

HUMAN AWAKENMENT

Introduction

The term "awakening" is a sociological phenomenon that has happened many times in history. It implies a situation of social sleep, numbness or coma that is so prevalent that anyone beholding it would see nothing untoward and anyone participating in it would be indignant at the accusation of being asleep. On the other side of the event of awakening is a more inclusive vision of the human predicament, a sense that life is and ought to be struggle and tension and a renewed sense of urgency manifested in the uneasy sense of needing to do much more than is being done. This kind of awakening has always gone hand in hand with any revolutionary movement. It is witnessed also in all the great religious movements: in the rise of Buddhism, in the literati movement in Confucian China, in the rise of Islam, or in the monastic reforms of the Middle Ages. More secularly and with a more ostensibly political thrust, similar campaigns of awakening accompanied and preceded the French Revolution of 1789, the American Revolution of 1776, the Russian Revolution of 1917. The tools of awakening ranged all the way from Town Meetings, political rallies, to tract and pamphlet campaigns. None of these revolutions happened by spontaneous social combustion although to history it may seem that way. All these revolutions involved and relied on the process of popular awakening.

In the social revolutionary movements the concern was for awakening the masses to a realistic appreciation of their plight as a massive imposition of injustice from above. One aspect of awakening was in seeing this as a man-made situation, not a result of some eternal law. As manmade, it could also be manunmade. The grasping of the universality of the social malaise, and the possibility of recreating their social structure by the investment of their own lives came as a revelation that enabled masses of people to sense anew their freedom even in the midst of oppression. When this revelation was accompanied by the appropriation of a practical vision of the new society, whole villages and towns joined the movement of social change.

Often at the core of all that is written and spoken in the process of awakening is a seemingly simple insight: "Man is born free, but is everywhere in chains;" "These are the times that try men's souls" "the dictatorship of the proletariat" or "I have a dream;". There are wellknown popular figures associated with the drama of awakening: Rousseau before the French Revolution, Tom Paine in the American Revolution, Lenin and Trotsky in the Russian Revolution and Martin Luther King in the American Civil Rights Movement. They become symbolic figures but are always accompanied by a small force who carry the message to the masses.

The results of awakening can be farreaching and by no means always constructive. Not all such processes of awakening, however, could be properly styled, "profound." The purpose of this essay is to examine the dynamics of profound human awakening.

1. PROFOUND HUMAN AWAKENMENT

Profound human awakening has to do with the perception of one's ultimate relationships. In the course of a lifetime, one experiences many "awakenments:" the discovery as a child of a world beyond the family; as an adolescent, the discovery of the opposite sex; as a traveler, the discovery of an alien culture, etc. Each of these encounters with the other person or environment irrevocably alters one's consciousness. Profound awakening, though, has to do with none of one's particular relationships. Instead, it deals with their transparency - the dimension of meaning and significance that shines through particular relationships. This transparency is the discovery within life's concrete experiences of a dimension of meaning that colors all mundane experiences.

As Kierkegaard observed, the self is a relationship that relates itself to its relationships, and in willing to be itself grounds itself transparently in the power that posits it. The self that is asleep is unconscious of this third dimension and thus of its ultimate grounding in reality. Or, on the other hand, it does not will itself to be itself and thus denies its grounding in ultimate reality. To be "awakened" is to have one's authentic grounding in reality exposed to one's consciousness, to receive this reality as significant and to engage one's creativity in history before this reality.

The human experience of the ultimate dimension of reality is first of all an experience of mystery. One encounters a radical unknownness at the heart of the ordinary. The routine is without basis, the comfortable is inexplicable, the ordinary is questionable. Theories of causation and science explain nothing, least of all the raw "thereness" of a situation.

Secondly, the human experience is of a dimension of freedom. Consciousness experiences an expansion. The future is not "out there" coming forward with an irrevocable certainty of content to be received. It is nothing but whatever is created in the present by the expenditure of human energy.

Thirdly, the experience of the ultimate is an experience of care; an aroused passion to use one's single lifetime creatively on behalf of the needs of the world.

Fourthly, the experience of humanness is an experience of tranquillity. In the midst of all the tensions and struggles that are part of ordinary experience, one sometimes encounters an extraordinary satisfaction or fulfillment. This dimension of depth, the "Other World in the midst of this world," adds spice, color and tonality to mundane experience.

Every person and social entity lives out of some relationship to the "Other World," whether consciously or not. Awakening is a process of recognizing this experienced reality. Once it is recognized, never again can a particular act or situation or relationship be merely trivial. Every thought and action takes on a profound significance," every experience points to and discloses ultimate reality.

With the discovery that man is not an isolated individual but is man in community, a new aspect of awakening appears. Awakening can occur for social entities as well as for individuals. Further, a community, like an individual, is a network of relationships that relates itself to its relationships and in finding itself willing to be its relationships grounds itself transparently in the power that posits it. A community is a net of social structures and patterns of interdependence. Within it tensions and struggles among competing interests are experienced. These frustrate members' dreams and hopes and produce divisions, alienation and hostility. But a community also experiences self-understanding. It develops a story that deals with its will to be itself and with its destiny and worth as a human enterprise.

A community that is "asleep" is somehow not willing to be itself and thus refuses to rehearse its own inherent mystery, depth and greatness. In a practical sense, this takes the form of either hostility or indifference towards its environment. Where the environment is a threat, coagulation into a ghetto and experience of a great deal of fraternity and mutual protection among its members may occur. But the opposite may also be true and the moving of the gifts and energies of members into a creative contribution to history is lost. Instead, the community sucks these gifts up into itself. A community concerned about itself alone is a community that is asleep. If it persists in this state it will die, a prey to the normal internal tensions that beset human beings living or working in proximity. A community for whom the encompassing environment is neutral or lacks any significance is a community that has no identity, a bare human settlement wherein "every man for himself" prevails over social cohesion. There may be settlement in proximity, but in these situations there is no community. It is comatose, a potential community lacking the vitality and creativity that define awakened human community.

The experience of social or community awakening possesses the same dimensions as that of human awakening among individuals: the perception of the ultimate dimension of its particular relationships, a reception of these as good, and a decisional investment of those relationships in constructing the future. For the community this means a perception of the mystery of its selfhood - its space, its history and its unique resources in all their bewildering complexity. It involves a corporate consciousness that the future is being created by the actions of the present group, which is free to determine its destiny with the resources it has on hand. It involves an experience of care, not so much for its own members as for the alleviation of those objective sociological blocks that are hindering the community's move into the future. And finally, it involves the experience of the tension-filled tranquillity of experiencing itself destiny significant in the civilizing process. When this experience of the "Other World in the midst of this world" occurs for a community, it is transformed from a bare human settlement to a historically important "chosen" people.

The task of awakening today is to release that consciousness within the communities of the globe. The question is how practically is this to be done?

II. THE DYNAMICS OF HUMAN AWAKENMENT

Human awakening occurs when four situational factors are present. They occasion a dynamic in consciousness which

produces an alteration of basic imagery.

First, consciousness is changed through events which comprehensively challenge reduced images. Kenneth Boulding in The Image describes the process through which consciousness is altered by the impact of messages. In some cases the data of the messages is so incompatible with the existing image of the real that a "gestalt shift" takes place. Awakening is this type of event. For it to occur there must be a bombardment of reduced images with multifaceted data that require a reorientation of consciousness to account for the reality undeniably encountered. A community caught in an image of its victimization by circumstances is bombarded by experiences of its own profound significance, its unique gifts and its open possibilities, and something profound occurs in the corporate consciousness. It has a new image of reality that will inform all subsequent decisions and actions.

Secondly, for consciousness to be awakened at the profound level, the messages that bombard it must include aspects of the comprehensive, futuristic, intentional and archaic dimensions of reality. These messages evoke a sudden expansion of interior and exterior time and space and a new relationship to past, present, and future, both individual and social.

Thirdly, whenever consciousness is impacted by the presence of awe, it is profoundly awakened. Subjectively experienced as fear and fascination, the awe discloses the ultimate wonder precisely with the ordinary routines of life. When this happens, one can no longer ignore or dismiss situations or relationships as trivial. The community can no longer write off aspects of its being as unworthy of attention, and it is called on to be present to every situation and to work out its response in the light of this comprehensive significance.

Finally, consciousness is awakened by events which call forth a new relationship to the givenness of this particular situation. Profound awakening is not a matter of increased information being made accessible to the community. It is a matter of altering the basic stance of the community to itself and to the world from one of indifference or hostility to one of total significance within every situation. An event, then, which confronts the social group with the comprehensive, futuristic, intentional and archaic dimensions of reality, which occasions an experience of awe and which elicits a new affirmation of the given situation as an awakening event.

What sorts of events may these be? First, they are events of radical engagement in the particular situation. Every community is beset with its own immediate concerns. Withdrawing from them forces periods of respite or reflection may be an occasion of gaining perspective or psychological or physical renewal, but it is not the occasion of profound awakening. The community is always beset with a nagging sense of futility over the immediate, and only an encounter with radically effective engagement discloses the unique possibility of significant participation in history.

It is secondly an event in which the numerous factions of the community are present and find their fragmentation overcome by participation in a common task. Experiences of collegiality with like-minded peers are interesting, but profound awakening occurs when the tension-filled wholeness of the community's relationship is present and creatively employed.

In the third place, an awakening event is one in which all of life is disclosed to be good. It is not one in which the significance of life is spoken about in abstract or philosophical terms, but rather one in which it is experienced, one in which the concrete practical limits in a given situation are faced and found to have creative possibilities. Occasions of reflecting about the ultimate significance of the situation are valuable for clarifying the happening of awakening, but they are not that happening. Profound awakening occurs when in the heat of concrete engagement the particular limiting factors in a situation become transparent to life's mystery.

Finally the awakening event is one in which effectiveness is experienced in the face of real possibilities and limits. Reducing the task of the community to that which can be easily accomplished may be helpful on occasion to raise morale, but not to occasion profound awakening. The sense of objective sociological ineptness is a major hindrance to community life, and reducing the task only contributes to the malaise. Profound human awakening occurs when one actually participates in caring effectively for the totality of concrete local needs.

These happenings of awakening necessarily involve a certain amount of turmoil. Old images do not pass away quietly. The form and degree of the turmoil will vary with the particular temperaments involved, but certain factors are common. First, there is an unwelcome intrusion on operating images which produces defensiveness, however affirmative the content of those images may be. Secondly, a transforming insight occurs in which the content of the intrusion is seen to be finally significant. Then there occurs a decision to live creatively before that reality that was disclosed.

A social grouping is designed for protection against just these unwelcome intrusions described above. Events which attack present operating images produce either an effective silencing of the intruder or a retreat into the ghettostyle of life. Direct criticism of a community's selfunderstanding cannot be received, for that very understanding is what holds it in being with whatever cohesion it may have. A social entity, however, is peculiarly vulnerable to the declaration of its historical and profound significance. When that affirmation is radicalized to include those dimensions of its life excluded from its self-definition, then awakening begins. The group is capable of looking at its persistent irritants and intractable deterrents and fundamental contradictions without fear of annihilation. This process is a painful acknowledgment of the irreducible mystery in the midst of the group's particular existence. But when the particular manifestations of this unknownness are acknowledged and named, there develops a corporate resolve to deal with them. This resolve transforms a community's perception of its role and task in history.

The effectiveness of awakening events depends on their appropriateness to the time in history when they are occasioned. The past halfcentury has seen a veritable explosion in consciousness around the world. Instant transportation and communication have brought hitherto isolated peoples into intimate contact with one another. Economic expansion has linked previously hostile peoples into a network of interdependence. Technological advances have generated new knowledge and expertise at a rate that has driven educational structures to and beyond the brink of their capacity. Operating images that sustained communities in former days of isolation are no longer adequate for the present situation.

Society has taken steps to protect itself and its members from the raw mysteriousness present today. The primordial verities of birth and death have long since received a veneer of structural sanitation by withdrawal into institutions away from the public consciousness. But now the more mundane complexities of work, struggle, love and conflict have been subjected to a commercial trivialization from which even the human armpit is not exempt.

Soap operas and situation comedies make light of (or exaggerate) the human predicament, and when this fails to pacify, community members are urged to take tranquilizers at the slightest hint of psychic unrest. And yet underneath it all is the consciousness of global reality and an aroused human care for the world. This means that for profound awakening to occur today, the occasioning events are not those which impact the community with more data, events intended to "expand consciousness." The community already knows deeply and painfully what it is up against. And it is filled with persons striving to care effectively.

But this type of care is virtually impossible to actualize. The issues are so complex, their magnitude so extensive and their resolution so demanding that paralysis afflicts individuals and communities alike. It is impossible to acknowledge and affirm the given situation if the community has no way to respond to it effectively. So communities develop an "escape mentality" in a futile attempt to avoid the consciousness that creeps in. Energysapping hobbies and diversions siphon off the physical and psychic energy that might otherwise find only frustration in attempting to deal with the social issues of the day. Ironically, however, society's attempts to protect itself from its own consciousness have been counterproductive. To the extent that they succeeded, they took away the lifegiving tensions necessary for society to move forward. To the extent that they failed, they produced cynicism.

The times have brought profound consciousness close to the surface for every person and community. For it to emerge a form must be found which has the potential of effectively channeling the energy now devoted to its repression. But this form must be carefully designed and subtly executed. People and communities have been burned too often by promises of easy and quick solutions through programs from the outside, programs which yielded meager results from enormous expenditures of money and energy. The program that will occasion profound awakening in communities today will have to take very seriously the consciousness and care already present in human settlements around the globe.

III. THE STYLISTIC FACTORS

The happening of awakening to a community cannot be guaranteed, no matter how timely the message or effective the occasioner or well prepared the situation. There is always a strong ingredient of mystery in the phenomenon. However, a great deal is known about the components of orchestration that remove the obstacles to awakening. The stylistic factors in awakening are crucial and are present in the framing and structuring of the day, the style of the staff, the social method and the social form.

The event is encapsulated in a vehicle grounded in the cultural heritage and whose form, therefore, is not jarring, but, in fact, so acceptable to the civil authorities that they may even support it openly. We may call this aspect of style authentically

archaic.

The second quality is intentionality in the arrangement of time and space which is at the heart of good style. This aspect is very concrete. It has to do with precomputed finesse in the timelines of the day, in the ordering of events dramatically, including both continuity and discontinuity.

It has to do with the careful placement of wall decor, the best use of the space available, the careful setting of tables, chairs, pencils, paper, chalk, magic markers so that everything required for the day is not only present but arranged with an eye to beauty and power and so honors the greatness of the community, the heritage and the event.

The third quality of style is objectivity. First, the staff for the awakening event come from another city and so are an objective presence. The structure of the event is also objective. The use of songs, workbooks, workshop methodology, wall charts, heritage decor and squared off tables allow the quiet unconstrained participation of all in the group over against objective referents. This allows people of different races and persuasions to all participate in a process together rather than polarize into different camps of opinion.

Sensitivity and transparency in the staff are other factors. The staff has to be sensitive to the issues, history and uniqueness of the local situation, and clear about their serving role. They learn names, honor each person, and pay attention to the local mores. They are not there as slick "operators" or charismatic heroes but as servants. Their concern is that the community come off, not themselves. Their power comes from their quiet effectiveness and dedication in dealing with anything that could block the greatness of the day. The symbol that holds the transparency of the staff is the wearing of the blue.

The presence of The Blue, as we might style these servants, is catalytic. They are not there to harass or harangue the audience but to elicit their creativity. Here the role of methodology is crucial. It allows the emphasis to be put on the process and not on the orchestrators. It ensures that insight is elicited and honored, recorded and put into preservable formats. At the same time, it furnishes the community with a universally applicable method that can be used in other situations.

Sophistication is another aspect of the style of the catalyst. This does not mean showiness or pseudo elegance but is a way of honoring the community. It is manifested by the careful greeting of people, an unassuming attention to details and a delicate attention to the way they present themselves in their dress and demeanor. Even their brightly polished shoes become a salute to the greatness of the local community. This sophistication is also manifested in their flexibility in solving problems behind the scenes without pestering people or broadcasting their anxieties.

Finally the style has a structural element. Structure is manifested in the delineation of roles, space, time and especially the events of the day. When not employed slavishly, structure allows everyone to participate, gives a corporate focus to each event and ensures that the people themselves are the center of attention, not the speakers or organizers. In a structured corporate situation profound life address can happen indirectly and deep alienation healed without knowing how exactly it happened. It is structure that gives people permission to participate and celebrate, almost against their better judgment.

Everything has to be so disposed that the only offense is that of the word of possibility. The stylistic challenge is to ensure the absence of a paternalistic, superior, demagogic or finally contemptuous style of evangelism that blocks people from profound awakening. The presence of the Religious as the task force of profound care will always be a critical factor in human awakening.