity is thus an experiment on behalf of the emerging social vehicle and religious mode, by which we build among ourselves structures that are socially transparent, in response to the issues mentioned above. At the same time, the polity of the Order is an experiment in the human ethos, the stance, required to do this job fully, ultimately, in this era.

II

13 The second factor, then, which must be clarified to deal with Order polity is where we stand--who we are--doing this experiment.

14 First of all, we are people who care in this time. We have identified ourselves quite self-consciously over the years first with the visionaries, and then with the revolutionaries, of our century. We have committed our lives quite directly to the spiritual, imaginal and structural service of the world's suffering as we saw it. We have altered our task, our configurations and the story of our work, time and time again as we have discerned new points of human suffering to which we were called. As part of the world just described, we experience fully the crises which our planet faces as it turns now to construct Century 21.

15 But this Order is a force which grasps itself as something more than Century 20 good people. We understand ourselves to be ultimate revolutionaries, even when this is difficult to distinguish from the unavoidable temporal model creation that is life in our times. We are not finally responsible to society for the shape of its new social vehicle and new religious mode. Nor are we responsible simply for declaring to society what is happening to it, like cinematic depictions of the Old Testament prophets. Rather we are, as Gogarten puts it, responsible to God for the world. That is, we are concerned not that the current reconstruction of the social and religious vehicles stands present not only to social effectiveness, balanced social processes, equitable distribution and so on and on, but also that structures are created that honor the human and sociological origin and aim of those who participate, that advance and extend the impact of the Other World, of Teilhard de Chardin's "noosphere", in the midst of this world. As ultimate revolutionaries in this fashion, we grasp ourselves to be the dynamic of the "Church as Social Pioneer" articulated by H. Richard Niebuhr; people of the "League" as described by Hermann Hesse; people following Nikos Kazantzakis' "crimson line" through history. This is our general calling.

16 Furthermore, this Order is a self-consciously covenanted social structure structure which grasps itself as something more than isolated 20th Century revolutionaries. We understand ourselves to be self-consciously in covenant with the Saints of the Twentieth Century, those of the Church, the League, and the Crimson Line. More immediately, we understand ourselves to be in covenant with specific people, under a specific discipline, forsaking all other means and groups by which the necessary deed might be done. We are the people of the Order: Ecumenical, the Institute of Cultural Affairs, and the Ecumenical Institute. Even those of us who understand ourselves as members of only one of these in fact participate in all three, as the only O:E, EI and ICA which exist are those which intricately depend historically and programmatically on each other. (Separating the three is as impossible as my husband wishing to marry a me who did not have my mother, my education or my dislike of turnips. No such being exists!) This is not a reflection on the future, but on the decision one makes in the present relative to fate. We know, in many cases personally, our founders. We have still resident among us personal memory of all of our common history. It is this particular group for which we foresake all others until our death. This sort of covenant is rather different from that of established Orders, for which founders and history are documented rather than living persons. This covenant shares with that of matrimony the life-giving scandal of seeing life's ultimate glory in the midst of particular, delimited imperfections. Thus, we have no intention of creating a vision of utopian primal community. Rather, we are constructing it everyday —out of ordinary work, with the ordinary people who show up called to do it in this way. This is our specific covenant.

17 Finally, this Order is a covenanted body which grasps itself as something more than "newlyweds". We have spent 26 years experimenting with being a pluriform, family Order. During this time we have created an enormous body of conscious and unconscious uniqueness. We use language which holds images common to us and symbols which have significance only in our shared experience. Our styles of speaking, decorating a room, making charts and reports, singing and so on we have intentionally commonized. But we have also unintentionally commonized countless aspects of our life-style purely by living so long and so intimately together. A great deal of this commonality is probably irrelevant, but in its foundational respects, it comprises an operating ethos which we call "corporateness". Because we are in the process of inventing this ethos day by day, we can recognize it more readily than define it. It shows in one's dress, one's mode of

speaking in a group, one's method of attacking a problem, one's table conduct, and one's relations with spouse and children. Order members may say that they "sense" someone is having a struggle with his or her Order covenant. What is often meant is that the anticipated practices of corporateness are somehow missing. We have named and struggled to articulate corporateness, but we did not invent it--our aim to become a pluriform, family Order in today's world thrust it upon us. This is the quality in our body which the authors of Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life point to with the term "charism", as used in the Christian Church:

The two dimensions of charism, gift and call, each connote a slightly different experience in the one who receives it. "Gift" implies something pleasing, acceptable, eagerly anticipated, perhaps. On the other hand, the word 'call' can sometimes connote the idea of an intrusion, something unexpected....

Shaping the Coming Age of Religious Life,
Lawrence Cada et. al., p. 167

Underneath our external action and internal structures, we have received--like it or not--corporateness as the mark, the sign of this body. In a restricted sense, it could be said that this is finally the mission of this body. In any case, we are not constructing primal community--the NSV and the NRM--out of just any posture. We are doing it out of the posture of corporateness, which we are inventing daily. This could be called our charism; it might be clearer to call it our particular ethos.

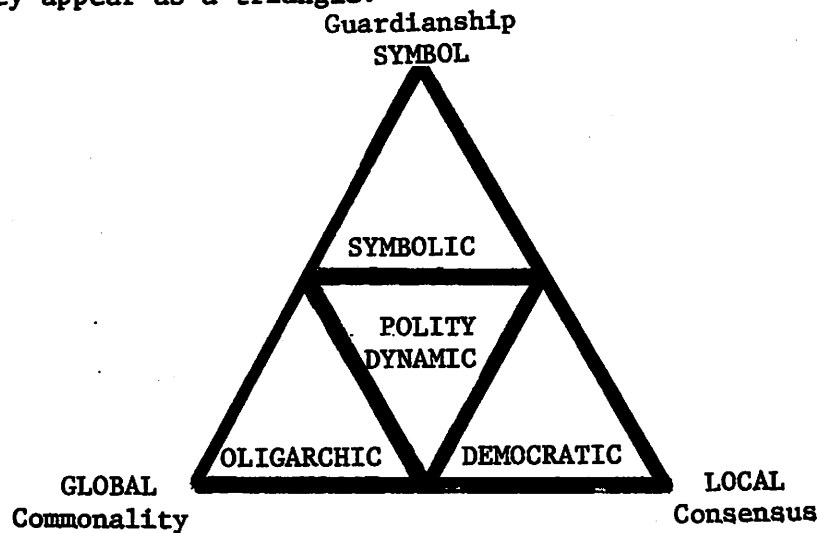
18 Marked by this calling, bound in this covenant and creating this ethos, we of the O:E/ICA/EI understand ourselves to be a religious Order. This simply means that we are out to embody the holy life in such a way that all of life might be holy. We do this as individuals and families, living out each day's timeline and assignments as a demonstration of integrity, be it in the creation of national development strategies, in demanding of oneself authenticity in giving a talk, or working for a check to ensure self-support. At the same time, as a corporate people, we embody the holy life of primal community. We are not a mutual enablement society, but a community intent upon using its internal systems as a demonstration sign in themselves. In this respect, we create structures at every level of our common life that allow us to struggle through what responsible social forms look like, be that in assignment making, cash flow decisions or program creation. We use our own lives--their time, space and relationships--as a laboratory for post-modern sanctity. In this respect, our polity exists to create structures, practices and guidelines for decision-making which can transparently be used to deal with the world's crises. Apart from the obvious strategic considerations, this ceaseless involvement in creating polity models in our internal life may partially account for our basic disinterest in direct political action in the external mission.

III

19 The third factor which must be clarified here is the dynamics of our polity.

20 Standing, then, in this relationship to society, the crucial insight of our polity is that we are out to maintain creative tension in every aspect of our lives between the oligarchic (or bureaucratic) dimension, the democratic (or community) dimension and the symbolic (or aristocratic)

dimension. These three are not structures, but rather the three dynamics which occur in the midst of any structure or decision-making process. They appear as a triangle:



The Order Polity document, The Order: Ecumenical--A Collection of Brief Essays on the Dynamics of Order Polity, catalogues Order structures in great detail. It describes these polity dynamics as follows:

There are three universal dynamics operative in any polity system: The community or democratic, the oligarchic or bureaucratic, and the symbolic or aristocratic. The function of the democratic is to form the consensus among the grassroots; the function of the bureaucratic is to implement the consensus of the body politic; the function of the symbolic is to announce, ritualize and confirm the consensus that has formed. No group ever makes a decision without in some fashion involving all three dynamics.... At best the three dynamics operate in tension, each having a unique function which complements the other two. Power does not reside in any one of the three dynamics but rather in their interaction....

The Order: Ecumenical, Panchayat, 1978-79, p. 80

21 Foundational to any decision is an implementing dynamic. No decision can be said actually to be made until it is carried out. This implementation is always in some respect an "on-behalf-of" function, from a woman cooking the family's dinner to the taxpayers in a society paying their taxes. Thus, it is called the oligarchic dynamic. The word here is used indicatively, not in the pejorative sense which modern political revolutions sometimes use. This dimension is that without which consensus of any kind, and symbology of even the highest degree are empty exercises. When this pole is weak, a polity dynamic is unable to effectively transmit its vision into reality, and the entire dynamic can become discredited, as when the Roman Empire had extended herself beyond her capacity to administer. This also is seen when parents threaten punishment of their children which they cannot enforce. On the other hand, when this pole is overemphasized, pragmatic concerns block the new and shackle the society in bonds of unnecessary procedure and red tape. This is seen when budget rules priorities and when plans are made contingent upon whether or not a community can accomplish an initial step. This dynamic has a global quality, in that its perspective is comprehensive implementation of a consensus. Its value is commonality.

22 The relational pole of any decision-making process is a visioning dynamic. New directions emerge from some specific concern, new insight or suffering in the midst of the social process. This emergence is always in some respect a function of the "common will" of the body, from the declaration coming today out of the unions in Poland to the youngest child suggesting that the family stop for ice cream. Thus, it is called the democratic pole. The word is used here to mean the broad community, the common will, and not intended in any positive sense of societal virtue. This dimension is that without which the most comprehensive and effective oligarchy has no support and the symbolic dynamic no vital grounding. When this pole is weak, a polity dynamic becomes disrelated from life experience, and lacks the vitality to change, as in England's administration of the American colonies. There is also a propensity for the formal and informal dynamics of polity to separate, as can happen in schools when the administration is unresponsive to student inventiveness. When this pole is tyrannous, new directions and possibilities abound without the practical means or depth commitment to carry them out, as the New Left of the sixties experienced. This dynamic has a local quality, as its perspective is sensitivity to particularized experience. Its value is consensus.

23 The rationalizing, or making sense, pole of any decision is a meaning-giving dynamic. Decisions made within any group are recognized as such formally or informally before they are considered as a part of the life of the group. This pole is bringing the body to self-consciousness of their decision, explaining its implications and garnering support for it. This recognition and honoring of change--setting aside the old decision and putting on the new one--necessarily relates to the foundations of the group. This is seen in a President's declaration of war, or in the phrasing of a diploma. It is making obvious, visible and tangible that which previously was unmarked reality, and is thus termed the symbolic dynamic. "Symbolic" is used here in the active sense mentioned, not in the sense of "only symbolic", applied to things which have false significance, like cowboy boots worn in the Loop. This dimension is that without which new moves remain illegitimate, and necessarily fracture off from the mainstream of the body; leaving a multiplicity of disrelated activities. When the symbolic pole collapses, there is a propensity for the group to fracture, as the Christian Church has experienced, because reality and authority do not coincide. This is frequently experienced in the family in our time, when fundamental decisions are not commonly brought to self-consciousness or marked. When this pole tyrannizes, a group remains unified at the cost of effective response to its situation. Russia under the Czars and the Christian Church before the Protestant revolt are examples. The quality of this pole is that of symbol--a tangible thing that points beyond itself. The value in this dynamic is guardianship of the whole.

IV

24 What, then, are our concerns and values in Order polity at this time?

25 Traditionally, we have viewed the oligarchic or bureaucratic dynamic as the overextended one, and the symbolic pole as collapsed. The Polity Document states:

In our time, the bureaucratic has been the dominant force, and neither symbolic figures nor grassroots people are immune from snares of 'red tape' of administrative machinery. Neither the symbolic nor the local exercises the questioning necessary to keep the bureaucratic effective in service to society as a whole by carrying out its will....

Earlier in these reflections, three tasks were noted for those creating the new social vehicle and new religious mode. Of these, the creation of a global economic system seems to relate to the oligarchic dimension of polity; the building of orderly and equitable forms of local power is related to the democratic dimension; and the practical demonstration of the new religious vision is related to the symbolic. None of this seems really new in itself. The newness lies in the sense that this is "for real", that the task now is seriously to construct the new century. Authenticating social experimentation in this kind of a practical era permeates all of these dynamics. It is the key task, and certainly the arena in which we as a body experience our key temptations away from creating the "paper mache" which we are called to. The quandary which faces us overall is how to use the dynamics which we are to do these jobs.

26 Two considerations are basic in developing polity strategy here: first, how to deal with imbalances and second, the difference between indirect and direct action. On imbalance, we have customarily said (and consistently observed) that it is futile to attempt to squelch the tyrannizing pole and beef up the collapsed one: that is precisely what is the most impossible. One is out to use the third dynamic, in this case the democratic pole, exemplified in Collegiums, PSUs and Councils, to maneuver relative to the other two poles. On direct and indirect action, it is necessary to rehearse that we are a religious Order institutionally, a sociological transparency rather than a proestablishment institution. We do sociological tactics in our direct mission. TASC is a direct demonstration of global economics; work with initiating RVI is aimed at local empowerment; the new religious posture is addressed directly in LENS and RS-I, to name only a few things. Our polity, on the other hand, is indirect mission. The integrity with which our polity maintains the Order is what enables effective external mission to continue. As the polity of a body covenanted in a mode of corporateness, what works internally cannot be expected to work unaltered as an external tactic. Thus, we create forms for ourselves internally, such as self-support, with an eye on how they could be adapted to the world's needs, and externally we create forms such as community cooperatives that deal directly with societal needs. Both kinds of forms deal with the same underlying contradictions, but internal and external forms are often--not necessarily always--different. There is a real urge lately to merge the two; that's great, but it can't always be done, and is by no means necessary.

27 The intent of the foregoing paper was to provide a place to stand, a perspective, from which to consider Order polity. The following is a random list of reflections toward our meetings in July and August that have emerged in the use of these screens:

- a.) It is important to us now to create firmer ways of recognizing our consensus when it is made. This has to do with structures for consensus-making and with symbolisation. We seem to harm ourselves waiting for agreement, rather than consensus.
- b.) The more Platonic assignments method and the more Aristotelian strategy method each require up to a quarter of reversed method after the Council to be completed. We may be ready now to merge these methods for both making assignments and building strategy in some manner, if not merge the assignments and Council themselves.

- c.) Our corporateness is a far deeper set of operating ethical screens than we can now articulate. This is noticeable in the extent to which we find it easier to meet and talk things through specifically than to articulate and use common operating principles. It is time to state in greater depth the components of corporateness from an indicative perspective. This is the key to our work with Order forms, classes and symbolic life.
- d.) We need to state the common set of programs we already have. A few, like the Exposition, are in only one place. Others, like LENS, are in many places, and a few, like the Religious House, are universal. All are our common programs.
- e.) There is increasing necessity in our work for regular, structural tactics, more than for short-term, maneuver-style work. Our concerns with training, quality religious houses, symbolic life and formation, to mention only a few, depend on this regular, ongoing mode. This requires not only an emphasis on regular structures, but much more difficult, the creation of a new story about being structural people.
- f.) Society at large and in all of its forms struggles today with covenant. This, more than anything else like vows or rule, is where our signal to the world lies. It is also the point of our transparency religiously, and seems the appropriate place to explore.
- g.) Symbolic maneuvers are needed in all aspects of our public face alongside our phenomenal practical systems; eg, maybe it is time to make a new move on one set of global books, one self-support bottom line across the world, clearer relationships among our national Boards, etc..
- h.) We are clearer than ever before that symbolic leadership is relative to authenticity, not power. We need to state the newness in this role somehow commonly; eg, it seems more helpful at this time to consider the one Global Priory than Area Priors, Centrum Priors, Nexus First-Among-Equals Priors and all that.
- i.) There is more spirit stirring afoot than ever before--just running around loose. This must be objectified and self-consciously used, or it could well become a genuine threat. It is probably the only thing that could. This seems far more a matter of making a move than discovering the exactly perfect tools.