

SYMBOLIC LIFE EXPERIMENT CONTEXT

Global Council '84 may best be remembered for the time we decided as a body to take seriously the creation of the new symbolic life needed for all the people of the planet in Century 21. Through the controversial morning solitary experiment and the near absence of the corporate liturgical drama, we became aware of the critical need to build our corporate clarity in this arena. Therefore, it is important that we stand back and ask ourselves what we intend to say and do with our experiment in the symbolic life.

In order to do so let's recall that by symbols we are pointing to the entire symbolic realm of icons, myths, practices, exercises, rites, etc. Next, let's turn to our common memory. First, Paul Tillich: "This is the great function of symbols: to point beyond themselves, in the power of that to which they point, to open levels of reality which otherwise are closed, and to open up levels of the human mind of which we otherwise are not aware." Next, Mircea Eliade: "Symbols are capable of revealing a modality of the real or a condition of the World which is not evident on the plane of human experience....Symbols always point to a reality or a situation concerning human existence." And Joseph Campbell: "An operating mythology wakens and maintains in the individual a sense of awe and gratitude in relation to the mystery dimension of the universe so that one recognizes it and participates in it since the mystery of being is the mystery of one's own deep being as well....A living mythology is to offer an image of the universe that will be in accord with the knowledge of the time, the sciences and the field of action of the folk to whom the mythology is addressed."

From this several things become clear. Whether solitary exercises or corporate rituals, we are concerned with enabling people to grasp and affirm a deeper level of consciousness than is normally available. The symbolic life tools we create are to enable people to articulate the profound dimension of life so that every person can experience him/herself as a profound human being.

Whatever symbolic life tools we create they need to be those which point to the "profound" - a level of consciousness. Which consciousness? This is the key question - the question of the "content", so to speak. What is required in our time is a symbolic life which points to the new consciousness that has broken loose in our time that we have used such phrases as The New Paradigm, The New Reality, The One-in-the-One, etc. to point to so far. (Here's an illustration of our problem - we don't yet have common language, which is a symbol system itself, to point to this new consciousness. We use words like profound in order to try to escape having to ground in human experience what we are pointing to.)

But why this consciousness? Because this "new birth of consciousness of the One World" is the single most significant event in our time. Heretofore this awareness was unavailable to humankind except only abstractly. This consciousness is compelling because it is the first time such an event has happened globally. This consciousness affects the deepest levels of human living. The view of the self is forever transformed. The view of world is for the first time a hologram - each part containing the whole - inescapably

related to the destiny of the whole. These are just a few of the elements of the new consciousness. We are still novices at spelling out all this new consciousness is, much less what it means for every day life, but there is increasing world wide agreement that this new birth of consciousness has happened. The best symbol for it is the Earthrise.

And herein lies the global social contradiction in our time: There is a gap between the fact of this new consciousness that has taken hold of the planet and its practical expression in every day life. While astronauts can speak of the "religious experience" of the view of the One World in which we all live, daily living still operates dualistically. Though we intuit or feel the one world, the structures of society, including its symbolic life, have not "caught up" so to speak. Consequently, we feel schizophrenic - "knowing" one thing but still operating in our daily lives without it. The planet does not desire extinction, but the pervasiveness of the adversarial mind-set, sustained by the dualistic world-view, powerful symbols and depth human images inherited from the old world-view, give the people of the planet limited options. The problem of the Chicago City Council and rift between the superpowers has the same root world-view sustaining them in being. Until the reality of the new consciousness has found its way into the practical operating modes of everyday life, these world problems will continue.

When this is seen, then the importance of experimenting with our symbolic life is more evident. First, it's clear it's not simply our internal life we are concerned with, but with how do we pioneer on behalf of society in creating the Earthrise Consciousness symbolic life of the 21st century. How to make evident what only a symbolic life can? Clearly, one sees that the issue is far more than how are we going to be sustained in the mission. The division between internal and external itself blocks us from the seeing the importance of this issue. It even runs counter itself to the New Paradigm. The creation of an adequate symbolic life that points to the New Reality can be seen as our most important social task. It's the key strategy of the New Social Vehicle.

Furthermore, we have been destined to do this experiment, because the new symbolic life will by nature be global in scope, transcending racial, cultural, religious, national and all other barriers. History has "set us up", so to speak. Our global pluriformity is exactly the kind of laboratory required to create the new symbolic life for the planet. What we sometimes experience as a problem is, in fact, our greatest gift. We are called to be the "Ritual Elders of the 21st Century" - to create, guide, lead the way in inventing the new mythology that unifies the planet into the fact of the One World - a reality which at the one hand is present but on the other is yet to be.

Of course, this will be hard because we are all products of the old. We will have to turn our backs on all those practices that may have been so helpful to who we were in the past but which may now be stumbling blocks to creating the necessary new. We will feel like phonies and hypocrites. Our own colleagues will disclaim our latest idea. But experiment we must. There is not another group on the face of the planet that is even remotely close to doing this job.

Therefore, as we go about this experiment we need to remember that the questions we ask ourselves that design our spirit life practices and the criteria by which we evaluate them will be as important as the actual doing of the experiments themselves. The research interchange will be as much ensuring of the workshop procedures as they will be the ritual products.

There are many questions such as how to honor the diversity and yet find ways to celebrate the unity? How does each "culture" go about expressing the New World - or because there's One World, is there only one way to rehearse it? Probably not, but we don't know for sure. But at least we have learned enough to see that the symbolic life experiment entails something other than simply delving into the cultural richness of the planet or trying to mesh the best into one form. Our perspective must be how to symbolize the Earthrise Consciousness through the various cultural backgrounds. The New Consciousness is more than the sum of the gifts of the existing cultural gifts. While the new consciousness is singular in nature, its expressions are probably pluriform.

The Earthrise IS Sacred. It's not a new religion, but the consciousness that has broken loose in our time across this planet is the most profound happening in history. Profound because it touches the whole planet. Profound because it unifies all of human experience. Profound because old barriers are given the chance of being broken allowing the new society to be built. THIS is why giving form to this new consciousness needs to be seen as the single most important undertaking in the next 16 years. Without it, our attempts at networking, interchanging, impacting, demonstrating, whatever we do, will be shallow. The Myth Factor of the whistle points provides the key to the future. We must, in fact, even dare to experiment with how to inject our learnings about the symbolic life into the programs we perform for other groups and organizations. What has been considered often as "lace" to a program event, needs to be seen as important as the program itself. We must not simply become another group with some great methods for helping other organizations be effective. In addition to that, we have an added responsibility - that of providing civilization with the symbols that can sustain them into the new world.