

"Where have all the Prophets gone..."

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION

How does the Spirit of the Prophetic break loose in ourselves as an Order? How do we hear / articulate a futuric claim on ourselves that will shock all of us into a common destinal context in this Year of Order Council? What is the methodology that will burp up such radical imagery out of our corporate deeps?

The prophets that I know have all experienced a shocking, painful awakening to human suffering, injustice, perhaps an impending disaster. Or they were struck by a vision of a new heaven...rocked by an insight into human existence that required proclamation to the world. What is the undeniable CRY that is rending our consciousness at this moment of history? The 15 - 85%? The 'innocent suffering'? The 2 Million Villages?

What is the ONE urgent message we have to declare, what is the ONE transforming gift we have to offer, what is the ONE life-changing claim we have to make on every person, every community? What is the good news we embody, we demonstrate, we proclaim...as an Order...in every corner of the earth? What is our proclamation? We speak 'images of possibility' or we embody 'profound humanness' wherever we go...is that it? Is that enough?

Is our next 16 years to be spent "creating linkages amongst Those Who Care," or "equipping other groups to apply our human development methods," or "impacting corporations with our LENS technology." Is this our mission? Or are these simply residue of our past 16 years, providing a means of self-support. Are these what we are about as an ORDER? These are each noble, but are they our RADICAL MISSION?

Then I ask myself, what is our foundational imagery, imagery that would allow us to talk straight and forcefully about our life and mission? The "Prophet" is a Judeo-Christian figure, the likes of which do not appear in religious traditions that are not rooted in Judeo-Christian soil. The image of "Good News" and "the Word" are also rooted in that same soil. How do we get some FOUNDATIONAL IMAGERY that would give us a common context from which to build a consensus about our Identity and our Mission?

This brings us to the fundamental contradiction, which unless dealt with, will lead us into further dis-unity (identity) and dis-array (mission). Pluriformity presumes a unity from which many forms arise, right? I do not experience us having a fundamental unity of self-understanding nor therefore in our destinal mission.

FUNDAMENTAL CONTRADICTION

I think the fundamental contradiction in our Order has largely to do with our MYTHOLOGY, with our SYMBOLS and beneath those our LANGUAGE. We have lost the power of an integrated set of images that the Christian symbols and poetry gave us in the 60's. We have neither created a new language, nor consensed on one we have begun to create (e.g. Other World, Profound Humanness) that allows us to speak with INTEGRITY or POWER to one another or to the rest of this pluriform world for that matter.

Whatever language we create / use for forming our common mind must have the capability of dealing with the theological (talk about G-O-D), ontological (nature of life itself), eschatological (destinal calling), existential (life experience) and sociological (indicative analysis) dimensions of our identity and mission. The old man had the language / imaginal tools to continually re-articulate who we are and what we are about in each of these contexts. Plus his language was capable of enabling us to push continually toward new depths in grasping our fundamental context.

Our initial momentum and power issued from a common life-changing experience that we pointed to with the verbal symbol "RS-I." That event in the life of most 'old hands' has been the existential grounding that has kept us returning to our collegium tables, sustaining our own vocational resolve to be this Order.

Think back over the contexts we have set for our more recent Councils and I think you will find that the most we have done is the sociological (talk about our global mission) with some quasi-theological (e.g. talk about the Final Mystery and the Word of Possibility) contexting. We can not, I repeat, CAN NOT SURVIVE on this meager diet...especially as a RELIGIOUS Order.

Besides survival, WITHOUT THIS Depth and Breadth of ARTICULATION, WE HAVE NO WAY TO COME TO A CONSENSUS this July or any other. To simply attack the issue of our identity or mission without dealing with our fundamental myth, symbols, and language will only drive us farther into the current paralysis. (Note our inability to consense on a common liturgy, build the curriculum for the 'global academy' let alone the various images out of which we operate.) Recall Stanfield's images of July 1983, namely that we actually have five Orders around our collegium tables (let alone within our own selves): The EI - RS-I Order; the ICA - HDP Order; the LENS - Secular Order; the I-Haven't-Enough-Guts-To-Leave Order; and the No-Matter-What, I'm-In-It' Order.

Equally important, what is the new "LIFE-HAPPENING-EVENT" that is founded on a symbol system-with-integrity THAT WILL ALLOW US TO SPEAK as the pluriform Order OUT OF A COMMON EXISTENTIAL BASE? Without such a commonizing event and its related language/symbols, how will we come to a consensus on our fundamental context and mission? ~~Theological treatises do not a common mind make, right?~~ How will we get to square one on creating a pluriform Order without some consensus on a common RELIGIOUS foundation.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATION

My practical recommendation is that a MAJOR PRE-JULY task force be formed that takes on the job of forging this mythology, symbology, and language...as well as creating an 'event' that would ground and therefore transform all of our contexts and give us a common foundation. I know it sounds hemongous, but have we ever put our minds to it? We certainly have enough pluriform, theologically lucid old hands on our Continuum to undertake this foundational effort...or pull in some more if we need to. I think this is the most fundamental issue.

I also think that without this kind of home work the July-August part of our year will be a disaster. We cannot simply brainstorm and gestalt nor discourse ourselves into a foundational context. It will take some depth prayer, head to head battling, razor sharp theological surgery and a lot of sweat to get beyond our current theological habits to a NEW CREATION. Such a representational group will, hopefully, have a poetic / imaginal 'THING' to present for refinement and consensus in July.

(I deeply appreciate the work of the Panchayat at Jaipur, pushing the work that David McClesky and others have done already. Their push on the One-in-One, the One-Many-Few, etc is very helpful, but I think we haven't gotten to the "systematic" dimensions of our new poetry, perspective. Their images may be basic colors on the palette from which we paint the new. I do think we have most of the 'colors'...we have just not painted the gorgeous, shocking 'picture' that empowers post-modern folks to live profoundly in this new world.)

ALTERNATIVE 1 : TRANSPARENTIZED HISTORICAL RELIGIONS

Start afresh and pull together the relevant historical data, mythology, symbols and poetry of the heros of each of the major historical religions. Then set about the transposition / transparentization of each, welding these historically grounded traditions into an integrated, pluriform system, accompanied by the creation of a commonizing event through which it can be transmitted / grounded in all of our lives.

To date, we have taken a somewhat liberal approach: selecting relevant poetry from various traditions, casting them in mold of the Three Acts, sprinkling them with a few Other World rubrics and then rotating them around. At the least this has allowed us to celebrate our religious diversity in some fashion and struggle with the relative wisdom of each. However, this approach has avoided the issue of our fundamental unity entirely.

We have bantered about the issue of "a secular RS-I." I think the key concern has been: How to maintain the integrity of the understanding of life represented by the Christian tradition. In particular the stance of YES to all of creation, the 'intrusion' into our illusions of a word about life, sin and grace, cruciformity, accountability and absolution, death and resurrection, etc. Whatever images / language we design to freight this new creation, they must occasion the life changing experiences to which each of these point.

One of the without-which's of the RS-I, I think, is that it took an historically grounded 'hero' and pushed through the historical traditions to the life changing context and images that were embodied and articulated by that hero. The issue at this point has to do with the 'incarnational' dimension of life giving stories and their related languages. If it hasn't been lived in this world, of what value is it to those of us assigned to live in this world (albeit out of the context of the Other World). Our experience through RS-I has given us the historical drive to take this world seriously and pour our lives into the creation of the new social vehicle and the new religious mode.

I ask myself, is Alternative 1 the same effort as the 19th century attempt to create a "Universal Religion?" I don't think so. The actual times in which we live (new paradigm, post-modern, global village), our theological methodology (phenomenological / existential theologizing) and our pluriformity (literally a body composed of the six Urs and their respective religious traditions) provides us with a somewhat different 'perspective' from which to start.

The grist for this effort is the classical myths of the traditional World religions. These are usually rooted in some historical figure / event, though not all of them. However, all of them have historical disciples who have written / embodied the mythology out of which they formed their religious movement. The image of 'passing over' is a key methodology.

This is one way to attack the fundamental contradiction.

ALTERNATIVE 2 : A SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY OF THE OTHER WORLD

Re-ground and then re-caste our Other World 'poetry.' We would create a theological / ontological / eschatological / existential / sociological SYSTEM from the palette of our Other World charts and talks. This job may be as massive as the one above, but it would be an utterly different job, mostly writing up a sort of SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY of the OTHER WORLD. This job has never been done, unless you count the Other World talks of July 1971-1972 and our Profound Humanness work toward it.

The basic frame and poetry is already there. It has the wisdom of our basic understanding of life: Intruding Final Mystery / Life Changing Events / The Servant Life of Care and Responsibility / and Authentic Fullfillment. It does not presume liturgical forms. It is grounded in 20th Century life images and experience. It is not attached to the old paradigm. It has depth imagery that can call forth new life decisions. It both assumes and articulates a global context. It assumes a morality of care and utter responsibility for history. It has practical imagery that can be applied to our strategy talk. ~~Also it does not require anyone to have to be 'converted' to appropriate it...it is a way to talk about consciousness, not, in the first instance, a new religion.~~

I think this is a more authentic, if not more radical alternative.

NOTES on DOING THEOLOGY IN THE NEW PARADIGM

First, post modern human beings can never again have the existential comfort of receiving DIVINE REVELATION(s)...undisputable messages from an authority figure, a divinely ordained theology presented by a prophet, a Son of God, an Angel or whatever. Our spacial metaphors: the Mystery in the Mundane, Encounter at the Center, etc. do not permit nor require the anthropomorphic figure of a divine Father sending messages to His children through prophets, Sons, etc.

Second, post modern consciousness does not allow nor require an ESCHATOLOGY that has cosmic spacial metaphors: the last judgement, paying for sins in hell, rewards for righteousness in heaven, etc. We can never have a classical type of eschatology in our post-modern era...a ringing judgment on society from some 'other' world. We probably will never be able, except nostalgically, to talk about our 'calling' nor see the ancient Prophet reeking with Divine Presence walk in our midst, save as someone lives out a demonstration / articulation of the new Human Being. We make decisions on the basis of the positive and negative effects on Profound Humanness, etc.

Thirdly, our God-talk (THEOLOGY) will necessarily be radically transparentized, boldly avoiding the trap of placing God "out there" some where (not to escape, however, the otherness of the Final Mystery, rather to avoid the illusion that there is another space where God is, apart from this one in which we live and experience life in its profoundest). Our "Other World in the Midst of This World" language speaks of being co-creators, consciousness of consciousness, being the evolutionary process conscious of itself, the noosphere of spirit, etc.

Fourthly, I am convinced that it will also be necessary to build a web of historical referents to provide the 'incarnational' dimension to whatever Other World theologizing we do. I do not believe the random selection of quotes without a way to get at their historical context and the life drama surrounding them is sufficient to freight the New Humanness.

Historical Note: One of the reasons the Other World charts spoke to us when we created them is that we had the common existential grounding in RS-I. Standing in that context we could appreciate the secular imagery and verify it's authenticity. While it was our "most secular course" it's power was what it did to people whose life story was rooted in the Christian symbols / language.

One group in our Order, a growing, significant part of it, does not have that context. Nor will they ever have it! The RS-I was dealing with THE life imagery out of which participants spoke of the deeps of their life. For any human being to take unto themselves the life imagery of any 'classical religion' they have to experience some kind of CONVERSION to it...understand it to be THE imagery without which they cannot operate authentically as a self. Does any significant new theological system require the 'conversion' dynamic for it to be effective...change lives?

The journey toward this new religious mode will require an analysis of the 'Late 20th Century Human.' What is the traumatic, existential encounter (like WWII was for another generation) that is forcing people to scream for a new poetry, a new understanding to make sense out of their most personal longings, most profound questions? Or have they been cut off from authentic religious symbols for so long that they are trapped in a stupor of TV commercials and anti-heros, blunted by global political absurdities or by numbing encounters with grinding poverty and injustice? Will our new secular - religious poetry have the capacity to get into people's life - decision - centers and transform them into a new kind of human being?

And then, as with Alternative 1, what is the EVENT that will provide the commonizing, life-transforming happening from which we can be a NEW RELIGIOUS ORDER WITH A COMMON SET OF IMAGES, SYMBOLS, LANGUAGE.

AN UTTERLY NEW REALITY

If we do accomplish such a unified system, we will no longer be able to call ourselves a Pluriform Order save as we attempt to hold onto our historically unique religious traditions. Will we not be a New Reality, a new creation, with one common understanding and one fundamental form? Pluriformity is the language of the era of Civilization, right?, not of Post-Civilization. Both Alternatives, 1 or 2, mean the death to that old mood self-talk. We will indeed have built the Mythology, Symbols and Language of the New Religious Mode...without which, have we not said, there cannot be a New Social Vehicle?

To be sure, we will continue to find ways to celebrate the unique gifts of our present pluriform civilization, drawing forth the humanizing wisdom of each, and making use of it to embellish the human factor of the New Social Vehicle. Weaving the new religious mode with some of the fibres out the old is unavoidable and perhaps necessary. Whatever the case, Alternative 1 or 2, we will have a NEW UNITY in both our Life and our Mission. We just may have the perspective from which our LIFE will be the manifestation of the New Paradigm Religious Mode and our MISSION the manifestation of the New Paradigm Social Vehicle.

ALTERNATIVE: THREE

This alternative is simply not to deal with the foundational contradiction but simply let us go on as we are...and have MANY ORDERS and MANY MISSIONS and therefore MANY MOVEMENTS...each going their own way, generating their own symbols, languages, mythologies, and disciplines...a trap in which we already have one foot!

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March 18, 1984