

The Global Council
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I want to talk about our year and what we have been doing, then to reflect with you on this Council and share some of our reflections on the shapes of the future.

The last three days have been a great celebration of the expenditure that we've been this past year. Three things especially struck me about these past few days. The first was that I was struck by the passion for the future that we saw in those area and centrum reports. All the talks seemed to go beyond their assigned time, yet you felt it was a shame they couldn't go a little longer.

The other thing that struck me was the nonchalance that you saw in these reports. It amazed me, that this seemed to show up again and again. Who was it that stood up here and said, "There have been no problems, this year, only challenges"? That was Calcutta, wasn't it? But if you have been to Calcutta, you know what it's like living for a year in that House. You are just on top of one another, the community is all around you, you can hardly hear yourself speak; yet, we come here and are able to be nonchalant about it.

The third thing that struck me is the diversity and variety that we hold within ourselves. Look around you and see who we are, where we come from. You would like to take the time to go continent by continent and have people stand up and take a look at what we've got in this room. It's just amazing.

When I was assigned to the Panchayat, it came like all assignments, as a major interruption in what I was doing. I was in Nadlapur at the time, and I remember going to wish our chief Guardian good-by. He was the Collector of the district and therefore also one of the symbolic heads that the village Panchayat responds to. So it was quite an ironic thing when I went there and explained that I was going to be on this. I couldn't bring myself to say "Global Panchayat" because that would have put me above him, so I just said I was going to be on our Panchayat. I still have a hard time explaining this to my relatives. They've gotten used to getting letters from me saying that I'm working in villages but to say that I'm on the Panchayat makes them jump to the conclusion that I've taken one more step toward "going native."

I would like to say a few things before I really begin. When we began this year, we found this particular job to be something you have to create from scratch. There was some history that had gone on before this but each of the years seemed to be so different. So we began to look around for ways of talking about this five-headed thing that we were. Various people tried to help us; some of their contributions were not so flattering as others, but we finally found the picture that we think holds what the Panchayat is. I'd

Development Zone, and our concern had to do with discerning what a Human Development Zone was and thus how you would go about choosing such a place was related to geo-social analysis. It was also related to what the region's contradictions were, and so it was related to the Consult as well.

The fourth arena of concern had to do with forms of the Order, and here our question was how we might begin to empower and intentionalize these forms for the various colleagues who have become associated with us across the globe in our projects and Houses. How is it that we begin to allow a commonality to emerge? How do you allow it to take form? The image of the regional team held that for us. Finally, we were concerned about Order training as we looked through the Council material again. What kind of screens did we need to create to allow us to stand present to the journey of our colleagues across the globe so that you could begin to clarify what training and journeying would look like?

These were the arenas of concern with which we began the year, and as we looked at how we would operate during the year. In previous years, as you know, we've visited the areas as teams. This year we decided that we would operate out of a four-year cycle and that this year would be about launching the Regional Consult. We decided we would be present in each continent for a Consult, and we were except for North Africa and the Middle East. We also were present at the Centrum Band meetings, held in Chicago and in Kuala Lumpur, and at Continental Councils in Nairobi, Brussels, Chicago and Manila.

Out of the engagement of this year, I would like to talk about just three highlights. One is the Regional Consults. It became clear after the Council that we were the ones that had to pick up the ball on these. It was with great trepidation that we did so. We were not sure what kind of reception we were going to get, but after a few exploratory phone calls we began to see that indeed there was a consensus to do it. So we risked it, and I was again impacted by the willingness, all across the globe, not only to do this event but also to make it a great event on behalf of the world, nothing less.

I was present at the Lima Consult in Azpitia and experienced it as an event that created one regional team out of separate bodies working in that region. You should have seen it. The Guardians who came, the cadre there in Lima, and the villagers--they were something to see. After the Consult, you had one team, where before you had three separate groups. There are many stories that you yourselves have told about how these Consults have gone.

The other thing we spent quite a lot of time on were the papers that you have received in the mail. We found that many people had been brooding on the same five arenas that I mentioned earlier, and we found reading the mail an exciting thing to do. People have done

to be?" This is key because it's out of the relationship that you take to this that the posture of creating strategies emerges. It's the relationship you take to Being's activity in our time that is key. If you don't do that then you flip out, or to use a word of one of my colleagues, you become a potato -- sometimes a profound potato but a potato, nevertheless. As Merlin in the film Excalibur said, "The tragedy is that most people forget." As you look at the role that we've been playing you see the power of this thing that we are. Historical orders have always played this role: to hold before society a vision of purposeful destiny when the sense of purpose has been eclipsed.

This is why for me what is going on in Kenya is important. When I was at the Council in Nairobi, we visited Kamwelini. I've been used to villages in India, but villages in Africa are something else. For one thing, someone would have to point them out to you and say that it was a village--it's not a compact cluster of houses. You would have a few houses here and then miles further down the road another house. The experience I had coming in--and this reflects my unfaith--was of barrenness and subsistence living. Even though I've seen that in India, in Kenya it seems to be so much more sparse. But then, going to the cluster office, as the auxiliary talked about the layout of the various villages that belonged to that cluster and of what they were doing, I saw something else. You say to yourself, coming fresh from the outside, "By all indications, people should give up." And yet, all of this is going on. It's a declaration that the future can be.

Someone was talking earlier about Murrin Bridge, of the backlash of racialism. There is now legislation in place which will mean that land rights which the aboriginals have won are going to be taken away because the land is so rich with minerals. In the midst of that you can see the kind of role that we play, staying on there in Murrin Bridge, enlivening the conscience of the nation, refusing to let that be removed. That's why we are there.

I think of the image "the bright face of Being." These days people talk about the kind of shambles that their life is. What's happening is that the bright face of Being is making a shambles of us. It is the affirmation of Being that is terrifying to us and that is good. You look at some of our old colleagues, people who've done the most marvelous things, and see the apologetic stance they take about it. It is like the scene in Excalibur when Arthur pulls the sword out of the stone and immediately puts it back. Our situation is a bit like that. Sometimes you find yourself out there in a village when all of a sudden you pull a sword out of a stone, and you want to apologize for it, or give it to somebody else.

Now to talk about what's before us at this Council. The question is: what is the wave of the future? What's going on? You don't expect

you took the Academy to a place like Africa or India and used it to train our teams so that they were not only effective members of Nava Gram Prayas but were part of a global people with a common memory who could be assigned anywhere? If we got rid of this "globally assignable" category, what would that do?

Obviously associated with this is the question of recreating the curriculum. I was excited reading some of your letters that have talked about the work we've got to do in Declaration. How many years has it been since we did that massive work on recreating the curriculum? Is it thirteen years ago that we started the Academy? Can you imagine the amount of learning we've done since then in just social methods, for instance? As an Order, we've been on a journey of getting grounded in the global, grounded outside of the context that most of us were born in. What would it mean for us to begin using both some of our Western contemporaries like Toffler, and also materials from other parts of the world and other cultures, like Japan, India, Africa and others who continue to shape the consciousness of this planet and the 20th Century? What would the curriculum of Religious and Cultural studies look like that goes beyond the boundaries of Western civilization? This is long range to be sure, but there is a depth re-creation job we have to do in declaring who we are, what we know and what these times are.

Along with this, what if we looked at the experiments we've been doing across the globe with the Human Development course, with the Profound Motivity course, with the Vocational Service Programmes? There is something emerging there. I like the name of the course they did in India. It is called RS-1, and it stands for Radical Selfhood-I. What would it mean to consider creating a weekend or eight-hour programme that could be a basic penetration tool across the globe in recruitment and formation? We never ask anyone to join the Order, but how do we create the occasions in which self-consciousness dawns on particular people so that they have an opportunity to consider it? This is another part of the swirl of things on training and formation. We need to think about how to undergird this. There's been talk of a Training Centrum. Maybe that kind of structuring would allow it to be empowered. There's been talk of designating particular Houses as Novitiate Houses and strengthening them with a larger number of staff so that you could send your interns and people from the regional team there. What would it mean to do that type of training?

Another swirl is the area/nexus dynamics for the one globe. It has to do with bringing a newness to the role of symbolic leadership in the Order. It has to do with using the image of the one Global Priory rather than area priors or centrum priors, nexus first-among-equals priors, and so on. It has to do with being one thing. This is more urgent as our engagement in the local continues to be more diversified so that the world can be served. It is especially

back to single, one-village projects. This has come out of our concrete learnings. We need to learn about the Human Development Zone from what we are doing, rather than seeking to define it in the abstract. We'll get more mileage that way, allowing our current experiments to mature. We need not cut them off or try to evaluate them right now, but let them come to fruition. Let's learn from these cluster experiments which in some places are a year or two old. You wonder what the Block experiment is going to teach us. You'd certainly want to get learnings out of that for whatever it is this Human Development Zone is going to be. Maybe the real bottom line to the Human Development Zone is that we emerge out of this four-year period with informed models and in some coordinated fashion begin to do them across the globe. But I think it will be helpful to have interior nonchalance about it.

Then the other thing this Council will deal with will be house placements and assignments, and I think the key there is to create a futuristic context as you look at configuration. I think the approach to it is based on strategy; we've got to get clear on what we are out to get done, and in that context look at House placement. It certainly has to be done from a radically detached perspective, in the context of what the globe requires and what care of the Order looks like. Anything less than that will not give us a comprehensive approach. It doesn't all have to be the same. You don't have to say that there is a single model you've got to use everywhere, and yet at the same time you know that token religious houses don't work either. Just to put a few names up there and say, "Well, we've got that hole filled," doesn't do the job. It defeats the purpose sometimes.

One of the exciting things in this Council will be how we web assignments and strategy together. You've had the experience in the past of having more and more distance between the eighth floor and the Council. There's been this regular pilgrimage that went on from down here to up there. How do we experiment in this Council with beginning to web that together so that when we are talking about strategies we are talking about assignments, and when we are talking about assignments we are talking about strategies? How you bring those together is a task for this body.

Where do we stand as we look through the Council to the future? We stand in the posture of repentance. That's what we've always been about, repentance and leading in the social act of repentance. That's what our job has been, not community development, not socio-economic development. Socio-economic development may be the air we breathe and the atmosphere we live in, but certainly the questions that we ask are not what the National Planning Council asks. The question that we ask is something more like the question of changed, transformed lives. Repentance has to do with the movement, and that's another way in which it's different from community development per se. That is, we are the catalysts, we are not present in order to

not lead to any one particular group being key, so to speak, is the other thing here. Being the religious also has to do with covenant and how we intentionalize that further. Someone said there is a long line of friars, and it's getting longer. What would it mean to begin to look at that experiment again, perhaps begin to intentionalize vows to dramatize it?

As we look at the future we look toward the regional team. Out of our engagement, there is a wealth and diversity of colleagues across the globe. What we don't yet have is the commonality that allows us to talk about this as a global movement. What would it mean to begin to do formation so that you could pick anyone from one part of the globe and bring him or her to another part and use the same kind of language? What would it mean to work on the dynamics of the Order--extended, movemental and symbolic? What would it mean to place demands upon the movement? We were talking the other day about a movement colleague in this country who is ready to underwrite a house, to support six people. What would it mean to place that kind of burden upon the movement?

Well, I'm done. This year has been a great year for me and for us as the Panchayat. We experienced being cared for by the Order, both in terms of the letters we've received and the things people have said. I want to close by telling a story that I heard when the Initiating Consult was done in Vaviharsh, a story told by a Guardian, Mr. Godbole, from Herdillia Chemicals in Bombay. You know how in India people like to use great flowery language to praise a venture. He got up and in his opening speech said, "The ICA is like gold. The thing about gold is, you take gold and put it in a furnace, and it melts into a liquid, but it remains gold. The ICA is like that. You take gold and you hammer it, and you can make it into a thin leaf, but it doesn't break, it stays a leaf and it remains gold. You can take gold and put it with other metals and make an alloy out of it, but you can still reclaim the gold when you need it."

When I heard that I said to myself, "Here is the usual way of going on," but this past year I appreciated the story in a new way. Maybe this is not what he had in mind but I tell it this way. If you have decided to be the Order--that is, you have decided to be gold--this is what happens to people who make that decision. Life puts them in a furnace so that they melt. The strange thing about it is that in the midst of being melted, they are still sustained as the Order. Or you get hammered until you are made into a thin leaf and the paradox is that you are still sustained. You are mixed with other metals and the strange paradox is that you are still the integral decision that you were. That's what we are--gold--not in terms of any ideal but in terms of sheer decision to be the Order.