

ORDER FOUNDATIONS

About 18 months ago Jonas Salk spent an afternoon at the Chicago anchor house, gave an hour-long talk and then held a discussion with about a dozen of us, including the Panchayat. In my reading in preparation for his visit and in his presentation, I was deeply impacted by his biological and evolutionary imagery. I was doing some brooding at that time about how some of my basic life metaphors were shifting and this added grist. I was also struck by a comment he made later to Ray Spencer and Justin Morrill that we were obviously going through a "molting" process - the process in which a bird loses all its feathers and looks rather ugly until the new ones have grown in. He was cautioning us to wait on some of our initiatives until this molting process was over.

As part of my training to become a Journal consultant (Progoff), I had become conversant with the Life/Study procedures by which you enter into the life of another person and allow yourself to "be educated" by its depth evolution. So I decided to do a Life/Study for the Order - I did this mainly during Sunday discontinuity. It was a fascinating experience, some results of which I shared with the Panchayat last February. Then in the pressures of Global Grants and formulating the proposal for the international development community (now IDF team), I set it aside.

I was aware during Bilbao and later in the fall, that further shifts were occurring in my consciousness around the concept of social justice. During the Research Symposium in New Jersey these began to come into focus more clearly. This February, after my files arrived in Brussels and I had a chance to go through them here, I found last year's work and I shared it rather tentatively with the IDF team. The reflection it stirred in them encouraged me to share it again in Toronto and then in Caracas and Lima. When I returned from Latin America, I read the talk by Martha Crampton on Psychosynthesis as applied to community work and it helped clarify some of my initial thinking. It is not the totality of my brooding by any means and is not systematic and coherent, but is a few of the nuggets that keep cropping up.

First, has to do with the order's identity. I feel that behind the many changing strategies we have employed there is a unity of purpose which keeps manifesting itself. We have always been about probing the spirit deeps - whether it was through all of the solitary office experiments we did; the creation of the New Religious Mode and Other World charts; the work with St. Teresa's Interior Castle, St. John of the Cross's Dark Night of the Soul, Ignatious of Loyola's images of Christ; the spirit talks in every order council; the Exemplars and Profound Humanness work; or the Saint, Journey to Ixlan, Kazantzakis, the red Journal. Our work today with meditation and other consciousness methods has a strong foundation under it. I cannot remember a time in our history when we have not either corporately or individually been probing the edges of the human spirit.

Likewise, we have always been engaged in initiating people into the worldview of the times. From the first collegium studies in Austin to create RSI, the Daily Office, the Housechurch celebration onward we have tried to keep abreast of the emerging weltbilt and to forge it into images which could be easily communicated to common people. One remembers fondly the Life Triangles which were the basis for the RS and CS curriculum which first we offered on a weeknight basis and later became the Global Academy; the early research into education which became the Imaginal Education course, the Preschool curriculum, Training Inc.; the corporate research reading project which led to the Social Process Triangles, LENS, Town Meeting and the consult process. Who else do you know that's trained hundreds of thousands of church leaders, teachers, community leaders, college students and rural youth - sharing with them state of the art

And none of this was considered valid without social application. Our laboratory may have moved from the university campus to the urban ghetto to the rural villages of the world, but we have always insisted all theory must be tested in the crucible of social reality. Combining both the Aristotelian and Platonic approaches, we took systems analysis from business and applied it to the complex reality of the local community. We distilled the action research in Fifth City, Mowanjum and the Marshall Islands into a comprehensive integrated approach to development which is still at the front of development praxis. Who would have thought the Maharashtra 232 would end up as 1400 Kenyan villages awakened to self-development? That the IERD would become the watershed event for global acceptance of peoples participation as key to self-sustaining development?

And today we're surprised to hear Dee Dickinson talk about different learning styles or Jean Houston about the importance of the spirit dimension or Joep Von Arendank about the purpose of human development or Marty Seldman about listening to your client? Are we really surprised or are they waking us up to our own greatness, our own history, our own identity - all clouded over by the here-we-go-again molting process we have known before and will know oh-so-many-more times in the future? And do we remember that before them it was W. Jack Lewis, Bishop Jim Mathews, the President of Yale University and many others who called us to our greatness? to get on with it - the business of living, of being, of giving?

This identity we have clothed temporarily in a variety of strategies. The permanent housechurch early in our study of religious orders talked of being a contemplative, teaching and serving order. Later as the Ecumenical Institute we talked about Spirit Remotivation, Contextual Reeducation and Community Reformulation. And when we turned to the world with the Institute of Cultural Affairs we said we were a research, training and demonstration group concerned with the human factor in world development. Today our emerging strategies appear to be - spiritually sustaining Those Who Care, whoever they may be; transferring our methods to the four communities; and initiating social transformation in groups and organizations of every type - and all of this on a global scale some of us never really expected to see in our lifetime!

I still remember Joe Mathews' excitement when he came back from the World Council of Churches meeting in Upsalla in 1968. Here we were about to send out our first Religious Houses in North America, and he dropped on us the "One World" concept! And what did we do with it? We gridded the world down to three spheres, nine continents, fifty-four areas, and 324 regions. And how were we going to care for the One World? Knowing that "history rides on the back of the religious" - by putting a religious house in every region, beginning with SEAPAC!

And how would we fund such a massive expansion strategy? With self-support of course. How many others of you joined an international school faculty to support the first religious house in a region of Seapac or India? And isn't it wonderful, how far that first guinea pig experiment, expansion strategy and funding mode brought us toward the One World for which we longed?

And hardly were we launched into this expansion plan, than we discerned a new experiment to try on ourselves - the human development project - dropping a mustard seed into a ripe community and catalyzing rapid social change. And nothing would do but there must be one of these miraculous things in every timezone of the globe! You could train people til you were blue in the face, but finally we knew that it was structures that held their consciousness in place and you had to change those structures at the most basic level. In the community.

Now we were no longer training church leaders, but the wretched of the earth, the lost and forgotten people in diverse and unknown exotic villages. Shangrila, Joe said, when he prepared our consult team for Shantumbu in Zambia. Bullshit - a guerilla war field from which the police graciously exited us! And how would we pay for this global spread? With grants from government, from industry, from foundations, from movement guardians. And those of us who had never heard of framing, or written a proposal, or accounted for a grant were off and running into a wild future that led to many mine fields, botched psyches, and cultural explosions. But also to a phenomenal global network that makes people who want to make a difference in society today slobber over it. Sure it's worth seven million dollars, and a helluva lot more!

And what is the experiment we've dropped on ourselves today? The primary unit - a pluriform community of diverse skills large enough to care for the total geography of a whole cultural reality. We haven't exactly discerned how many of these it will take to care for Spaceship Earth, but give us time, we will! And isn't it great that Brazil says they'll be ready by 1988? And we're not going alone this time. We're going with many others to create those self-conscious cores in every nation of the planet. Knowing that evolution proceeds through cooperation and communication, we're connecting with other networks, others who care.

Collaboration is the name of the game and we're learning all over again to be sensitive to social realities and to choose our partners with care. We don't yet have the "collaboration partner" selection criteria to match the site selection screen of yesteryear, but we're discerning it as we go and we know a lot today we didn't know three years ago when the IERD swept us off our feet and up into the Cloud of Unknowing. And would you believe it, we have a new funding mechanism, too. Programme contracts and organization consultancies are taking us to Thailand and Singapore, to Tanzania and Uganda, to Bolivia and Ecuador, to Jordan and the Sudan and many more we can't keep track of.

And our consciousness is expanded and now we're thinking not just of the worldwide but the history-long. Our imaginations have shot out into the future and we've come to see that the oppressed are those who are not yet with us - the future generations for whom our lives will be whatever legacy they have. Knowing that humanness itself is threatened by nuclear annihilation, we reach out to identify and empower all those groups working toward planetary unity.

Whereas the atrocities of the two world wars once stimulated our decision to change history - make it go a different way, today we see that we are charged with saving the planet. We see that the resources of this earth are being thoughtlessly ravaged, threatening the sustenance of future generations. And we see that it is the economic structures which maintain this pattern. And so we are committed to working in the economic community to altar the values of corporate culture.

Whereas once our study of Franz Fanon's Wretched of the Earth and Paul Frero's Pedagogy of the Oppressed catapulted us into empowering the oppressed, how do we empower the unborn? We must midwife the evolutionary journey. And how is this journey endangered? We see that women, the poor, and traditional and aboriginal cultures are being excluded from decisions which shape our planetary culture. Without their values, future generations will be weakened. And so we are committed to working in the development community to bring these peoples into the mainstream of society.

Whereas once it was RSI that gave us the courage to venture into cultures of which we knew nothing to do a task for which we were hardly prepared, today we are no longer the Christian bigots we were. We've lived with Muslims and Hindus and Buddhists and Animists and Agnostics and Cynics and Volunteers and we know in our guts that care transcends all belief systems, that courage comes from a source deeper than tradition, that being willing to change knows no cultural boundaries. And so we stand as this pluriform reality we are simply as "the religious" - those committed to that which is greater than us, the name of which we do not know, but whose reality we have each personally experienced.

And we see that our young are not being prepared for life in the deeps. That all traditions are failing to initiate youth into the meaning of life in an open universe and a planetary culture. And so we are committed to working in the education community to open up new avenues of consciousness and care.

And can you believe that it was the horror of 1984 that put us in this new position? The chaos, the confusion, the bickering, the Safaris, the Holons, the rats in New Delhi, 500 tickets being rewritten, hundreds of thousands of translated pages distributed, the betrayals by those close and far, and bankruptcy in finances and spirit. Yes, it was 1984, but it was much more. It was everything that went before. I have seen this snake called the Order shed its skin at least twice before in my lifetime and each time I was sure we were dying and that I was going crazy. But each time - and this time is no exception - the new skin has been more beautiful than the old. And now I know that the Order has a soul which transcends all strategies and all temporal images, and God loves us for who we are, not what we might become.

IDF Trek to Latin America

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