

GLOBAL CENTRUMS AND PRIORSHIP

In light of our plans for Global Centruns in the fall, Priorship is an important arena for us to spend some time on this quarter. A few years ago, we made a crucial observation - perhaps it was really an imperative, or an experiment. We began to see that the Priorship developing in our Ecclesiolas was the backbone of the Order. The exposure to the depths in Ecclesiola enabled growth and training to occur. This observation convinced us that spirit could be breathed into the divisions of our work, whether as Guilders or as post members. We discovered that our Knowing, Doing, and Being was not limited to Thursday nights, although Thursday nights took on the function of being a rehearsal of the deeps, much like worship.

As we begin to experiment with the organization of Centruns, we have had the glorious opportunity of being guinea pigs in the 8 to 5 workday - Priorship dynamic. Priorship should not be limited to any particular timespan, but consider the 8 to 5 period in order to give us some idea of what is possible. With the advent of Centruns, we now have structures, or regular occasions, in which Priorship can take place. By that I simply mean our 8 a.m. collegium meetings and our Centrum meetings Tuesday night. Whatever else occurs these two places, are the points of rehearsal and intensification of Priorship. What we mean by the term "leader" or "leadership" will always be a dimension of Priorhood. The 8 a.m. and Tuesday night meetings form a tandem in which coordinating themes and emphasis begin to work in concert. The 8 a.m. meetings we have tried to keep very short, light, tapping on certain subject arenas and themes. Tuesday nights last longer, so that we can plow through and dig into what we are considering.

We have always known that Collegium is our time for context and vision. Perhaps the term is becoming cloudy, but in Management Centrum, collegiums have been crucial. We use them to fill the need for a futuristic and overarching context for our work. It never fails, when we begin the day with a futuristic, visionary context, the work of the day gets handled far more effectively. Collegium is also a time for business. In a thirty minute Collegium, we spend twenty minutes on the context and ten minutes on business. This pattern enables vitality and flexibility in the work of the day. Periodically, we try to reconvene at 4:30 every other day. Sometimes an end-of-the-day meeting is necessary to pull together and coordinate certain work efforts.

In addition to contexting and visioning, there is also the rhythm of station and lunch meetings. By stations, I mean the five major divisions within a Centrum. In Management, we are using a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday rhythm for lunch together as a Centrum, and then station lunches on Tuesday and Thursdays. This has created a tandem in which the spirit growth and maturation of our Centrum personnel is taking place. In the Centrum lunches, we deal with spirit growth - however inadequately. We grope constantly for the edge, for methods. Without this dynamic, we simply lose the rest of the afternoon. We alternate this with station lunches. In those gatherings, we look for individuals to begin to demonstrate prowess in social methods. That's where you find station leadership.

We have also begun to rotate the leadership for our luncheon meetings to allow for growth in Priorship across a broader number of people.

Another mark of emerging Priorship has been distinguishable since we began working with twenty-six week time-lines. It is the ability to brood futurically, to push to the comprehensive, to look for the long-range picture. Twenty-six week timelines seem to be an extremely practical, futuric canopy. When a person begins to deal with his station and its tasks in terms of a six-month time-line, it is amazing to see the smoothness and effectiveness that emerges. In any event, the Collegium, the Centrum, the lunch and station meetings are the four pillars driven into the midst of Centrum activity which allow Priorship to be exercised.

In LENS, we tell people that if they want to manage an operation, they must get ahold of its processes. The same holds true in Priorship. We need to be on top of the processes of Collegium, Centrum meeting, the lunch hour and the station meeting. When a person has those firmly in mind, he has a way to manage the overall health and morale of the group. In that way, leadership emerges. You do not start out by appointing leadership, you are after developing leadership. We want to have individuals whose own responsibility for the Centrum's tasks emerge. In other words, we have Quaterns, Station heads and Resurgent chieftains, if you will. The function of a Resurgent chieftain is to exercise the leadership he has on a team. Some of our stations are large enough so that we have Guerilla bands - two or three persons we assign to handle certain arenas and then we put a resurgent chieftain in charge of the band. We need to watch that imagery these days as we work with the Establishment, but it does point to the function of a leader in our understanding of polity, and our understanding of the Social Process as a tensional dynamic.

A person may be assigned to "x" and his name may appear under that column, but he is also assigned to sustain the tension in the system. How is that done? In my post, we have the constant tension of maintaining production and overall planning. When a person is assigned to a job, it is in the context of maintaining that tension so his accountability and his reporting to the group answers two questions: "Did you blow up a bridge, yes or no?" - along with some way of providing an explanation of how he was able to bring off both the production and the planning. For example, in LENS, one is out to maintain a balance between the male and female principles. When one grasps both conserving and venturing as revolutionary thrusts - that the venturing is not the revolutionary and the conserving is not the hanging on - one uses the tension of both to bring some new idea into the Centrum. In other words, it takes every bit as much ingenuity to maintain something already in being as it does to leap forward into a new arena, a new task.

The Stations have certain built-in tensions among them. Publishing House and Property, for instance, continually bump heads because of the nature of our tasks. When a group of people are assigned to work on a task, they need to spell out that tension in a creative sense. Their job is to maintain the creative tension between two posts. In tasks that engage more than one post, it is important to maintain a series of values while bringing off a task. Perhaps a chieftain's most crucial task is to illuminate exactly what the tension is

We operate so much in pigeon holes, just like in business. It goes something like: "I'm assigned to fill out form 702 and you are assigned to fill out form 703 and I'm not responsible for 703, I'm responsible for 702." That may all be right, but you are also assigned to be responsible for the tension between form 702 and 703. I get shot if 702 isn't filled out and you get shot if 703 isn't filled out, but we both are responsible for the relationship or the process of the interchange between form 702 and 703. And we must state what the tension or the flow is - what common values operate between Centurms.

In the overlap that occurs between Management and Development, we need to create a situation where the overlap is not experienced as reduplication of effort or as a pain in the neck, but where crucial decisions need to be made in order to free up both Centurms. Constantly, we must deal with the actual financial situation and the future Development possibilities. Every Centrum must operate in that tension and therefore, it is the function of a leader to illuminate the tension in every decision that is made.

It is also helpful when the individuals in the Centrum grasp their roles as the secular-religious. Anyone can identify with the image of the Secular-Religious, and since anyone can understand himself to be playing that role, he can exercise leadership in the post, in much the way it is done in Religious Houses. True, Centurms are not synonymous with Religious Houses, but insofar as Religious Houses work to train individuals to understand themselves as responsible for the total, they are the same. Centurms serve the same function. We have a tendency to fall into hierarchical patterns in our teams, units, and Congregations, but Centurms seem to cut across the hierarchical. We have had success with leadership emerging around a group task, or within a given group of people.

There are certain practical dimensions of Centrum Priorship. Centrum Priorship seems to evolve when a degree of model-building is involved in the assignment. Model-building is still open, to some degree, in Centrum, whereas in our Congregation life, the models are built and functioning. When, in a given week, one's assignment involves model-building, we have fostered a great deal of creativity. To us, that statement is trite since we are always involved in model-building. The practical dimension of model-building is that once a model is built, to create a common mind around it so it becomes a legitimate, operational possibility for a corporate group - not just something stuffed in your back pocket.

Management Centrum's genius is that anyone who can create the common mind around a model so that a consensus emerges as to how the model will be used, is very useful to Centrum. This seems to take place in ad hoc meetings, irregular meetings that just take place. The person who has some sense after the Pressure Points ought to be present as a common mind gets built around a new model. In that way, we get something other than an abstract model. These ad hoc meetings take place after Collegium, over lunch, perhaps in the afternoon.

A crucial tool in getting the common mind around a new model is visual symbols. In Management, if we have something on the wall, then we are going to honor it. Therefore, the artistic, rational creation of wall decor cannot be overemphasized. These artforms should reflect both what you actually do and be

a creative artform as well. Even for spirit giants, 8 to 5 is a long period, so we have to bombard ourselves with intentional decor to communicate to us through the arrangement of our space. The decor should communicate both the actual task and the tensional system we are in. The space design of Production, Editorial, and Management and the Print Shop makes it possible for one to stand at the last machine in the Print Shop and see all the way through to the Typing Pool. It is not particularly important to see through to the typing pool except imaginally. Before a printer puts paper into a press, he has four operations he must be thinking about, operations in which decisions have been made and coordinated. The actual physical arrangement of space should communicate the tensional system in which he operates in such a way that he is constantly reminded of the activity he is actually coordinating. That is an ideal organizational layout: a system located in the middle of the posts. More priorship comes out of the organizing of meals, the placing of visual decor and space design than we sometimes think.

The edge for us in priorship is allowing mundane tasks to breathe spirit. This is where the spirit person must constantly struggle. How can a person be so cared for and so nurtured that he sees the significance of his mundane tasks, that he accepts the fact of his acceptance in every part of life? We must constantly work on ways, methods, and tools to let the spirit loose, to allow it to come forth.

It is not that we ought to rehearse our global context, it is that our global context is simply the way it is. Whatever else edge Centrum life is, every task has global implications. Not imaginal global implications, but the kind in which the dropping of the baton means the whole globe goes down the drain. Whether you are doing a call on a Donor Circuit, or a piece of paper for the Global Order Report, if one of those pieces of machinery falls apart, or one of those calls does not get made, it has global ramifications. We are not trying to scare people with that context; it is simply the way things are. Therefore, our coordination between Centrums becomes even more important relative to global impact. For example, if the article the Local Church Experiment is using for a gift does not have some critical thinking behind it by everyone, we are foolish. It is not that Research decides what we are going to study this quarter, and then Management prints it and Operations sends it out - all of us must be involved in all the decision - making. In that way, a decision will be felt with the impact it ought to have.

The Priorship between Posts that is developing is creating the collegiality that our future will be built on. It has to do with developing trust, respect and maintaining a creative tension, which, at times, may seem painful. Even though we are all in the same building, on the same floor, it often seems we are a long way apart. The only way we can imaginally bridge the space is by Priorship being exercised by many, many people across Centrums. The Guardians meeting exemplifies this. Of course, Development was spearheading, but it was Research, Operations, Management and Development that brought off the Guardians meeting. This is total Centrum Priorship.

---R. Loudermilk

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