

PARISH TACTICS

By Gene Marshall

To really understand what this diagram is pointing to and therefore some of the understanding that is presupposed in it, you have to say to yourself that the Church is not something handed on to human society, that humanness as it was created was the church. How can you get that said? Man was created to be the church. The church is that part of the human race that has found out what it means to be human. So the dynamics of being the church, the dynamics of being authentic in your relationship to the way life is are one of the things that's given. So when you say that every community that ever was and ever will be and ever has been is a dynamic of human settlement,

cultic radical awareness, and shaman individual, you're not just using words. There are always simple spirits who for whatever reasons, causes, fates, have come to be those individuals upon whom the community depends for their intensification. As there has always been congregating of people in human society for the sake of becoming more clear and more capable in being the system of radical awareness of the humanness they are. And there has always been in any living together of human beings, some kind of settlement in which there is mutuality of care and concern one for the other going on in that community. So it's like when you decide to be the church in the local community, you decide to be that local community in its authenticity. You decide to overlay all of the perversions of that local community with something meaningful and real and human. That's all the congregation is in this dynamic. It's taking the cultic life that you've been given in your community and transforming it into cultic life that transforms relationships of human beings into breathing spirits, living souls... as a cadre takes whatever kind of glue there is in that community and overlays it, replaces it, in one sense transforms it, into new kind of spirit leaders.

This morning we're going to work on the parish, and we're going to talk about it as an overlay of love, an overlay of concern. Let me put it this way. The parish is not a geographical community. It is not the space on the map enclosed by a grid. The parish is an overlay. It is a presence. It is a spider web that has been woven over the wall, so to speak. The wall represents that piece of earth and humanity and rocks, trees, glass, people, dogs, cats, firehydrants, birds, trees, and whatever else makes up that segment of human settlement. You overlay that with concern. You build into it concern. And that's what you mean by the parish. It's not the community itself. It is an overlay on that community.

Here's another way to put it. You're out to do a global revolution and the whole globe is an elephant. Your particular local parish is a small square located on his rear end, you know. Or maybe it's on the back of his ear. Anyhow, the parish is taking a pin and jabbing it into your particular location on the elephant. The reason you do that is if you're going to move an elephant, you've got to begin some place. If you happen to have a little square located on his rear end and a really great pin, you can get an entire elephant into motion --by driving your existence into that rear end where you're located. It's the elephant you're concerned about. But any such thing as concern for a whole elephant if you're a local church, you're concerned for the whole elephant through that local community--through interacting with that hair, skin, flesh, and dirt, where you are. That's where you make an impact on the elephant. These people who are going to go out and love the world in some abstract way, be global human beings... Until they live this all their lives, they haven't got the foggiest about what it

means to be a human being. It's with the whole elephant in mind that you take your pin and deal with one particular global community...somewhere.

Of course, elephants are rather large to move, especially when your job is not really to get an elephant on the move, but to transform an elephant into an angel. You've got to have a lot of those squares operating to get that job done, you know. Take elephant eyes and make them over into feathers, or whatever it is we have to do to our world today, is a bit of a massive job. You really do have to cover the whole elephant.

You really do have to organize local churches in every neighborhood across the earth, if we're going to get the kind of job done that the revolution of our time calls for. I mean a radical metamorphosis of humanness, a taking of the million years or two of human history and consciousness and helping it around the phenomenally radical bend in the whole course of human history, actually creating new kinds of human beings who can live in the new kind of a world that we have on our hands and to build a new kind of world those new kind of human beings have to live in. That's the kind of job you're dealing with with the parish.

The parish is one set dynamic of humanization, that dynamic of loving. You might break the parish down into these three poles--justing love, witnessing love, and caring love--you can almost use the word, 'presencing love,' love of being there as a sign, a presence of the new example of what humanness can be. It's sort of wierd to talk about love in that way, I find. To rock somebody's life with a word of possibility: I'm pretty clear about that kind of love. To go out and change the structures of society that are warpping and tromping and disabling people's lives: I'm pretty clear about that kind of love. But this is a little more subtle. Just being through the years the kind of human being that is always doing these and showing forth to other people possibilities that they have of being a human being--there's a certain kind of preten-tiousness about that that bothers me. I know myself so well that the very idea that I might be a helpful example for somebody else just frightens me to the roots of my toenails. What if they get to depending on me and then I do what I'm capable of and then I'm down the tube and there you go.....etc. There's a wild kind of thing you're dealing with here. Yet, that's what's needed in the world--people who are willing to decide that they are going to be iron men until Hell is redeemed and Satan is completely dismantled, or whatever. That is, until they're dead.

The parish is where that concretely meets the sins of the world, so to speak, in that local community. The congregation is where you take ordinary willing folk and transform them into spirit people. And the parish is where you take spirit people and invest them in the civilizing enterprise. The parish is really that for the sake of which you have a congregation. If you did not have a parish where you were investing spirit people into the very structure of history, building spirit people back here in the factory (the congregation) would get a little ridiculous. Yet, this is still our major contradiction. To go out into the parish and do something insignificant is what is happening unless the dynamic of the congregation is going on, where you are manufacturing the kind of human resource that when it goes into that parish, the times in which we lives are genuinely encountered, met, and changed.

We want to look at the tactics of the parish. There's something sort of difficult about justice which I haven't got said yet, and it's hard for me to say. When you're out to care for a parish, you're out to care for saint and sinner alike. You're out to care for every human being no matter what his state of stupidity, no matter what his state of rebellion, no matter what his state of rejection of anything authentic and real and meaningful. Justice has to do with taking care of all, of the last human

being, in the faith that in God there is that possibility that any old human being can become a radical example of what God created man to be, that any sinner can become a saint. But you're never naive. When you're out here fighting in the parish, you're fighting satanic powers. You're fighting rebellion from God, and that rebellion from God is incarnated in very concrete warriors who have given their soul over to the enemy. Yet you always know that those people could commit treason. Even the most violent enemies you have are, after all, creatures of God whether they know it or not. So there's that wierd kind of tenever being naive about the fact that that parish out there is full of demons and dragons and enemies. Nobody's your friend. Nobody. If you are in truth the light of the world, when you're out here in the darkness, you're in the darkness, and that's that. You're experiencing yourself being rejected. You're experiencing yourself being overagainst the enemy, and therefore you have to be clever.

We were talking this morning about being careful around the community here. There's another reason for being careful in whatever community you're in. Who wants to lay down his life for some piddling thing, like getting from here to your house? If you're going to lay down your life, you want to lay it down for something significant. I've only got one life to lay down, and I'm sure not going to stick it before the next truck that comes by. It's the same way when you're working in the parish. You hold on to your life. You hold on to your reputation. You hold on to your power. You hold on to whatever you can hold on to until the time comes to die it, to put it where it has to be put. Then when it's go for broke, it's go for broke. And you're clear it's you that've have decided to go for broke and not some occasion that came by and took you. It's that kind of shrewdness you've got to have to even begin to think deeply about what you're doing in the parish. No more romanticism. This is hard-headed, raw rugged revolution that we're talking about.

Yet it's the kind of revolution that knows that you've already won. When you touch the bottom of what it means to be a human being, and your task is to call the world to be human, you can't really fail. You are calling human beings to be what they already are and to give them form to that in their particular time. If you don't win in your lifetime, your children will--that kind of confidence. Therefore, you can live in the presence of enemies knowing that your enemies have already been beaten a thousand times, and one of these days they'll come up to your doorstep and find a way to do what they need to do. So you have to leave all those channels open. That makes it tricky.

Let's break down the parish a little bit further and look at how the tactics relate to it. When we do our dynamics diagram, we put up something like, Social Justice, Reprogramming System (we've got to have secular words there), and Human Care. When we were doing the parish experiment in 5th City, we organized something we called stakes. Stakes were to be an embodiment of the principle of Human Care, although we didn't have this diagram at that time. We organized what we called guilds. Guilds were to be an embodiment of the pole of Social Justice, although we didn't have this diagram at that time. We really put most of our push into the Reprogramming System, but we never talked about that. We talked most about stakes and guilds. Then we talked about seminars.

It was quite a breakthrough when we finally saw that there were two Reprogramming Systems that had to go on in the Local Church dynamic. One was in the community of faith, where you were radically educating the self-conscious church to be self-conscious about its faith and about its world and how to be the faith in the world of our time where you turning self-conscious men of faith into spirit troops that could go out and do something. That was one kind of reprogramming, or education, or re-contextualizing their lives.

There was another kind also, which was part of the task out in the community. You went into the community with the Gospel, of course, which was the Word about life before

you got there, and with a message. But you put it in a million and one different ways. You put it through phrases on the side of buildings. You put it through movies and discussions following them. You put it through dances and festivals, and on and on and on. You had a thousand different ways that you reprogrammed that community and gave that community a new way to grasp after itself as a significant part of the human struggle.

If you were working in a Black community, you had to reprogram the fundamental image of what it meant to be Black at that time. This was more true three or four years ago than it is now. Being Black was a problem in negativity. That is, everybody wanted to be white. Something has just changed in that particular dimension over the last two or three years, because a lot of reprogramming has gone on in many different kinds of ways across the whole country in that particular area. So this kind of reprogramming has to go on in a Black community. That has to be thought through very carefully if you're going to work in a Black community--what kind of reprogramming has to go on to take the present community that's there and give them the kind of constructive grasp of their being that allows them to be not only unique in their suffering and in their history and in their gifts, but a part of the whole program of history.

If you're thinking of reprogramming a suburban community, how to yank that community out of its present mindset of economic tyranny, how to yank it out of its present mindset of family-itis, how to yank it out of its present mindset of my little private world, rather than to see themselves as part of the whole global destiny and responsible for it, and on and on and on it goes--the task of reprogramming the mindset of the suburban community is the fundamental parish task. Building stakes that care for a suburban community... Why, suburban communities are so well cared for that it just makes it ridiculous. How to get medical care to everybody in suburbia--is not a problem. How to take some of the medical care away and put it where it's needed, how to convince people they're not really sick--using their resources to make millionaires out of charlatans. That's the problem, not health care. Or working in Social Justice--within suburbia itself the only justice problems you can find are often whatever two or three Black people occasion to live there or whatever Mexicans showed up in a house on the westside that don't quite fit in.

You have to work hard to get radical and horrible injustice found. The injustice is that this whole community is in no relationship with justice to the rest of the world. The injustice is that this is the cream of human civilization unconsciously living off the blood of people all over the world. So that means again that the main problem in suburbia is the reprogramming of the mindset, of giving that suburban man a sense of the tragedy of his life. Here he has everything in the world, and is off in a corner, not really connected with the destiny of human history in our time. You'll notice in the tactics that the emphasis is upon reeducating and reprogramming the mindset. And it's probably even more true in the first year of the parish program than it is the second and third.

On one pole of Reprogramming put Direct, Direct Reprogramming. All these tactics are on direct reprogramming, or bringing into being direct reprogramming projects-- 31, 28, 32, 35, and 26. All five of those are direct reprogramming, or bring into being direct reprogramming systems. Another pole is Catalytic Reprogramming. Probably Tactic 30 would be an example of reprogramming in that way. It has to do with giving the community a new sense of being a community. It has to do with community significance. It has to do with giving the community a new sense of its role in human history. You can see that that's very important relative to moving toward direct action. Then the third pole is Symbol Reprogramming. Tactics 29 and 25 are pushing in that direction. We are going to look at those tactics individually in a moment.

In Human Care there is only one tactic that you can say pertains, and that is Tactic 27. Under Social Justice, the only one that's really clearly Social Justice is 36, the very last one. Also probably 33 and 34 would fall in that area, too. So by far the majority, as you can see, have to do with reprogramming the mindset of that community-- or the symbol-set on one pole of it.

Another thing to keep very clear about this first year of tactics is that these are but signal tactical units, as we've called them. These are units of practical time and energy that are for the sake of creating signals. You are not bringing into being a full-fledged parish program this year. Some of the things you'll be doing will be part of a full-fledged parish program if you had one. But that's a coincidence. These are aimed at creating signals, signals, signals, signals. When you redesign your tactical model for the second year, you might not be doing any of these things, but doing another set of things that would have a different meaning from signal, as establishing a community organization or community action network or something along this line. But this first year of the model it's the category of 'Signal' that you're out to do.

What you mean by a signal is something that you can do that doesn't use up all your time. There are certain kinds of projects in the parish that would just consume every ounce of energy that you've got. You couldn't do anything else. The kind of program that's a good signal is something that holds up high the banner that you want to wave hard in the year or two ahead, but doesn't cost you too much. Our order did that one time when we sent a few of us out to Albany. We were intending to be a part of the breakloose of the Negro into black consciousness in that particular moment. But if we had thrown our whole ship into that wagon, we wouldn't have gotten the job done for which we were called. Yet we had to throw our ship into that wagon. Anybody who was the church couldn't avoid participation. So we did signal kinds of things that only cost us a week's work of one man or two weeks work of two men and sent a couple of men down to work with King for a week to help him get organized. That can be done. But to consume your whole program in that particular thing would have been a disaster.

Well, maybe that's an example of the kind of situation in the parish in the first year. You want to move, and you want to move hard on so many social issues that it just makes you nauseated, because you haven't got the troops and the preparation done to move on them. Yet you've got to move. So: signal, signal, signal is the kind of category that you're using.

Another way you're playing a double game with yourself is that you want the imagination of the whole congregation to be thrown out into the parish. Yet you can't go out into the parish with all your energy. Your energy has to go into that congregation. But in order to throw the imagination of the congregation out into the parish, you've got to go out into the parish and do something that calls forth their imagination without losing your whole energy down the drain. Do you see that particular kind of problem?

Another way you experience it inside yourself is that the parish is really the important thing. And that's true. It's really the important thing. The parish is where you stem the tide of history in our time. It is where you deal with the real trends of our age. Yet the first year all you do is set up a flag. You test the earth. You do nothing. You just set up a flag and mark out the path. Where you put your energy is in training an iron core of leadership and in redirecting the basic operating image of the congregation. That's what you're going to have to do that first year.

The second year, after you have an iron core of leadership and a whole congregation with a new mindset relative to participating in the world, then you can step up your parish program and make an impact that next year. The third year you want to surprise them again with a further step-up of the parish program. The fourth year that parish has got to feel like it didn't know what hit it. It's got to feel like an avalanche descended. 'We thought these people were just playing games, putting up their silly little signal flag. They didn't fool us. We knew they were just do-gooders. God have mercy! What's happened to us?' This is the kind of thing we've got to anticipate the fourth year.

This signal is a very serious signal. It's a signal to ourselves that three years from now there's going to be an avalanche in the parish. It's like you go out and say, 'On this hill is where the ninth army is going to march through in three years. On this hill is where the tenth army is going to conquer the Bastille.' You put down your sign there. And you go back and tell the congregation about the hills for another year. Maybe something like that can begin to get hold of this.

I think it's very important to get our stories told to ourselves. Remember, this is to take only one-sixth of your time. I don't know about you, but I get kind of excited about the parish. Back in the congregation when I look Mrs. Bigbottom in the face, and the task is to turn her into spirit--compared with going out and doing something in history, I wonder if maybe I ought not just go out and do something in history, without Mrs. Bigbottom. But it's just patient day by day by day by day agitating Mrs. Bigbottom in a thousand and one different ways until she's able to see a new operating image for herself and be a part in whatever way she can of real spirit moving into the community.