

POLITICAL DISCOURSE

I am Mary Warren Moffett. I am a housewife from a suburb of Chicago (in the United States) and I work full time in Social Research with the Ecumenical Institute. (or the International Training Institute). I am very pleased to be a part of this course and to have the opportunity to spend this weekend with you.

This weekend is about Living Effectively in the New Society—what Kenneth Boulding has called the Age of Transition. You and I are caught by the incredible mystery of having been born into a time that is between ages. This kind of opportunity has happened rarely to people in history, I think. Maybe when man first discovered that when he could band together with others in groups or tribes he could organize society. Civilization began that—in an incredible burst in between ages. Or again, I think about the burst of creativity we call the Middle Ages, when art, music and literature flourished. Though it is always moving, at certain times, history seems to swell as though it were a great body of water. We are at a time when the swell is coming to a crest That's what we mean by resurgence. That resurgence is bursting loose everywhere in the world today. Everywhere you look, this crest is beginning to form on the swell of the water.

I think that the rumblings of this resurgence have been going on for many years. When history looks back, the whole of twentieth century will be lifted up as that form. But the rumblings have been going on for many years. Probably before this century began. That we are the ones who live right in the midst of this incredible crest of resurgence, the crest of the wave, that you see everywhere today in the spirit of man.

In the Political arena, I'd use a word like RESPONSIBLE ENGAGEMENT. What would it mean to live authentically engaged in society? This is a dynamic process that raises the question of man's creativity and pushes the area of integrity. And then tonight, the Cultural Process. This is about the meaning of life. We spoke last night of values that have collapsed; the loss of mythology, the kind of thing that would be talking about the meaning of life. Perhaps, beyond that, just to be happy. What does it mean to be happy, anyway? I'd like to share with you a very short poem.

"There are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink, but he that stands it now deserves the thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered. Yet we have this consolation with us. That the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly. 'Tis' dearness only that gives everything its value. By perseverance and fortitude, we have the prospect of a glorious issue. Look upon this picture and weep over it. And if there yet remains one thoughtless wretch who believed it not, let him suffer it unlamented. "

Last night when we talked about a social process, as an abstract model which gives us a screen, a way to look at what goes on in society, there were the Economic, the Political and the Cultural dynamics, without which society would not be sustained. The Economic is the dynamic of society which sustains all of society. It is the resources, the production and the distribution which do that. The Political dynamic is that which does the ordering, which gives form to man's communal life. It is the communal pole of the Social Process Triangle in which are order, justice, and welfare—those things which help man to carve into the chaos the form of society. In the Cultural is the illuminating pole, or that which gives a society its significance in terms of its wisdom, its style and its symbols -- that which gives meaning to the other dynamics.

We talked last evening of the kind of imbalance that always takes place at any point in history in this Social Process, and we gave many illustrations about this today. The Economic dynamic is that which has been over-emphasized, or over extended, has grabbed the very being of humanity today, and, we might want to say, feels the impotence of the impact of the incredible over-emphases of the Economic today. The Cultural has collapsed just collapsed. The concerns you gave last evening: the family, the educational structures, and so on, are illustrations of that collapse in society today.

When you begin to talk about the Political dimension of society you begin to raise the issues of responsibility and engagement in life. When I say engagement in life I mean passionate engagement in a particular mode or stage in which you find your self at a particular moment in history. Behind passionate engagement is the deep drivenness in every man to care. You and I are caring beings, that is, care is not something some people have and others do not have. Every single person cares. That is both the curse and the glory of having been born in the time when consciousness has made us aware more than at any other moment in history of our relatedness to every single thing in the world.

I'd like to tell you how that drivenness to care was manifested in my own life. In 1966 I left home -- I left home. I had been away from school since I was fourteen. I had been married for fourteen years; I had my own home; Don and I had two children. I had worked in various ways in organizations and other structures in my community. But I left it all. I don't mean I left the role of wife and mother and suburban housewife, but it was almost the same as if I had. What I want to say is that I did that out of a drivenness of care that I had. For I could no longer live in an affluent suburban community outside Chicago when not more than fifteen miles away, the inner city, the ghetto, was springing into my being to do something about it. I couldn't bear the injustice I saw, and I was going to turn myself into what for me was the life and death issue of my moment. I couldn't have had more passion. I didn't know what I was going to do but, I was going to do something.

Well almost immediately, what I found was that I was literally battling windmills. I learned very quickly that there just not enough of me, to altar just the givenness of life in the ghetto of the inner citywazzu . I wanted to buy one pair of shoes for a child who had no shoes for the winter. Until I looked around and saw fifty other children who had no shoes for the winter. It seemed that over and over again I bumped into frustration, and all I could do was cry. And I did.

Now that story may sound naive to you, but I learned two very important lessons from that experience. One was that I learned, or should say that I confirmed the fact, that I care very much about life and what goes on in the world. And two, as my drivenness began to consume me I saw that each one of these dynamics, is intricately related. I was up here, working in the pre-school. I saw that the cultural dynamic and the economic dynamic, and the political dynamic are inseparable. That there was not one thing that could be done, here or at school, without the involvement of those other dynamics. That was a crucial thing to have happen in my life.

Now, I want to talk a little about the political process. It was not long before man in early self-consciousness saw the need to create the dynamic you and I call the political process. That is, he had to find ways to bring order into the chaos in which he found himself. That kind of order meant that, first of all, he just had to defend himself. There had to be a way to fend off wild animals, fend off the enemy that lurked around the next rock or around the next hill, and so in the ordering dynamic the pole of Common Defense was created. That's just the basic pole of the political dynamic. You and I have to have a way always to defend ourselves. There had to be rules to insure what I call Domestic Tranquillity. In order to maintain the kind of society that was begun there had to be rules that were enforced. Domestic tranquillity came into being. And then there had to be an agreement among people on a Legal Base which gave permission for this ordering dynamic to go on. The rule was, if you kill someone in my group, I'm going to kill at least one in your group. You see that today in any dynamic in life. You men in your businesses would see this dynamic operating over against justice.

Justice is the dynamic in which you find the laws or the rules, the authority to enforce the order that has been created. The justice gives power to the law. Justice that comes into being when you look back may not be, in perspective, the kind of justice you and I would talk about today. But that's not a value judgment, that's just always been the way society dealt with the kind of legal consensus that arose from a people. Whether or not it was imposed was beside the point. If the King ruled the land, that was the consensus. There was no question from the man who lived on the bottom of the heap. That was the Legal Consensus. Then, the Judicial Procedure which man creates to legislate, and the Executive Authority, which might be a king or a congress or it might be a small group of people. Any society always has executive authority.

Now, to see to it that the well-being of every citizen is provided for was the pole of Welfare which said that there are certain things about life that a citizen can expect. He can expect a Secure Existence. He has the right to be protected to have certain things given to him provided for him, to create secure existence. And there are certain Political Freedoms, there again you and I may not call that freedom, the right to vote or whatever, but there

were freedoms given. That is a citizen knew what his rights were. Any time in history, be he slave or be he today in a country that is just emerging. You talked quite a bit last night, I thought about Significant Engagement. And the fact that every human being wants to feel significantly engaged in society—the right of every man to have some say about his own destiny.

Much of history has been written through the eyes of this pole of the social process. I know the history that I study was the glory of Greece and Rome, the great city states; and then the great nation state. The heroes of my past are largely political. Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Napoleon, or Thomas Jefferson. Who were those men who created the great nations; who swept across the earth with fantastic political power, and without whom no nation's history would be told today.

In terms of world history, when the political dynamic broke forth into revolution in the 18th century, there emerged a new consciousness about the plight of the common man—the little man. The French coined their great slogan: "Liberte, egalite, and fraternite." The American Revolution, a continuation of European culture, was based upon the ideal that all men were created equal.

Today across the globe, you see that Order is the pole of the political process that is extending itself. This happens in a time when there is a swirl of complexity. Man does not know what forms society is going to take, and therefore, Order is the pole of the process that grasps hold. This happens in different forms. It can be in holding the status quo, or saying nothing is going to change." We're not sure what we want, and, therefore, nothing will change. Or there can be the kind of order imposed because change is erupting here and there. Order looks out and blows a whistle and says, "Hold on there." We're not sure that's what we want. And a clamp comes down to day, "No more. No more!" And what this does is make justice flounder and become weak. I was really fascinated last night by Jim's illustration about the fact that there is no viable system for the world today.

So justice, that which articulates the form of society, flounders today because man does not know what that new vision should look like. The collapse comes at the point of well-being, that man finally does not feel himself a part of the concept at all. Man's mind has reeled in this complex time in which we live, the vision of what society could be has been lost. Everyone is clear that there are no easy answers. Everywhere you look the vision, the picture, is not there.

Now this imbalance and this consequent loss of vision in the political context has its effects upon the individual. When a whole society has fallen into disorientation, it is always manifested in an individual. Today we are in what I like to call "the engagement crisis." There is a crisis across the globe in terms of engagement of man. I'd like to say here that the word "crisis" in Chinese is held in two characters—one that means "dangerous," and the other that means "opportunity". That is precisely, then, the crisis man is in today—one of danger and one of opportunity. When society is wrenched the way it has been in this century, it is little wonder that man has been caught in disorientation. This disruption is taking place in every dimension of life. I think sometimes that I have a grasp of how the economic dimension has taken hold of my own life. But then I forget, and things like where I live, or where my children go to school become important questions and I have to raise the question all over again. Those decisions are made out of economic values.

In the political arena of life today there is a pervading feeling of anonymity, among people. It is as though the structures are out there to get me. They are not there for my benefit, they are there to do something to me. And man is leery in engaging in society when he feels so far away from the point at which the decisions about his life are made. There comes a feeling of impotence, the feeling of being a puppet that is manipulated on a string, by someone or some structure so far beyond that he couldn't even reach it if he wanted to go there. This kind of impotence, this feeling of frustration, makes man want to reduce his world, to gather in all he can grasp within his reach, and say, "I'll handle what I can manage to see and what wants I can manage to hold onto." This retreat has finally come at this point in a very good example in the family today, the one function in the world where you would think man could be a king today. If he is the king it is inside his head, because the queen has lots of questions about any decisions the king wants to make; and the princes and the princesses of the castle don't even want the kind of world the king has to offer them. So deeper and deeper alienation of society takes place, until finally a paralysis sets in where the question is asked, "Well, if I do anything, what would I do? I don't know where to begin. Things are so complex, where would you start?" There is a kind of guilt within this alienation, the kind

of guilt that comes because of the drivenness going on here. Finally, man seems to have no weapons left, except for his deep cynicism about the way things are being done and about the way things are.

But I wouldn't want to suggest that there are not incredible encouraging signs in the world today, relative to man's relatedness with this globe. I think there are emerging possibilities all around the globe for authentic engagement and responsibility for the world. I am encouraged with the consensus which has emerged that we are not going to blow ourselves up. We may not have found the key or the right way to solve the conflict between nations. But for now, at any rate, this world has decided it will not blow itself to bits. I find that very encouraging, because I plan to be here awhile. I am encouraged by the phenomenon of the economic community around the globe. Perhaps more than any other structure in society today the economic community has shrunk the globe into a village, and one can hope that this economic community creates a global community, with its fantastic ability of creating. The cooperation between the educated, the scientists, the artists, has just amazed me in the last few years. I am particularly intrigued by the multi-cultural exchange of artists that occurs over the world today. Just this past week here in Chicago we had the Canadian ballet, the Russian gymnast team, the Ballet Afrique, Mexico's Folklorico, and France's gift to us all, Marcel Marceau and Renoir.

Finally, I see great hope in the fact that people today are looking for comprehensive solutions to problems. There is great dissatisfaction today in engaging in something that is going to collapse the day-after tomorrow. I call that band aid treatment, or underneath are the deep wounds of society that that kind of approach cannot help. I see more and more that people are saying NO. They are going to do nothing until they see a solution that deals with the whole problem is there. I find it at very encouraging.

Now, there is a malaise in engagement, and there is a sign of encouragement. But within this kind of situation mankind has a new way to participate in life because of the consciousness no other living thing has. Man's engagement in life's journey is symbolized as he goes through life from birth to death. I call these four modes of participating in society. The Hindus have called these the four phases of life. We borrowed that, and have called this the four life phases—a journey from life to death, in which there are four opportunities to experience life all over again. Now, the phases, as Don mentioned last night, go from 1-29, from 20-40, from 40-60, and from 60 on. Each one of these phases has a particular role to play, unique to that phase, that society depends upon. Each phase has a life and a death. The creativity that comes in each of the phases is unique.

Let's talk a minute about the youth. The youth's role in society is to challenge and to question and wail, and ask more questions after answers have been given, to experiment with everything that there is to experiment with, and keep questioning, and keep demanding. It is no wonder that people in the next two phases have a problem with the youth, but he is playing his role. He is doing his phase, by just being—the name that some of us call it -- rebellion. That is not rebellion! That is pushing society into the future. For history is only going to move if that happens with the youth. If the youth do not question what is happening, there will be no future for them to be the adults in. The kind of birth the youth has is just the birth into life. The death of the youth is a very difficult death. For to give up the role of having beaten on the door is for me, perhaps one of the most difficult deaths of all. There is something very eternal about giving that up, saying that is finished, and moving on to a new life.

The next phase is from twenty to forty. This is what you might want to call the emerging adult, the rising adult. The role of this phase is to begin to mold the future—that kind of assuming responsibility for the change that needs to take place. This is the time of the great warrior. This is the time when fantastic battling takes place. I'm in this phase and I like to fight. The kind of passion that phase throws in to creating the structures society lives with; the kind of making his mark in time and space, putting his notch on the tree. His birth into this phase in which he flounders awhile forms the transition from youth. The task of that is to die to being the backup.

The established adult, from forty to sixty, is there simply to be the establishment. The establishment is the phase which gets things done. It says, "I demand authenticity!" if you want to change anything about the society I'm concerned about. These are the times when one is a ruler, when there is excitement in knowing that the maintenance of society is in your hands. You can just tell when a person is the ruler of his situation. Then when that dies, he gives up that life he is and moves into the other phase.

The elder's role is to be that one who passes on the wisdom. By the elder's very presence in society there is a relationship and symbol of death that is beyond. This is the elder who is related, perhaps most of all, to the

future. For the elder cares about what happens when he is no longer here. He is to illuminate the way life is. He is the sage, wise person. This is a remarkable kind of life to live.

Now there is a dynamic, of course, within all of this. We play various roles in our plays. Sometimes you might show up as a youth, rattling on the door, rebelling against a situation. Or you might find your five year.-old child, playing the role of the elder on your behalf.

And the escapes that come within the phases—the youth who dismisses heritage, who says no to his past because he does not want to deal with the sweat of life. Or the rising adult. I think I'll pick on the women of society who want to stay young. There is a time when youth has to be died. I think we women have particularly manifested our reluctance to give that up, so escape into youth constantly. And the established adult, who perhaps says no to being the maintainers and so goes into flighty patterns instead of assuming the responsibility of his phase. Or the elder's escape is to retire. I think of the people I know, my mother, her friends, and other people I know in the elder phase of life who have a glimmer that there is something that is not retirement. That is to say that you don't retire and move to a little conclave of non-activity, but that there is some kind of creative process which goes on beyond the age of 60 or 65 or 55 or whatever that age is. You and I have participated in placing the elder in retirement. You and I do not want to face the contingency the elder holds in front of us.

Well, part of resurgence is recovering what it means to be human in our time. The deep awareness to grasp that each phase of life is a complete and full lifetime. Isn't that fantastic! You thought you had one life to live and you do, but you have four times to live that life. And when that awareness comes you become aware of the perpetual hunger of every single age group. I said I'm in the second phase and I'm coming to the close of a phase, not for another year, but already I'm beginning to think about what it looks like to live a whole year dying. Already I'm beginning to wonder how I'm going to give up fighting and battling and become the ruler. That should be very interesting. Well, it's kind of fascinating and fear-filling too. I don't know if becoming forty is as fascinating and dreadfilled for a man as it is for a woman, but there is something about becoming a woman of forty that fascinates you.

Well, now I'd like to go back for just a moment to that caring I spoke about earlier—the astounding awareness of our relatedness to all of mankind. Now there's a strange feeling of fascination. There's fascination in the realization that people are people wherever they live. That the same yearnings in your heart are in the heart of every other person that lives. There is a kind of longing for meaning in life. When you grasp the fact that you were yanked into life, not first into a family, not into a nation, not some particular color, but into all of humanity, you will begin to grasp that humanity and your part of it as just the indicative of your life, the givenness of your life. Then you begin to grasp the deep meaningfulness that is inherent in that. For you, life is bound to every other life. And your concern reaches as far as your relatedness reaches—to the whole globe. Now that's fascinating. The dread. To become aware of that kind of responsibility is a burden that no one to shoulder. It comes like a mountain of hate on your shoulders. It makes the story of Atlas carrying the world on his back become a living reality. For to carry the weight of the world on my back is impossible. I cannot do that. There are the suffering masses of humanity; there are too many people and there is too much to be done.

Well, it took the impact of a totally other situation to disclose to me what happens when that weight falls on you. A couple of years ago, I went around the world with a group of people. We went to Calcutta. I'd heard all about Calcutta. I heard about the heat; I heard about the swarms of people in the streets; I heard about beggars on the street and people who live in the street. But I was not prepared for the impact that city would have on my life. We left our hotel and walked down the street. And immediately an assault of humanity crowded around me, and I began to feel tugging on my skirt. I would turn around and a hand would be like this. At first that seemed to be a very easy situation to handle, until you saw that up and down every street that you walked a hand was out. You finally decided to try to ignore it all; until there was a tugging so persistent I couldn't shut it out. I turned and I looked into the face of a woman who had her hands out to me. In her arms she held a dead baby. I became so sick I could not stand it. When I saw that what I had thought it meant to care for my fellow man was destroyed because it meant I cared for that woman and for every other person like her in the world; I suddenly felt the sickness of phoniness that I held inside. And I could not stand anymore. I went back to my hotel and I closed the door of the room and I did not leave it for two days. I stayed in my room with a fever of 103. I wouldn't look out of the window and I wouldn't eat. Then I came out two days later, and I went to the hotel dining area. When I walked in it was dark and humid and I walked across and sat down at a table and picked up a menu that was filled with every

delicacy you could imagine. I started to feel sick again. I realized that somewhere in the background, violins were playing And I wanted to get to my feet and scream, don't you know what that's like out there, don't you care about that out there? What are we going to do about that?

The screams of mankind can no longer be forgotten. The mountain stays there. And life will not take "no" to ever allowing you or me to forget the memory. It's there and you care for the world. You just care. And the deep appreciation and delight that you have for life. The mountain of care has to be with that total relatedness to all of the past and to all of the future.

And you know, the globe is not so big. Did you read that the last astronauts that were on the moon, called back to earth and said, "Guess what? When we hold up our thumb, we can blot out the whole earth. It's just the size of a thumb.

But you and I will always have escape hatches. We're inconsequential; we're inadequate; we can't do the job; we're insecure—but that indicative will not go away. The resurgence within us, that is at hand, comes at just the point where life has burned you and me with things you and I cannot blot out with our memory.

Well, the political process is experiencing resurgence today because man is beginning to raise the questions of what it means to be a man of integrity. And beyond that, what it means to live a life that is filled full of meaning. It may be that you and I will see the re-engagement of the kind of passion that forged the great nations. It just may be that we, you and I, will see the dawn of a global society in which every man's concern is for the whole world and on behalf of his brother. Then you see, of course, I can't go home again. And you can't go home again. Because the whole world is hungry.

Mary Warren Moffett