

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HUMAN SOCIETY

We want to continue to push at getting hold of the New Reality. The last four talks were about the new reality from the various poles of the triangle. These next four talks are an attempt to **begin** probing at the relationship between the poles and the dynamic reality there. The subject of this talk is *The Significance of Human Society*, or what it is like to live before the vision of the eternal in the midst of doing the utterly temporal. I spent a long time brooding on that question and I decided that it is a difficult tension. The rest of this is an elaboration on that major insight.

This has been a radical year for all of us, even here in Siberia (Chicago Nexus). We discovered that there really is no Siberia. There is no place to go where the radicality of the mission and the radicality of the task of caring for the world is not present. In the past, our experience was something like facing a huge spotlight so bright that it blinded all of us, and all we could do was testify to the fact that a spotlight was there. We would go here and there, into little communities, telling people that there's a spotlight out there. They would say, "Where?" We would point it out: "Right there!" They would look, then say, "Well, I be damned., There is a big spotlight out there, and it is so bright I can hardly see!" Everywhere we went we testified to the fact that there is a big spotlight that blinds you. That is no longer our task or our experience of the task. Rather, we have our backs to the spotlight and because we do, we are no longer blinded but we see life and human history illuminated and the human condition vindicated in the glow of the spotlight. The crucial issue is discerning between the reality and the shadow. We do not want to mistake our shadow for what is out there. We don't want to go around testifying to our own shadow. Rather, we want to testify to what is actually out in the world. That's the only sense I can make out of why we are giving all these talks. It is to testify, not to our own shadow, but to the human condition, which is finally illuminated in the light of the new reality.

Frankly, I liked the new reality better when we were calling it the Kingdom of God, not because I understood it better, but because I didn't have this incredible sense of being cast adrift. There was something anchoring about that image. But also like an anchor there was something limiting about it, and I suppose the image of the New Reality is a better image.

My first point has to do with what it means to live before the temporal with the vision of the eternal. We are called upon to witness to the fact of human fulfillment. We have done that before. We did that primarily as an individual thing. All of our religious training—and I mean that for all of us, whatever our religious training—gave us images of individual fulfillment, of individual salvation. There's no image of social salvation, of what it means for an entire society to be saved, redeemed, or for the entire human situation to be vindicated. We're coming to terms with a sense of the redemption of the entire human situation as opposed to our own individual selves.

Human history seems to have become transparent in the intensification of what we have been doing, what we have been knowing and what we have been being. It used to be that our own lives became transparent. It was as if you were walking along doing something or struggling to get on top of some insight or struggling to be some kind of style in the midst of washing dishes and suddenly, if you'd been good and had been to House Church, life would open up for you, and you would sense the profound. We used to live between these events like Tarzan between trees, swinging from one profound illumination to another, just hoping we never missed the vine and plunged into a trough of utter mundanity never to return again.

I don't sense that we do this anymore. You don't start the day hoping you will have some kind of profound encounter. Rather, you start the day confident in the transparency of human history itself. You do not experience one little thing after another after another, but the fact that all human history is revealing its meaning.

How do you get that said clearly? To me a key has been our experience with authorization this year. For a bunch of people who do not seek publicity, we certainly have been in the public eye, sometimes not very happily. We have certainly been in the offices of those who control the public imagination, but not always happily. We've seen a breakloose in webbing together people who understand themselves to be directing the human destiny, in a way that we never have before.

When I was in Gibson, North Carolina (a strange experience which will show up throughout this talk), one of the first things I experienced was kind of wild. I was sitting there working to get the consult off the ground and in strolls a local official. Usually when the dignitary of someplace shows up or some big-timer comes in, everybody stops what they are doing and jumps up and pumps his hand. They get all the youth out

of the room in case one might hit his thumb with a hammer and say something to embarrass us. They drag out the last few real donuts that somebody gave us and put a whole spoon of instant coffee into a cup so that he can have a real cup of coffee. It's like life just comes to an end when these people come.

In Gibson, the official came in and nobody did these things. Somebody gave him a crayon and told him to go draw a sign over there and he trotted off happy as a clam to draw and draw, but that wasn't the shocking thing. The shocking thing was that he did this really crummy piece, picked it up and brought it over to somebody I didn't even know who just showed up out of the woods the other day to be on the auxiliary. He asked if the drawing was right and this person told him, "No! It's not right. Take it back and do it again." So he picked it up and did it again. This was shocking.

Human history becomes transparent in that kind of moment, because you begin to see that the salvation of individuals will not finally rebuild this earth. The earth will be rebuilt because entire social relationships are being transformed. The relationship between symbols of power and structures of power is being radically transformed in our time. It is being drawn into a net. I used to think an authorization net was for the sake of catching the project if it fell off the tightrope, but now I see that it is a net for gathering in the future. It is gathering in the building of the earth, and it is spreading itself around this globe.

I wonder what's going to happen the first time all the mayors of all the villages in which we work decide to have a guardian's meeting so they can help. It's going to be striking when all the legislators that we have somehow enabled to see a future vision decide to come together and raise the question of what legislation must be enacted, and when all the financiers and bankers meet to try to deal with the issue of capital formation in local community. According to *U.S. News and World Report*, the single most devastating problem facing local community around the world is the problem of capital formation.

This is a time when we see the affirmation of the human condition. We are no longer isolated witnesses trying to testify to something that no one else has even heard of before. We no longer sense ourselves as prophets lost in the wilderness, trying to cry out and tell somebody about something they probably wouldn't believe even if they heard it right. Rather, we sense that we are in the midst of a sea of those who care.

We all became clear this year that not everybody cares. "I think everyone cares," is a fine image to use in speeches but there are some "s.o.b.'s" who really do not care, or who care so little that they will cut your throat because you do care. I don't fool myself anymore about these people caring. They don't care and they are trying to kill those who do care. They are psychotic in some fashion; you notice that their hatred doesn't seem to have any rational ground and you know they don't care.

I've also discovered this year, however, that everybody can care, that it is possible for every human being to live the care that his life could be. It is never too late for anybody. Somebody who spent 20 years in s-o-b-hood can be converted overnight. He can rise up and walk to the altar and declare himself for caring.

Our witness is not for those few. Our witness now is for those who really do care. As I looked at the people at the Gibson consult, I was shocked to see that it was really true that there are some who care and some who don't care. There were a lot of people at the consult who thought this was a federal project and would get them a job so they could get out of Gibson. They kept waiting for the big federal jobs and they were sorely disappointed when none were offered. And not all those who stayed away from the consult were people who do not care. Many people who care deeply about the future of Gibson did not come to the consult because they sincerely and deeply believed that the consult was running counter to the welfare of the community.

We are experiencing a re-definition of who our enemies are. They are not necessarily the people who sincerely believe that what we are doing is running counter to the betterment of the human condition in the fulfillment of history. They are not those who have another program or another way to come at things. This isn't new, but our enemies today are those who have no program whatsoever except destruction of what seems to be vital in the community. That's a different image, a different witness and a different audience.

This witness that we've encountered is calling us to become detached from the old order of things. This is my second point. In the midst of doing the witness we have sensed a new kind of detachment from the old order. Years ago, we created or accepted a set of polarities for the sake of getting clear on the dynamics of life and ordering our work in the midst of the world. We talked about the polarities

between knowing and doing, the secular and the religious, the dogmatic and the pragmatic, the subjective and the objective, between the mystery and history, between the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. All of these polarities are artificial. We knew at the time that there were not real. We knew that there wasn't any real sense in which people sat around and "knewed" for a while and then they went somewhere else and "doed" for a while, and in the midst of that they might get around to "being" for a while. We knew that was not true of the human condition. But we did that for the sake of getting clarity on what the human condition is. We did it to clarify the dynamics of society and we discerned the economic, political and cultural dimensions. We knew that life wasn't economic from 9:00 to 12:15, political from 1:00 to 3:30 and then cultural after six o'clock. We knew those polarities were artificial. We created or accepted them for the sake of doing something with the world.

This is the time of detachment from those old polarities. A new paradigm is dawning in the midst of the New Reality. We have to learn to operate within that new paradigm; that knowing and doing are one thing; that the secular and the religious are one thing, and they have always been one thing. Even the objective and the subjective are one, and I want to go back to say that later.

I think we discovered this year that there are no rear lines overagainst the front line. There is no place where all you have to do is shine your boots, keep your rifle clean and stand at attention when the generals come by. All we have are front lines. I was amused by the comment that there are some people who think they ought to take a rest from the mission, from the live bullets flying around, and teach in the Academy. These people are sadly mistaken. There are real bullets flying even in the hoary old Academy because there are no rear lines anymore. Siberia is only an image. There are real bullets flying in Siberia, in Chicago Nexus. There is no place to do "R and R" unless you've found some way to make your foxhole do the task for you. The bullets are real everywhere. We have no safe mission anymore and we have no place for people who are worn out to go.

The secular and the religious polarity is an artificial one. This year we have become clear that the deeps are our concern. I have never experienced this body as more secular or more religious, not one more than the other, but both at the same time. The secular and the religious are one. Somebody suggested the other day that a good idea for the retreat might be to use the New Religious Mode charts, but they had to be secularized first. As I remember the New Religious Mode charts, they were the secular expression of something else that was supposed to have been religious. The distinction is being wiped out and it is the deeps that are at stake.

Even the distinction between the objective and the subjective is being called out of being by the New Reality. Our task is no longer to do something to the world, for the world itself is doing something to itself. No outsider can watch this unfold without having his life being caught up in it. I went to Ivy City a while back for a Youth Forum which in and of itself was an existential struggle. Later, they told me "We wanted you here not because we think you're young anymore (actually you're kind of decrepit), but because a man from the Robert F. Kennedy Foundation is attending this forum and he will decide whether the Foundation will fund Community Youth Forum *ad infinitum*."

I don't think I have ever had a more hellish time than I had at that Youth Forum. Nobody showed up for three hours, and when they did come, they gathered in the playground and played basketball. I had to send Carlos Ollison out there with a stick to drive them into the room. Three people sat in the front row and everybody else sat in the back, pinched girls, and drew pictures. Meanwhile, the man from the Kennedy Foundation was taking copious notes. At lunchtime, they all grabbed their food and ran out the door. The scheduled lunch conversation didn't happen because nobody was there for lunch. So we drove them back inside a second time. While we were getting the last group inside, the ones who had already come in found a record player, turned it on, and were dancing in the middle of the Community Youth Forum. The man from the Kennedy Foundation was still taking notes.

Finally, some Muslims, wearing turban and their garb, brought some order and discipline into the situation. But they weren't youth. They were 35-year-old men. They were having a great time at the Forum but they weren't the youth. The youth had become very silent and didn't say anything, so in trying to recoup our losses, we invited the Kennedy Foundation representative to participate with us in the evaluation. Our image was that we would explain to him that this wasn't really a Youth Forum. We would try to get him to see what we intended to do overagainst what actually took place. We sat down and he started to babble that this was the finest thing he had ever seen and he thought there wouldn't be any problem funding it. He said he had never seen anything so effective with youth before. You and I are clear that we are not doing

anything to the world. The world is doing it to itself. You no longer have to beat people into submission to see the new day. You don't even have to remind that there is a new day. You simply have to be there to catalyze the beliefs that they already have of the fulfillment and the essential meaningfulness of life.

However, this growing detachment from the old order has bred a kind of schizophrenia in our body. Because the polarity between objective and subjective as we once understood it, is disappearing, we act strange. We say this is a time of "doing," not a time to get caught up in training and yet, every five minutes a new training construct is being invented. When people talk about a new construct, they call it everything but "training." It seems the word itself has become an anathema. Or reflection. It's been a long time since we had an entire summer task force working on a reflective construct, some kind of retreat, as we did this year. Yet we "know" that reflection is not what needs to happen. What I am trying to say is that we act strangely in the face of these things. I think it is because the old polarities are disappearing while a new paradigm for those realities has not yet emerged.

There is nothing problematic intrinsic in training, reflection, in the religious, in knowing, doing, in the secular, the objective or in the subjective. The problem is something in our paradigm about those things; a new paradigm is being called for. We have to tell ourselves a whole new story about what training is because most of our images date back to 1969. Immediately after we say "training," we add "but I don't mean sitting around the table." Nobody else means that either and everybody knows that nobody else means that. But we have no picture of a reflective construct that allows us to get past the old odyssey. People worked hard in the Research Assembly and created a retreat construct. Nobody is pleased with it. I am not surprised. I could have told you we would not be pleased with it. We are not going to be pleased with anything we come up with in any of these arenas until we give strength and power to a new paradigm about them.

Every time somebody from the Assignments task force talks about making assignments to the "Religious Houses," we all grit our teeth. I saw some people this morning trying to drink coffee to avoid retching every time they mentioned "Religious House." What disturbs us is something intrinsic to our paradigm about these things; something is going out of being and we must let go. What is at stake is our vigilance before the ways of history. We must become and we ought to become vigilant before the trends and the waves of history itself.

This is not a time of starting things, but a time of gathering up. We have to gather up all of our old spirit constructs and put them to the test, to separate the wheat from the chaff. You do not separate the wheat from the chaff by going to individual plants, stalk by stalk, trying to peel off the husk. You gather them all together, you shake them all up, and you see what you have left. That is what has to happen to our spirit constructs. That has to happen with our training constructs, religious house constructs, or the constructs of polity or finance. This is not the time to discard. This is the time to gather up, to draw in. The song about gathering in the sheaves is highly appropriate for this time. The task that we have set out to do will require everything we have. We simply have to take the best of what we have and create the new to fill the gaps. That is a gathering up process. It has to do with putting things to the test. They must either produce or show their deficiency.

I am leading up to a new paradigm of mission. Our vigilance before the ways of history is not finally a paradigm on training, a new paradigm of reflection, spirit or religion, but a new paradigm on mission itself. Because of the new missional paradigm, this year we have finally awakened to the fact that all those people we are working with are not like us. Until now, we have gone with the select. Everybody in the room at an RS-1 was more or less like you. They might not be quite as sharp or as on target. They were probably locked into an old piety and an old morality, but they were essentially like yourself. I will never forget doing an International Training Institute in Bombay and being overwhelmed by the sense of similarity between myself and the participants, even though they were all Indians.

The people we work with now are not like us. They are the masses, and very different from us. It's a sense of the difference between doing an ITI and doing the Human Development Training School. At the ITI I felt the similarity; when I did the Training School, all I felt was the alienness. These fellows are not like me. That is the sense of the people we are working with: they are not like us, because we are working with the masses. That is going to require a new paradigm. It is bringing into being a new paradigm, a new picture of what we are about in history.

In Gibson, none of the white people would even talk to me. If two of us were in the room, they would go to the white person, shake his hand and talk to him. I felt like reading *The Invisible Man* again. There was tremendous anxiety over what was going to happen. When I left Gibson, I got a cake from one old white lady, a bottle of aftershave from another, a kiss on the cheek from a third old white lady, and an invitation to church to fulfill a membership drive from another old white lady. What had happened was a new paradigm. I had not changed and they had not changed; there is no illusion about the fact that they had changed. What had changed was their perception of reality itself. They saw a New Reality.

People really are interested in people who are going to help them do what it is they yearn to do. That's what gets them excited. I don't think anything has impacted me this summer more than the simple statement that what sets us apart is that we do what we say we will. People see and sense something new when they encounter those who do what they say. That is the only way I can explain it. Some of these same people own slum housing, but suddenly a new picture of reality is presented to them. This picture has to do with rebuilding human history and building the earth, not in some abstract sense, but in the concrete sense of doing the yearning that has occupied people's lives.

This is a time of the vindication of human history itself. It is a time when we are called on to be confident in the future, to dare to trust the future. That is hard for us because we are planners. We are model builders who create plans, maneuvers, set up task forces and send out troops to get things done. Of course, we always run up against the iron wall of history itself. It has never been difficult for us to be confident in ourselves and in our own plans. But this is a time of confidence in the future that is coming to be; in the future that is not our future. This calls for a radical kind of faith. The future is coming into being out of a sense of values which we have no idea about, because they are not human values. They are the values of the Mystery itself. Having confidence in such a One and the future of such a One is a supreme test for all of us. Obedience to that future is what is called for, as well as loyalty to local man and the future that will come into being for local man. I believe this is what we mean by Primal Community. Primal Community exists when a human being dares to be confident in the future that is coming into being overagainst his own hopes and anxieties, when he dares to be obedient to that future even though it compels him to die as a self, or causes the body he belongs to to die as the entity that it once knew itself to be. When someone finally gives himself and his loyalty to local man, rather than to his own plans or ideals about life, there you have Primal Community. There you have the New Reality being given flesh, being made incarnate.

We have to stand ready to live the future that is not our own, that is not the future we hope for, but is, nevertheless, the future that will be. Perhaps in the future in this new paradigm, we will talk about two kinds of people. We will still talk about "those who care" and "those who don't care." But, in a new way, with a new image, we will come to talk about "those who believe" and "those who do not believe," not in doctrine, dogma or religion, but those who simply believe that the future coming to be is the future that is needed, demanding our obedience and our loyalty.

In this last year, there has been no phrase that has addressed my life more than the one from *The Journey to the East*, when Leo says to H.H., "Life is not just a game." All this year I've been living out of the image that life is not a game and I think this year I've discovered that it is not. I think we have all discovered that it is not. Risk, Monopoly, chess and checkers all have rules. You can win the game by following the rules. You can lose by disobeying the rules. But life is not a game. There are no rules to follow. There is only confidence, obedience and loyalty in the midst of the vindication of human history.