

ASSIGNED PRIORSHIP: RELEASING THE YES

I want to talk about priorship. We have learned a great deal about priorship from the long history of the Church, from the movies, from ourselves and from the Lord of History who kept beating the daylights out of us until we caught on. Some aspects of priorship we are still struggling with, and probably will be struggling with until we go out of being.

It is frightening for us to think about next year. Someone came up with three hundred and fifty as the number of assigned priorship roles we will need next year. That includes all the Troikas in all the Houses around the world, the Centruns we are starting, and the Congregations. The need is overwhelming.

In talking about assigned Priorship, it is important to say that in one very real respect, assigned priorship in the Order is no different than the priorship of anyone else. In Development Centrum, the most effective priorship is carried out, not by the designated Quintern, but by people who in many ways are much more sensitive not only to the day to day concerns and operations of the Centrum and its Mission, but to the individuals within the Centrum.

Priorship is a life dynamic and has nothing to do with having one's name put across the top of a list or put in a Troika somewhere. For us, as we have always said, power is in the center of the table. That is probably one of the truest things we have ever said. I want to talk about Order Mission, Order Care and Order Symbol as the three areas of assigned priorship.

Priorship means radical concern for our Mission, our comprehensive task. Anyone around the world who finds himself reduced to less than a global context has, to that degree, chosen not to be a Prior, or not to be the Priorship dynamic in a group. Utter comprehensiveness when dealing with the World, the Church, a continent, your Centrum or Post is required of a Prior. Anyone who is only concerned with his little task is finally lost, because his vision will never expand to the point where he knows how it fits into the entire scheme of things.

At the same time, a Prior is radically concerned with the comprehensive, he is radically concerned with the particular. That is, a Prior is radically engaged at a particular point in the midst of his comprehensive concern. The task of my post is only my task insofar as it deals with the comprehensive.

There is no Mission without corporateness. In our history there is absolutely nothing comparable to the commonness of RS-I. We have one model for penetrating, for systematically going from Area to Area, Region to Region, and Metro to Metro. Anywhere you bump into RS-I, it is the same, no one can toy with offering that course. Priorship concerns itself with radical corporateness, holding our models, our consensus, and our power in common every place we go. We have to rehearse that understanding again and again, especially in Development where we have a tendency to think of each person in a specific way. Yet, without question, it is our rational pattern, and common strategy that hold and keep us in being. Priorship is always concerned with the consensus, and part of that consensus is corporateness. We must check and check and check, never doing anything without consulting a

colleague. Nearly every time I have found myself in a bad "snafu," it was because I did not think to check with someone else, to get the corporate wisdom. This does not mean great involved meetings or discourses--just small conversations that help get one back on the track. On the other hand, our models and consensuses are there to be broken, but this is only on very rare occasions. When we do decide to break a model or a decision, it is always decided upon corporately.

Mission is certainly our prime concern, but after that comes Order Care. Care, however, only takes place in the midst of mission and, again, the key to it is utter comprehensiveness. There is no caring for the Order outside of a knowledge about what is going on in the world. We are a different people because of Watergate--no matter how much you think we should or should not be. Watergate has affected the spirit state of this nation, and that is where we show up. To bring this down a level, to care for a particular Post means to know what the state of the Movement is. We must be aware of the fact that we, as a Movement, are in a radically changing battleplan. The front we were fighting on four years ago is so different from the present locus of our engagement that it seems like a different war altogether. If you are not aware of this going-on-ness, then there is no way to care for individuals within the Order.

Concerning the state of the Movement, several people have talked to me about this being a hard quarter. One colleague called it the shaking of the 747 jetliner as it makes its huge turn. Part of what we have experienced this quarter is the fact that RS-I is no longer our bread and butter. Our battleplan, includes a mass of existing programs and others in the process of being created. We are not exactly sure of how to engage in them all. To be a Prior in the Order is to be aware of this.

Care for the Order also means care for individuals. We have long talked in lectures about a third ear. A Prior needs a third ear, a third eye, 27 fingers and any other potential means of heightening his sensory perception of every individual around him. It is not possible to read the situation in someone else's life by the way he asks a question or makes a statement or walks down the hall. A Prior catches the glimpse in a person's eye, the people he decides to be with, and other subtle clues to his spirit state. Anyone who is not aware of the people around him is not a Prior. However, a Prior is not a patch-up person; he does not try to do something about everything he sees, but he does see. Care for human beings is structural. Some of us think Priorship is having conversations with individuals about their spirit problems. Almost always, the last thing a Prior ever wants to do is talk to someone about his spirit state. Instead, a Prior is concerned with finding ways to enable that person to care for himself, to be engaged significantly and therefore find life and health. Depth, structural care has to do with assignment, with adequate operation of a structure like Centrum, Post, Congregation, Ecclesiola and Team, and it has to do with the ordering of Corporate life and with developing a facility with corporate wisdom.

Priors are always concerned with assignment-making. Assignments should enable a person to take another step, but they should be made with indirection. It should seem as if a prior is doing something with one person, when actually he is doing something with another person. Most of the world's people are masters of indirection but too often get caught dealing with people and situations head-on. I most often get caught hurting or destroying another person when I decide to directly engage him, or directly confront him, or directly make an address on his existence. At times that is necessary, but only once in every hundred situations. The person in this room who has been in the Order the longest has an interesting situation. He gets the daylight's beat out of him time and time again. But he knows that most often, if he is the recipient of a direct beating, then someone else's spirit problem is being dealt with. That is indirection and what an opportunity! It could be a pattern each week.

The assigned Prior is one who the Order has decided stands as a symbol to us all. When he walks out the door, he is a symbol of the whole. When he stays inside he is a symbol of the whole. He is a symbol because he represents a worldwide network of people with a particular mission at stake. This is what it means to say that an assigned prior is called upon to play roles. First of all, his role is to be the whole. He can never get caught simply in some narrow aspect of who we are; he does what is specifically needed in terms of the whole. He may decide to use anger, but with control. If he lets his anger get out of control, he has decided, to that extent, to give up his Priorship. He uses his passion in an ordered way. He also is in control of his mood, the situation, and the context at all times.

These are all very practical things that, if a Prior keeps them in mind, he will never lose. If he reads the situation, reads where the Order is in a particular situation and reads what is possible, he never loses. He may decide to throw up a balloon and the Order may decide to shoot it down and that is fine, nothing is lost.

We used to talk about the phenomenon of second priorship. The person who is assigned priorship in a situation--the person who is in the chair, or who holds the chalk or whatever, is a symbol. Everyone else in the room is clear that the Prior cannot be allowed to lose completely. Of course, we hope he never gets himself into a situation like that any more than once every five years or so, but some of us are not so bright as others.

One thing I have learned through the years is that the symbolic head of the Order can never be allowed to lose or be shoved to the point of losing in a situation. "Losing" may not be the best word to use, but that person is the symbol that holds the unity and the consensus. He has radical power and anyone with wisdom knows this is the way it has to be.

On the other side of that, the Prior that takes himself too seriously is lost. He is able to laugh at his own stupidity, at his own mistakes. He pursues a course and drives it through. He stands, however, alert to other wisdom which may alter the direction he has taken. At that point he repents, allowing the situation to go another direction. Even then, he is not losing. A prior always sees winning or losing in terms of the corporate body. At the same time, he must take himself very seriously.

Another important piece of wisdom we have must have been gleaned from the Chinese. It has to do with honoring the other or allowing the other to save face. I am not discussing a reduced, distorted version of saving face, but its most comprehensive aspect. Anyone in Development Centrum who comes up with a plan must be able to read the possibility in such a way that the assigned Priorship does not have to say a no. Rather, we create a context in which the yes which we always start with in a situation can be said. Then, if we have to say no, we recontext the situation so it is broad enough to reveal that the particular concern is, in a larger scope, not adequate. In that way, a no is realistic for it is in the context of a larger yes.

Perhaps that is what I have been trying to say about Priorship. A Prior never wants to let himself get into the situation of having to say no to anyone. He will have to, of course; saying no is a part of life. But a Prior's concern is with releasing the yes.

---Charles Hahn