

THE PROFOUND FUNCTION OF TOWN MEETING

I believe that Town Meeting as a social instrument is giving form to a titanic trend in history that defines our times. I believe that Town Meeting as a social instrument is engineering a complex, global maneuver of the spirit movement in our time. I believe that Town Meeting as a social instrument is manifesting a profound ontological dynamic of human consciousness in our time in history. And, I believe that Town Meeting as a social instrument is participating in the awesomeness of the final economy, of that eternal mystery, that undergirds our time and all time, past and future. !

I suppose all of us have smiled a bit at our struggle in times past to grasp the profound trends in history. It is not a simple matter, of course. After my experience of this year, which I bear witness is the greatest year of my life, I have come to believe that there has been no trend since the breakloose of the technological revolution that can even begin to compete with the trend which has appeared on our horizon that has to do with the rise of local man. I believe it was that earlier trend, the technological revolution, as it solidified into the forms of history, that destroyed the possibility of local man across the world. I do not rue it, but that is what caused urbanization and took away from local man the task of broad and long range planning for his village and the next community. Now, I believe, local man is rising again. One of the evidences of that is that local man has not had to be persuaded to move any place I have been this year. I found him quite ready to move before I even arrived on the scene.

I have fallen in love with local man all over again this year, and I have asked myself why. I think that if I were to answer that, I would say that I fell in love with him because I saw him ready to move. We sometimes believe that local man is filled with apathy and lethargy. This is not true. There has been a tight cap upon his motivity, but with the least opportunity for that to break loose, it breaks loose. I believe that those of us who have been educated the way you and I have been educated expect local man to be the kind of cynic that we are and to manifest the kind of apathy that we manifest. I find it is not true. I find within local man a kind of integrity that I wasn't sure I had in myself, and I think this is why I fell in love with him. When you go through a time in our country where you have the whole matter of Watergate and Mr. Nixon, and he was simply a manifestation of something far deeper than Watergate, you begin to wonder if integrity exists at all. I have found integrity in local man and therefore I have had born within me a new kind of confidence. Evil men will come and evil men will go in high places, but there is moral integrity in local man; he is on the rise and nothing can turn him back.

Another thing that told me local man was on the rise was something quite different. I became aware of the fact that if you plan and decide simply from the top down, sooner or later you run into a stalemate, and you and I have run into that stalemate. When you go from the top down, you are always dealing with figures and statistics, never with people. When you see that so many people each year starve and that so many catastrophes will happen, you come to a stalemate and finally you just panic. I think that is what has been going on in the high places of the political dynamic of every nation and is going to go on even more observably in the future with the princes in the economic dynamic of life. They simply cannot exist from the top down. They are seeing now the absolute necessity of working from the bottom up in order for history to move.

An oversimple illustration of this is that in no village that I have seen is it necessary for people to be hungry. I believe this is true of all villages in the world. It is not necessary for them to be undernourished, period.

This is the rise of local man. The world ran away from him, ignored him and got into trouble precisely because it ignored him. The world is now being forced to invite him once more to participate in making history. Before we are many years older, we are going to see that which is now but a cloud on a distant horizon, as a thunderstorm covering the earth. I am not talking simply about the third world. Those of us in time so-called developed or overdeveloped nations have suffered from this affliction of the suffocation of local man more than anywhere else. Yes, there is a new kind of change that we are just waking up to, and I think there is going to be, in our time, an emancipation of local man in the overdeveloped nations.

For a few years now we have lived before the symbol of an X: the top triangle was labeled the New Social Vehicle, the bottom one the New Religious Mode. When that first appeared before us, we knew, those of us who cared, that a New Social Vehicle had to be created across this globe, but we did not have the slightest idea how to go about it. Now we know how to go about it. Over against the kind of training that we have all had, we thought that building a New Social Vehicle was getting an ideology

and selling it to the people. That is liberalism, decadent liberalism. That never did create a New Social Vehicle, I believe. A New Social Vehicle is always created when local man is released to get his own creativity into history, to decide his own destiny. I believe, finally, in any profound sense, all social revolutions have happened in precisely this way. I believe that what we are doing in history is the only alternative to either Communism or Fascism. I do not ask you to agree with that, and it has nothing to do with little shriveled up people like us. Who cares who does it? What we are doing is the only alternative this world has to that which continues to squelch local man.

It is in that context that I understand Town Meeting. When you go out into the rural villages that I have seen this year, you do not find people alive. You find them dead. But give them one grain of hope, and something pops loose. All you have to do to look at our symbols and you understand it. If any of you went to do a social demonstration and failed, I would not be able to understand it. All you have to do is give a little grain of hope, and local man pops loose, ready to move. He is not about to let anybody come in and tell him what to do. He is quite ready to participate with other people in deciding the form of the society of which he will be a part. Town Meeting is that which flips the cork, which allows a little air of hope into his being and releases the creativity that is going to build a New Social Vehicle, cutting across all of the vertical lines of demarcation that have separated us into black and white, east and west, Buddhists and Christians, and whatever else. A New Social Vehicle is coming and the Town Meeting is the means by which you release the power, the gigantic power, that is necessary for local man to work together to build the social vehicle.

Next, it is very obvious to you that Town Meeting is a maneuver, a worldwide maneuver in the effort of the movement itself. And, we have to understand this. It became clear to us not so long ago that we had to leave our inner castles and move out into the only world there is God's world and that is the everyday world in which we are born and in which we die. The Town Meeting has been the basic instrument whereby that horrendous move of the whole movement became a realistic possibility.

I have sensed for some time that something I never anticipated would happen this summer. I have been waiting for something, to happen in these two or three weeks that we have been together. But nothing has happened. And suddenly I became aware that what hadn't happened had happened. When I put two and two together, I discovered that the happening is that which you brought here with you. You understand that? I never saw so many runts standing tall in my whole life. You talk about seasoning, you talk about stability, you talk about maturity, well, you just look. That is what happened this summer, and you know and I know that had it not been for Town Meeting, this which did not happen here, but happened before you came, would not have happened. That is crucial when you are talking about a revolution.

We have talked for years about going to the masses. We have known that as long as we contain whatever it is that we have to offer within any corral, it would be relatively useless in history. We have understood for a long time that we could do no other than go to the Last Fat Lady. You and I have known long before we even knew it, that we could not allow the church to contain us, that we could not allow our nations to contain us, that we had to go to the Last Fat Lady. Search her out and lay before her our offering. How do you do that? Well, they say there are two million villages in this world; my guess is that it is closer to three million. I have had an idea that every one of us sitting in this room has a deep conscious and unconscious resolve to not give up marching until the last village of this world has participated in a Town Meeting. Town Meeting has given us an instrument with which we can go to the masses.

As you well know, what we need, when we touch down on the soil of the 25 nations in which we work is credibility. We are not out to be anybody, but we have to have credibility. Those of you who work in Paducah and in Hartford and in Pueblo will agree that the United States is one of the wealthiest, strongest, most prestigious nations in the world. When I go to see people, I get out as quickly as I can that gorgeous document that says "Town Meeting '76". And I quickly tell the story of the 5,000, systematically across this nation. People used to ask, "Who are you?". Now they are saying, "How come I never heard of you?" If you are not a revolutionary, if you are not a soldier in remaking society, this has no meaning for you. But if you mean to win, Town Meeting has given us credibility, not these things we call Social Demonstrations and you better believe it. And God bless all of you who are spilling your blood in social demonstrations. I am just trying to talk as a hardheaded revolutionary at that point.

The next thing Town Meeting has done for us, and I am going to talk about my nation again, but it applies to Belgium, to Germany, and to Canada as well. Town Meeting is but the beginning in this country. It is preparing us for the next step, a social demonstration in every middlesex village and town across this country, which will spin so rapidly that suddenly you will discover you are doing

Primal Community Experiments, which is what we went for broke on in 1970. I am still going for broke on Primal Community Experiments. This next year we need to start trying to learn how to be a strategist. We need to protect our flanks fires. That means that we have to go to one of the prestigious cities of this country, one that the eyes of all are upon, one that is struggling to move itself. I am going to recommend Ivy City in Washington' D.C. That is one flank. The other flank is to find the most needy Indian reservation in this country. You understand what flanks are? And I mean start a new sense of hope among the people that we have maligned as we have maligned none other.

The third flank is to do the Selma of the 70's, which will be a black, povertystricken, rural village in the South. Then, maybe, there will be a fourth flank. I am not sure. It may be that we are going to have to do something for the Latin Americans in our country. What we are after are the heartlands of our country; to release local man in order to cut across the whole nation. If we do four this next year, the following year we are going to have to do 47, the number of houses within the United States. The year after that, 470, and the year after that, 4,700. If we could get 470 or 4700 going, we would have momentum enough that the governmental structures along with private institutions, hopefully the church, would spin that into the 47,000 villages in our country. Don't you think for one moment Then you kill yourself to set up a Town Meeting, that you are simply setting up that Town Meeting.

We are the People of God. We have to make sure in our lifetime that the torch that the People of God carry cuts across denominations and solidifies religious structures. That torch must be carried from one generation to the next. I am insistent that my fire be spent in maintaining the torch of the people who must always pioneer and in handing that torch on to a new awakened body who are God's People. You can only hand over that torch when you lay down your life in building social demonstration and in enabling Town Meeting.

My third point has to do with the profound relationship of Town Meeting to the ontological. It centers on profound awareness. It centers on historical engagement. It centers on human effulgence: the plethora of humanness. I believe that this is what consciousness is. I believe that this is what humanness is. I believe that this is the reality that the so-called religious or spiritual dynamic of every culture was trying to understand and bear witness to in their own poetry. I am not interested in ideas; I am not interested in doctrines. I am interested in the reality that you can only grasp phenomenologically, that every religious, every spiritual effort was trying to be seized by.

I am clear as never before that without unreserved historical engagement, you never reach the fullness of humanness. That is, care is not finally a decision that you can make if you wish to be human. Care is not an emotion, it is an engagement with the total being in the total given. And our sign of this are the symbols on our walls. Town Meeting is here and with Town Meeting, what you actually are doing is profoundly awakening people.

There are a few that came out of the religious tradition I came out of who still believe, no matter how we fight it, that to wake up is to come to your senses and believe in a certain body of doctrines. That is not what the church of Christ was based on by a long sight. The man Jesus was concerned that people wake up about their lives, about the reality in our lives. Well, it may be some years now before we , can get this clearly articulated in theology, in genuine dialogue with our past, but ~ it is going to be said again and the church is going to care about changed lives, not about conformity around ideas.

In Town Meeting, you are awakening people. Those of you who have beep with us a long time understand that this is nothing new. The first bug model we ever built grasped the church, the People of God, as involved in witnessing love, in justing love, in presencing love. When you do Town Meeting, you are doing what I mean by witnessing love. When you are engaged in social demonstration, you are doing what I mean by justing love, and when you are en, aged in both, as we all are, then you begin to have some idea of what it means to have presence and to take care of that presence that all that pass you by behold new possibility.

Now, what is it going to look like sociologically when you intensify your profound awareness and intensify your historical engagement? Well, if you really want to know, I am ready to risk myself for the first time in history and tell you what it is going to look like.

Have in your mind the Star of David. If you draw your first triangle with the point up, and then draw another triangle with the point down,

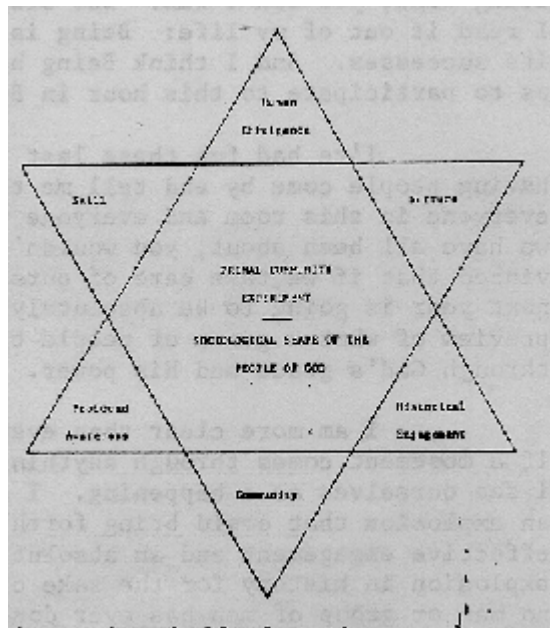
you have the Star of David. Now, in the one that is pointed up, over in the left angle, put down,

Profound Awareness. In the right hand angle, put down Historical Engagement. And, up at the top, you put Human Effulgence. (By the way, if any of you don't know what human effulgence is right

now, that is what you have had all this summer. None of your pains have none away, no less agony, the burden is not lighter, it is heavier. What you have is human effulgence, personally.)

Now, the other triangle. Up in the

left hand upper corner, put Skill. That is necessary in order to be effectively



engaged in history. You don't have to be literate to have skills, and when you go to Maliwada, you better know that before hand. Those people are brighter than hell, but they can't read their own name, let alone write it. And over on the right hand side, up at the top, put Nurture. Only as long as your profound awareness lasts can you be historically engaged. And if you do not take care of yourself, that profound awareness goes away. Nurture is life or death. It is what you do for yourself and what you do with one another. Down at the bottom, put the word Community. And I don't mean some organization; I mean the kind of community that never is confined to its own inflation. If you put a dot right in the front of that Star of David, and take your finger and start spinning it just as fast as you can, that is the Primal Community Experiment, the new sociological shape of the People of God. I

Town Meeting is building that shape, not for those of us who are exalted by attending cigar boxes with steeples on top every Sunday morning, but for the masses of humanity. I don't know exactly what people of various faiths have meant in the past when they talked about being men of God, but I know this, that I have become clearer and clearer that there is an invisible economy that my projected economy is always bumping into. However you describe it, there is something going on out here that is unsynonymous with even the greatest of our battleplans, and ~ maneuvers.

The greatest talk made here this summer was on opening night in which we were reminded of the temporality of our being a group or movement and screamed out the urgency that comes from the awareness that nothing in this world long endures. That which endures is being, not us beings. I think this underscores the wisdom we have had not to try to organize ourselves any more than we had to get the job done. You must always remember that until you have to win, you will not win. No one of you ever is tired of getting up in the morning if you are taking care of yourself, even if you are only 20 and maybe it is more important then than when you are 65. You have to condition yourself to see a cold slab with your dead cadaver on it. You get the picture; no man ever won. We haven't fought an inch beyond RS1. All things come and all things go, and only Being goes on. That means that only Being wins, you don't win. But Being is gracious. I didn't read this out of a book; I read it out of my life: Being is gracious for it allows you to participate in its successes. And I think Being has bestowed upon us the high honor of allowing us to participate to this hour in Being's success, in Being itself.

I've had fun these last few days, just sitting around doing nothing, and having people come by and tell me things; I wish I had kept a list. If you consider everyone in this room and everyone who isn't in this room and the one thing that we have all been about, you wouldn't believe what we have accomplished. I am convinced that if we take care of ourselves, and I believe that you are going to, next year is going to be absolutely out of this universe. We have had but a preview of what a group of people that have disciplined themselves can accomplish through God's grace and His power.

I am more clear than ever that we are not and will not be a movement. If a movement comes through anything we may have occasioned, it won't be our movement. I see ourselves as a happening. I see ourselves as having the potential of being an explosion that could bring forth, in our day, a new

fashion of profound awareness, effective engagement and an absolute plethora of humanness. If we become such an explosion in history for the sake of being an explosion, let us remember again that no man or group of men has ever done anything but failed it is Being itself shalt succeeds in us and allows us to participate in the success of Being.