

THE SOUL OF THE ORDER: ECUMENICAL

Rough Draft

This Order was our effort to put sociological form on a group of people -- actually on the SOUL of a group of people, Yes, groups of people who find themselves bound together by a covenantal decision each made individually as well as corporately as a group have a soul -- a group soul. (See C G Jung) Their decision was and continues to be united by an overall common purpose. Even when they have dispersed into many different activities as we have been the soul remains intact -- mysteriously and wondrously. How do I know this? I experience it -- a great feel first of all underpinned by a great resolve (individually and as a group) NOW needs a great THINK. So let's think together.

Thinking organically, we bunch of ordinary/unordinary people find themselves one with each other in a way none of us quite understand -- in the past but especially NOW. In the past we decided to call ourselves a family order -- or rather I would say NOW an Order of Families. Turning it around that way somehow enables me to see and emphasize that the family was and is the significant building block of the edifice we built and the "edifice" we and God continue to build.

This shouldn't be surprising to us actually. The word choice of "ecumenical" says that. It means "universal" -- all inclusive. We did understand that we were to be an inclusive community -- all ages, all cultures, all traditions. The traditions part is what makes it so challenging -- even to the point of sheer and total impossibility. How on earth could we Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Secularists, Catholic, Protestant -- even my kind "Southern Baptist" - those who protested against the Protestants!!!

I'm trying to say that this oneness being created even now transcends us as hunks of protoplasm who lived and worked together back in the 1960's and on. We were one corporate people then and in some eerie sense still are. The inclusiveness for better or for worse ALSO applies to the wholeness of our lives. We are marked people. The Style will long endure. Succeeding generations are already deeply influenced by this style. And it is for the betterment of humankind. Our flaws were tragic and longlasting. We can only ask forgiveness and state our apologies where appropriate. We were and are a learning organization.

So let's think even deeper together about the Soul of the Order. The Great Feel is uppermost in my awareness. I feel set apart, different from most of the people I meet. My blood family certainly feels that I'm set apart from them and different -- sometimes with admiration, even following my lead. Ties have been severed beyond repair. Between these extremes there's a middle ground -- gray, uncertain, suspicious yet eager to have me near again. Why? I wonder. However, the rift between us can never finally be spanned and reconnected. "You can't return to family again" would be my novel to write. I am set apart, chosen,. I will always feel different from most other people as well as my family.

The Great Resolve is more amorphous when I first seek to state it -- vague, abstracted from life in general. I resolved to care for every human being, the earth, animals, plants, minerals, dirt, rocks -- the whole of creation. That resolve has never wavered only deepened and expanded in my awareness. True I sometimes am not so aware of it. I get absorbed in caring for myself OR just for those closest to me. I even shake my fist at God and ask why the march is so painful and long -- even preparing my breakfast each morning seems to take an enormous effort. I think I lack true abundance. But then I look again and I have everything worth having --

income, a roof over my head, a loving wife, a job, the possibility of significant engagement. I guess I can't stop wondering why I can't also have a good old ordinary profession -- why can't I have that, too.

Care for others, especially the care for ALL others on the planet requires I let go of personal, self-centered care. It also requires embracing and appreciating with a joyful heart whatever livelihood comes my way. Any occupation that serves a social need and is NOT harmful to other people or the earth is a doorway to universal care. This is a GREAT RESOLVE!

The GREAT THINK is the greatest challenge of all. The other two seem like naming something that already is. I just am those things. But to conceive and get a clear mental picture of the future Order, a group more intensely bonded together and more actively interchanging their work and their lives -- it's like its never been thought of before. No pattern from the past seems equal to what is needed now. The field is wide open. The only major obstacle is the natural resistance people have to extraordinary social forms that don't fit any mould society has already prepared.

A worldwide network of retreat centers caring for Those Who Care is graphic enough of an image. The centers would interchange major learnings and new skills learned. They would have some programs designed and conducted in common in order to increase the impact needed for changes in our usual social forms.

Those who care would also have focus groups, task forces or guilds that work specifically on alleviating human suffering and injustices. The Watershed project in India provides us with a starting point for these guilds. The guilds they have emerging deal with) _____.

So how do we describe the Soul of the Order? Joe Mathews named it when he said it is CORPORATENESS. In many ways that's still accurate. That's who we ARE - like the three musketeers -- all for one and one for all. But Joe also knew we were still quite diverse, quite unfocused, each going our own way. He also saw we are on our way toward corporateness. He said we dream that one day when all of us are cremated and our ashes are all put in this one large jar -- corporate at last! What an image!

So that's one element of our vision. It is very much like Thich Nhat Hahn' Five Mindfulness Trainings. He says in effect that we are on our way to right livelihood, right consumption, right action and the rest. We are in training for these values, principles and Stand Fors!

Our description has some times been given to us by others -- The Jesus of our day -- what poetry!? I guess Joe gave us that one himself. "Out to save the world" -- in a way, but far too arrogant -- or is it? Norman Jewison during IERD in 1983 in Malibu called us "fluid people". We certainly feel very fluid. The people of the Question --- who said that? Was it Harrison Owens? I can't recall.

What are the learnings from having been the Order Ecumenical?

1. RS-I was and is our pivot foot. We stand on this articulation of the gospel. God - Christ - Holy Spirit - Church -- those papers and the structure of the lectures are my identity and at the heart of the Soul of the Order.

2. The second great learning I have from that: always remain true to the structure of a person's mind. When you edit their paper, chart it. Do not delete or diminish the structure. So it is with the lectures in RS-I. God lecture structure is: external situation, internal crisis, existential or life question this raises and the escapes we humans devise from responding authentically to that life question. ETC. Any training of river guides will follow that structure just like the Tagore ritual in India followed the structure of the Daily Office.
3. The third great learning is a corollary to those two learnings. The freedom I have as a human being (in Jesus Christ) allows me to think any thought, feel any feel, do any action, experience any experience. There literally and absolutely nothing I cannot do as long as I love the Mystery - God!!!! Underscore, underscore, underscore!!!! That is what allows me to explore "New Age" thinking, the consciousness movement, whatever else you call the spirit movement of our day.
4. The fourth learning pertains more directly to the formation of an Order. It is essential to have a common touchstone. In our case it was a common self-understanding - RS-I. The touchstone, we used to say, could be that every morning at 6 am we all walk through a room and pick up the same cup, put it down and walk out. But there has to be a common touchstone.
5. The fifth learning only follows and reiterates that. It is essential to rehearse that touchstone on a daily, weekly basis -- whatever is practically possible and will keep the touchstone alive.
6. The sixth learning is discipline. Setting up your common structures and doing what you say you are going to do is what discipline is all about. Teaching the young discipline is the major challenge of our current situation -- in the year 2002. I have a course I'm developing on that.
7. The seventh learning is commitment. Ask for an answer and life response to the question: will you make this commitment for life. You don't have an order without that. I well remember a colleague who chose to answer: give me time! But you must ask that question.
8. The eighth is mission. Whatever you do is for the sake of specific, concrete mission. That's the value and foundation of why the Watershed project was chosen. It's at the heart of any Order.
9. The ninth is self-support. Fundraising cannot be the only mode of doing that. You must be able and willing to have some work outside the chosen mission to support the rest. It's a fundamental principle of the capitalistic world we've inherited and has literally won the day in our life time worldwide.
10. The tenth is you must be willing to pay the price - your energy, your time, your psyche, your very spirit, your soul will be stretched to the maximum. Why? This is because corporateness is basically unacceptable in the social fabric of our current understanding of a free society. We think the only way to be free is to be an independent, autonomous, stand alone individual. In other words you are swimming against the tide of the way society is going. As result most of us will have to give up our careers (if we ever had one) and social success. The day when this is not the case may be closer than we think. But right now I believe it is still true.

Some tips on how to develop this:

1. Manual work together "seeing each other sweat"
2. Regular, edge foundational studies are essential in some form -- not necessarily books and articles -- could be talks, discussions, visiting projects - not just intellectual stuff.
3. Be willing to play the game -- follow the rules even when you disagree with them (Dr. Phil's training for five days)
4. Make the group decisions by consensus.
5. No complaining - before you complain or raise an issue have your own creative solution thought through and ready to present. Always state the mind of the group -- a very difficult concept and practice to learn. If you don't agree with what the group decides plan and plot on how you can change the mind of the group before the next gathering.

How would I train an Order:

1. HAVE THEM EXAMINE AND QUESTION THEIR INDIVIDUAL BELIEFS (ones you can observe from your own behavior. Then decide what beliefs actually serve their well-being and what does not. Again ask Dr. Phil. Read and stud *Self Matters*. This is a God session. One day.
2. EXAMINE THEIR GROUP BELIEFS and what does and does not serve their mission. This is also a God session. One day
3. LOCATE & REFINE THE ESSENCE OF WHO WE ARE AS A GROUP - what is the Soul of our organization, the values most centrally held. This is a Christ session. One day.
4. BUILD THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE ORDER'S STRUCTURE: symbol system, knowledge system, message system, work system and discipline system - This is Holy Spirit or life style and a Church session. Three days.
5. PLAN THE NEXT YEAR, 3 MONTHS, MONTH and decide who does what. This is a Church session also. Three days.

A total of 9 days would be required.