

Chicago Centrum
Priors Council

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"DRIVING THROUGH THE FOG"

This quarter I have been intrigued with the solitary exercise of charting the day, the week, and the quarter. It has been very exciting. I began to chart the past quarter and found it very interesting to discover there have been three events that have been, probably, the events of the quarter for me. They have all been very similar in the way they have felt as I have run into them. They all had to do with running into the future and the unclarity of that future. But the event itself, the feeling of the event, is like when one is driving a car, rounding a corner in, say, Northern Minnesota, and running into a fog bank you didn't expect. You feel completely lost and yet know that you have to keep going. I do not know how many fog banks you have hit like that but it is a frightening experience. Yet the experience is like being pulled out of gear for a second while you are still going. Something about that experience brought back the story at the end of the Eiseley paper we read in CS-I about the crow who usually flies up in the treetops and is not afraid of men. A fog bank hits when Eiseley is walking through the forest. Out of the fog, the crow comes at him and he realizes the crow is very disoriented because here is a man in the treetops. The crow has lost track of where he was.

That fogbank hit me three different times during the quarter. It probably hit more often than that, but three were unbelievably overwhelming. One happened at a local Church Consult in Boston. I think I laid my own elephant trap there. There was a Field Visit Thursday night. I did not know until twenty minutes before the last plane to Portland, Maine that I was going. As I was running out the door, someone from the Local Church gave me three blue booklets. I was supposed to have looked through to see that everything was there. Everything was there except the thing that told me how to do the Consult. I had not done one yet this quarter. The workshops deal with the imbalances of the Local Church. Next day, the procedures arrived about two hours before the Consult started so I was not completely prepared for dealing with the future of the Church. We got into the workshop Saturday morning. If you have been through that Consult you know ~~what~~ the group does. It takes the activities that go along with the dynamics of the Cadre, the Congregation and the Parish and begins to build illustrations of what each dynamic looks like.

The procedures refer to the "Parish Guild". That was a different note for everyone in the consult, including the person leading the consult, because I think all of us have been at least to some degree operating out of the image that ~~what~~ we were about in the Ecumenical Parish Experiment was different than the Local Church Project. We thought we were bringing in a religious club over here to be concerned about the neighborhood, and a secular club over here that would be concerned about the neighborhood, and somehow they would work together on projects where you didn't have to do the Daily Office. Everybody in that Consult was operating out of that image but instructions seemed to indicate we were to operate out of a different stance than that. It was a strange dynamic and there was some confusion about what that Parish Guild thing was about. I thought the way to grasp this dynamic would be to push the workshop out ten years. I asked what in ten years the cadre will look like and the congregation will look like. Then the fog bank hit. I could not say anything and the group could not say anything,

except a Unitarian fellow, who said, "You can't do that." Somehow we got through to lunch so I had a chance to check back up on the procedures. The future had hit me and hit the whole group of us. It was an unbelievably paralyzing and strangely unfamiliar territory to deal with.

Operations Centrum looks at all of the Twenty programs, and we deal with those programs that are relatively settled. Research and Development are dealing with the ones that are more experimental. In a direct sense, we coordinate RS-I, PLC, Core Curriculum, Advanced Training and the internal finances of the order and other such arenas. We were trying to build a picture of all the Twenty programs and all of the eighty-four Religious Houses. We took the consensus we made last August when all of the Area Priors were here: how each Religious House was expected to have three RS-I's and each would hold one PLC a quarter and so on. We were trying to build a display that would hold the comprehensive picture of everything the Movement did last quarter within the realm of the Twenty Programs. That is an unbelievable experience. When we were about half way through with this picture, some one came in and said, "Wow! That represents a lot of work up there." So we stopped to look. There's room for one hundred Religious House names across the top of the chart we built, and there are Twenty programs down the left hand side: so there are roughly two thousand of these one inch by two inch squares up on the board. Someone asked, "If the index of what we expect of ourselves is three RS-I's, how many man-hours does one RS-I represent?" One RS-I is probably more than a thousand man-hours including the participants' time, and the cooks' and the recruiting of it. Three RS-I's per house mean more than three thousand man-hours, that's six million man-hours per quarter. As the squares begin to fill up, one could see the number of RS-I's and the number of LENS courses and the number of other activities that are going on and begin to be overwhelmed. I was at least. We began to get a comprehensive view of all that the movement is doing--including a 232-person RS-I course in Manila which represents just one number in one of those little squares. We tried to push ourselves to see the whole movement as we would from the moon, to see the concretions of what we are doing.

The fog began to sneak under the door. It really happened to me when one of the university students came in and looked at the board for a while. Where other people had been interested in it and intrigued with it, he asked, "Now what sort of decisions does this thing help you make?" I started to tell him if you looked on the side you could see how a particular program is doing and if you looked down, you could sense where the excitement in a Religious House was happening, and maybe sense what particular things they were doing to come off with power. And then I made the statement: "And you can imagine what this does in terms of forcing you to see the whole Movement now. Think of what it will look like five years from now." And boom! The fog bank hit.

I also went on a LENS course toward the end of the quarter. The first one I went on was to Cincinnati. I had not been on a LENS course for a year. I knew that people had told me that there had been a major series of shifts in what it meant to be part of a LENS course in that participants mostly were no longer the Movement. We were encountering the business world which was so excited about the LENS course. As a matter of fact, I found it interesting. The concretions of this encounter are overwhelming.

I was in Cincinnati with about twelve or fourteen men from Proctor and Gamble. About two-thirds of the way through the weekend, we told the story of who we are as the Research and Development arm of the Church. Most of these men were the Research and Development arm of Proctor and Gamble. Our stories

started to intertwine as to what it is to be in Research and Development in the world. One of these men was part of a group in Proctor and Gamble that spent eight years developing "Pringles (those potato chips that come in a can.) It really gave me heart to hear what they had spent eight years doing, in terms of brainstorming and trial runs that they made. They thought they had it licked and perfect and they put them in a can, opened it and the chips all stuck together. There was one fellow who talked about his eight years on freeze-dried coffee. He said that the first experiments in mass-produced freeze-dried coffee produced coffee worth more than gold; it had cost more than thirty-five dollars an ounce to produce and gold was selling for only thirty-two. Then there was part of this group that had spent eight years on "Pampers" disposable diapers. What these men found exciting in LENS was not simply the methods but the concepts by which to grasp the whole planet.

The next week, I was in Rochester. I gave the Sunday morning Guild lecture. I do not think I was on top of the lecture as I should have been. I was making one of those statements you make when you are making general points you know that you are not clear on. You say, "What would it look like if..." I was talking about the possibility of using a particular method in business and said: "What would it look like if the major leadership of twenty business corporations across the world were here with us this weekend. What would these proposals look like?" As I said that, most of the faces in the room turned to the faces that you would see on the front of Business Week. Somehow the pause after my statement went Boom... Boom... Boom... I do not know what happened in the rest of that lecture. What I had not realized was that the future becomes real for a moment. There's the uncontrollableness of it, the wildness and the possibility of it that were just overwhelming. Every structure I am in, the team, the Centrum, and congregation has been to see "The Sting." Well, I don't know what that movie is all about, but I know this much: I have been operating out of the story that only the naive can act with confidence in doing something relative to the future. Yet those men were not naive in that movie, but they were confident. There was a buoyance after that movie that bordered on giddiness. It had to do with the kind of confidence that is in the midst of the fog I think that everybody's is relative to the future.

That has been my experience this quarter. We are coming out of the Turn this quarter. We went into the Turn in 1971 like one of those big Daytona Speedways, with the banks and speed. It has taken us two years to get out of the curve. We can occasionally get glimpses of the straightaway at the other end of the curve of the Turn to the world. And every once in a while there is a fog bank across the road. There is no stopping and waiting for the fog to clear. One simply drives into it, with the confidence of Henry Gondorff and his group. That is what the quarter has been for me--running into fog and driving through it.

Tim Lush

