

TOWN MEETING CONTEXT

The symbol on the wall (triangles, pentagon and three campaign circle) address me over and over again. It holds us in being. Without it branded in our midst we would probably fly apart at the seams. The pentagon gives us a picture of five activities or our continual tasks. Yet they are totally interrelated tasks. Global Community Forum activates the awakening process and thereby feeds people into such things as Social Demonstration which is a world wide sign that society can be changed. Primal Community provides the context for awakening to take place, and is a tool, product and end of awakening. At the same time it is the reservoir or container to catch the fall out of social demonstration and the instrument of its replication. Primal Community is a place where awakened people can stand and out of which they can live. If you did not have the Metro Cadre, those awakened people, who are a sign, that embody awakening as concretely possible for every man around the world, precisely in his local situation, the other campaigns would not come off. Now we have branded that into ourselves the last six months. Yet there are other things that seem to be taking place in the midst of our awareness of the pentagon interrelatedness, not changing it but illuminating it in a different way.

For example, at the Guardians Meeting in October there was a long time guardian that I had not seen for several years. In fact, he has been a participant long before we began to form the guardians. He is a deep spirit person. It was great to see him here. He happened to be assigned to lead a workshop and did a fine job. Toward Saturday afternoon, when he was taking a break, he came up and said something like, "When are we going to do something that finally lasts?" I thought he was talking about the relevance of the guardians meeting. I went on to tell him how all of these procedures have been laid out very carefully. How all this was done by Sunday so that every guardian would have marching orders, assignments if he so chose, when he went back. He didn't even hear what I was talking about. He said, "No, you know we had such things like RS-I, CS-I, LENS, LCX, and all of these have gone by the board and now we will be doing Town Meeting. When are we going to do something that lasts?" My reply to him was that we only have one thing to do and that is to be the Church. There will be many strategies and tactics, but always only one thing--to be the Church.

And now for a third introduction: a quote from Thomas Jefferson. "When I went to my first Town Meeting I felt the ground shake under my feet."

What I want to talk about today is the sociological manifestation of the Dark Night of the Soul, the new significance, the new hope, and the whirlwind that all of us are taking on. If Thomas Jefferson was right about the ground shaking under his feet, he probably could not have better described what is happening to us these days with Town Meeting.

A happening happens to peoples' lives. Awakening takes place. They now find a way to experience their experience in the deeps of their lives. That is, they live before the Mystery precisely where they are, precisely in their local situation. They stand before God, if you please. But the difficulty is that we have no symbolic way within the Community Forum of grasping that happening. Any one system of great symbols that held 10,000 years of our history together, that allowed us to relate to every depth experience that we had is no longer adequate to freight that experience to peoples of the culture of our age. Therefore those symbols are not available in Community Forums to allow grounding to take place. As one of my colleagues expressed it, they have no place to stand. Then he hastened to say, that is not correct. Of course, one always has some place to stand. But we have not yet been able to name it or symbolize it, so that everybody in our society has a deep way of grasping himself. Therefore we have the feeling of being torn loose, of being sent out to sea without a rudder or just being flotsam and jetsam bouncing upon the waves.

At the same time we are shoved out to work with everybody. We go out and knock on doors and suddenly volunteers appear. They come in from almost any place in all sizes and shapes. Everywhere you go they rise up. Some of them say, "Where have you been? I've been waiting for you." "Why haven't you come before?" Or someone will show up for one minute and then disappear. Another will show up for an hour and then be gone, another for two hours, another a week or a day. They return at different frequencies or alternate with different rhythms. You have all sorts of people coming with all sorts of time spans that they seem to be willing to give. The question now is how do you give them a common context or is the task sufficient commonness for the moment? How do you have a meeting where you can have common symbols that they all know how to take hold of? How have you got a story for each of them so they can grasp hold of what they are doing? How do you relate their total life focus to Town Meeting/CFC or vice versa? It used to be that what we would do was to invite people to come into the movement where we had an already built context in which they could be immersed. Then there was a common base by which you could carry out your task and common life together. Now a shift has taken place. We are no longer pulling people into the movement in that way. Instead, we go and pour the movement out into the world. We just empty it into the abyss of the world that is there, in order to be able to work with the volunteers or whoever is present. It means that in many ways all the old forms are inadequate. All the ways by which we had to grasp things are gone. The contexts are gone. There is disrelationship at the center. We had built up many short courses and images held by certain kinds of words to handle different situations so that for example, when someone came up in a crisis and poured his anxieties out, all we would have to do was say, "You have to make a decision" or something like that. That held for a number of years. Well, that is no longer adequate today. That does not mean that the short course is not a true statement but it is more like a truism. It doesn't hit where his major contradiction is. So the context or the center by which we ground those things, the final grounding seems

to be in a disrelationship. The old is gone, RS-I is gone. It means RS-I is no longer the sociological cutting tool that it was ten years ago. PLC is gone. Lens is gone. Fifth City is gone. This does not mean that they are gone finally, or they are not present today, or that they can not be used or they again will not play extremely effective roles. It means RS-I is no longer the sociological cutting tool in the sense by which we grasped it in the old context.

Even Fifth City, whatever else it was, was a sign of where we as the religious poured out our life. Now we are pouring out Fifth City into twenty-four social demonstrations around the world. They are secular happenings in every culture and in every kind of a nation. That swirls a happening that comes back to us with great power probably beyond any power that it had before, but the old context does not seem to hold it.

At this same time common operating procedures whereby you could talk to your colleagues or honor that relationship to carry out the missional trust seem no longer to be adequate. Or take consensus building for example. Oh you could go about building a great voiced consensus, yet nobody seems to know what to do on the other side of that. A disrelationship seems to be there. So what this leaves is a certain emotional distrust in our midst. It doesn't mean that people are naughty or that they are disloyal. It is just that a sort of feeling presses in upon them in today's situation. It is almost that you are alone. There is no Movement and yet the Movement is everywhere. The center that you are trying to grasp has all of creation whirling around in the midst of it.

In this kind of a situation you and I wrestle with what it means to be the new form of the Church. The collapse of the historical church is just written over everything and yet the secular is no Messiah. It has collapsed just as much as any other form. We stand on a third point. I don't know whether you can call it a middle ground or what, but it is where the new sociological form is being hammered out. Segundo said the gift of the world is the new face of the suffering Christ. That strikes a deep awareness before we even begin to demythologize. But whatever else the new form is, it is the center of calling ourselves into being and it has to do with the totality of what is going on in the world. We are required to be the new form while at the same time we are out seeking the new form. Mass impact that is going on illuminates the awareness that the new is being born, and at the same time forces a great urgency for that new form.

Now the sociological manifestation of the Dark Night and the Long March is always grasped as an "either-or" situation. You either sit in despair or live your life out as a person who stands in relationship to the Final Mystery where a brand new significance is given, exactly in the midst of the mundane situation. Then the whole understanding of radical engagement is dumped back into your lap.

What Town Meeting does for everybody is to explode the comprehensive precisely in the local situation in which they find themselves. Awe begins to break loose for them in that kind of radical engagement. It becomes a remembering event for them! I am sure that many people are going to remember Town Meeting '76 as the place where the happening happened to them. And that in itself

will become a symbol. It will become a new rock that will be laid down for them to bump into. Or a new story by which to begin to tell what is going on. But radical engagement also takes place with every person in the Movement who is participating in some part of Town Meeting. This is seen in the circuit riding. Especially since Foray 21-6 began. Circuit riding seems to be so mind-blowing that people come back and just stutter. They cannot seem to express what was going on so much exuberance was taking place. Yet, they would go out on long treks and stand out there in "the silence" alone day in and day out, working with this volunteer or that. Before it seemed like everynight you had to come back to be sustained to go out the next day. Now it is almost like the whole movement is just being bombarded by the Mystery with such great rapidity that it causes a creative explosion at every point in everybody's lives. As the Mystery keeps breaking in on you, here and there, and coming so fast in so many ways it calls forth a new kind of response bringing forth every ounce of creativity that you never even knew existed or was possible in the midst of your being.

This week has been a symbol of that. The stories told and accomplishments reported a tremendous explosion that happened in this council the first few days will take days to tie together or to even see the new vistas the explosions were placing before us. This same thing is being experienced in our doing or in the radical engagement taking place. We have been given back a whole new understanding of what it means to have a love affair with the world. You begin to trust your intuitions. You don't have to go back and prove this or that. You can cut loose from the old and create a new form. You begin to genuinely trust those intuitions as the new bombardment of creation pours into you. All the work, all the reflection, all the hard study and training that you have done now is a great reservoir from which you draw to paint the picture of the new creation that you thrust into the future.

Today there is a whole new sense of vocation. The Town Meeting is a universal call. Now we have always said this. But this is the first time the last far lady became a sociological reality instead of a dream in the far future. You can start from any vocation; from any situation; from any condition, and respond to the situation here. Life is all about participating in the human happening. Now you can participate in the human happening wherever you are, whatever you are doing, whatever your stage in life. The Town Meeting has the methods and it gives the opportunity. As one person said, "I have been waiting all my life for this to happen." It is that kind of grounding of vocation.

The new form of the church is here. Just think of participating in the evangelistic task. The term that has just been bombarding me out of the 19th century is "the great awakening." Just think of that. The "Great Awakening." I never know what that meant when I read about it except abstractly. Now for the first time I began to feel after what the Great Awakening really is. Whatever awakening it is, it is going to far outstrip The Great Awakening of the past. Because that was just located in a small part of the geography here and there in a rather small part of the world. Also, the great awakening that is taking place now comes in every kind of form. Metro Cadres from all sorts of communities and networks are just appearing. Town Meeting and CFC are furthering this form. Not only in one nation or two, but is a portent for every nation around the globe. I would like to use the term

"the great awakening" for that phenomenon. Yet that doesn't seem to be too powerful a term now. So I went to dictionary and looked around to find a synonym or some other image. Finally I came back to one that we have used but I never thought of using in this way, "The Great Catalysis." The Town Meetings and the Global Community Forums are happening here and will happen a-1 over the world. They are calling "wholly loosened" people into a brand new relationship of trust in history, of participating in the resurgence at hand.

This then leads us to a new kind of hope. There has been a shift in the way that theological dialogue is taking place. I do not mean abstract dialogue in seminaries or in study sessions but the dialogue that takes place in life. The shift from the Son to the Father, the cutting edge of the Word is freighted by reality itself now rather than primarily through the reflections about reality - by doing rather than knowing. In other words we live in terrifying lucidity. Self consciousness of the Dark Night and the Long March has allowed us to see and to grasp the Word at every point in our life. That terrifying lucidity is present in every kind of situation that is forced in upon us. Therefore, the more engaged we are, the more we are rejuvenated. The more we are expended, the more exhilarated we are. And where is it that you have sustenance in life? Why it is in life itself! What do you need in order to live? Life itself! Where do you find life? In life itself. Creation itself is its own answer. Genuine engagement produces transparency and direct self conscious relatedness with the Mystery and this produces sustenance. If you want life you already know where it is. You have it. Where is the Christ Word? This is the Christ Word.

If one of our colleagues would allow me to take an incident that happened Friday night and use it, I want to push beyond that incident. We came into the Guild Hall. It was almost completely decorated. They had done a tremendous job and you just stood amazed at the way it impacted you, particularly those triangles which show transrationalization. You go from one per micro to six per polis to thirty-six per metro and on up. The last point up there is a little tiny triangle. It had one thousand printed in it. I said to whomever was standing there. "That ought to be 10,000, let's put another zero behind it." A voice from across the room said, "Go fly a kite." That person was extremely tired. Well I thought I would have a little fun. So I said, "Don't you know that if you do not put that other zero in there you won't be taking care of yourself?" Well I expected an answer back, something like, "Rubbish, " or "Oh come off of it," or "Go fly a kite!" again but the answer came back, "I don't want to take care of myself." Well, if you push the intuition that person had about that little piece of decor, you immediately smell radical engagement. Radical engagement is the way you and I take care of ourselves. We don't have to have anybody to tell us that. That was the great wisdom that came out of that intuitional response.

I have tried to find several ways to get ahold of that kind of engagement. Now you go back several years to Simone de Beauvoir in a book she had called Ethics. She had the image of the ethical person as being the adventurer. It had nothing to do with male-female ontology, but was an overall image of any person who forged out the future. The creativity that you have been

operating with as you went out on those circuits has been just like the adventurer. Have some of you younger people ever seen Errol Flynn on the late, late show? The best picture is when he is a pirate. But he is a "goodguy" pirate. Deep down inside he is protesting the contradictions of history. He flies a Jolly Roger over his ship. The first picture of him at the beginning of the battle is on the deck. He fires whole heartedly. He grabs hold of a rope, swings down, takes his trusty sword and pinks these in the community that won't be sponsors. Then he swings back over the deck and cuts down all of the negative images that are in that community. Then, he swings back and someone cuts his rope. Whomp he falls. Up he jumps and saying, "ho, ho, ho" turns around and grabs another rope. He is the guy that constantly exploded every situation into the future. To change characters, I happened to catch about two minutes of the Buffalo Bills' player, O.J. Simpson the other night. What I saw him do was make a sixty yard run. He must have been tackled a dozen times. And everytime he twisted out of it or went in a different direction, they would hit him and his leg would go limp. The tackler would then fall and O.J. would go ahead. It was fantastic! He just exploded into the future, thrusting this way and that.

Anyone who lives out of hope has a deep awareness of victory. Our hope is not based on temporality. It is unconditioned expectation. It is based on God's faithfulness and His love. Then on the other side of that, however, broken, twisted and inadequate we are, however poorly we do the job and whatever kind of events lie broken on the floor here, we have hope that in God's faithfulness and love that we are allowed to participate fully, wholly, significantly and expectantly in the next step into the future. Or again that same hope sees the Kingdom of God is always present and possible. This means that that love and faithfulness is present in every sociological situation and in every kind of condition and at the same time has the possibility of sociological creation. Therefore to trust that final Mystery is to trust the future. To hope is to bring the future into the present, into the now, into this situation. Therefore, my task is victory. My life is victory.

It does not make any difference if people have had to do this in the desert. I think of Soren Kierkegaard who paved the way for the Twentieth Century theologically yet died thinking himself a horrible failure. Woodrow Wilson tried to bring the League of Nations off. He died a broken man unfulfilled yet he paved the way for the future. So we have lived in the desert. That does not negate the fact that we lived in hope. It is there in the desert that hope has produced this situation for you and me today. For whatever reasons now you and I live in a time of resurgence where we are allowed to see the victories that are taking place sociologically before our eyes. That does not mean that the future will not reap other results still unknown to us. But Town Meeting/CFC is hope itself. It gives hope to our colleagues, to the future, and to the world. For me the issue, between 1000 and 5000 Town Meeting/CFCs finally hasn't got a thing to do with your and my techniques but whether we are going to be people of hope. Looking at my colleagues, I see a whole new kind of response. You can just see when they are living out of hope instead of despair. That is what you mean by 5000. The future is pulled into the present. You release a hope of what in the world is happening. In the midst of everyday events the Mystery is promising people awadenment of "Life" where ever they are.

So the new form of the Church is seen in those who live in the victory. Those who live in hope are the ones that are making up the new form of the Church. Those who push this into self-consciousness are the new form of the church. It is when you have lived in the appearing of hope and bring self-consciousness into it. And it is these people that live out of this hope, wherever you see them and it is amazing how they are appearing, and who are pressing self-consciousness into it, who are the new form of the church.

Now all of us here are caught up in a whirlwind in some amazing and fantastic way. You have a Town Meeting/CFC and individuals just come unglued. They just appear with all sorts of ways of responding. Some even have tears in their eyes. Some just seem to float out of the building, as if they are levitating. Euphoria is there. Several of you this week have born witness to how communities have come alive. You don't know what will happen tomorrow or the next day but that community has lived for a day. Oh my, it is not that literally everybody was there. In fact I had one meeting in which a guy stood up at the end of the meeting and said, "Everybody was here," which literally was not correct. Forty thousand people lived in that community and there were only 200 in the meeting. But when he said "Everybody was here," he was right, I think. Everyone was represented. The community had a day of living.

Now you also talked about that whirlwind coming in not just with a single Town Meeting/CFC or two. Some of you were saying it takes three Town Meetings to make a circuit. One Town Meeting when set up properly in relation to other communities make a circuit. One Town Meeting, two Town Meetings, three Town Meetings! How many? Four, five, six! - Boom and an explosion! The whirlwind takes off! Somebody was telling me about a New Jersey Town Meeting. At the end of the plenary some fellow felt called upon to stand up and say, "Well, I'm from a town up here about sixty miles away. I belong to this service organization, and I was sent down here to look at Town Meeting. I tell you this is exactly what our town needs. I'm going back to my organization and we're going to put on a Town Meeting in our town." Well another person, then another, then another, five, six of them stood up each from a different town and said the same thing. That's what I mean when I say a whirlwind is beginning in ways that you just can not imagine.

It is exploding all over the continent. The national association of community colleges met in Cincinnati. We asked a colleague to go there and represent the Continental Movement. He said that he spoke for about fifteen minutes. At the end he asked for questions. One guy stood up and said, "Well I know what Town Meeting is all about. I'm from San Jose and the Town Meeting there was the greatest thing that has happened in the last fifteen years in my life and the greatest thing that has happened in San Jose in the last five years." That statement released questions all over the place. But they were all logistic questions. "Where can we have one/" "How do you go about doing it?" "What do we have to do?" Those kind of things. That is the whirlwind we are getting caught up in all over the continent. You know by these kind of responses that you now are not just affecting individuals and communities, but networks which spread all over the nation and world.

We are using networks to present a Town Meeting. But the explosion is also catalysing new networks.

I went to a presponsors meeting at a Lion Club not too long ago. Eighty percent of them were in phase three and 80 percent of the were not "totally attentive." And it wasn't the same 80 percent! But the ICA consultant had it set up very well. He knew exactly what he was going to say. He had a key individual planted out there. And so he said very calmly and nicely what he had to say to those people. He was very nonchallant and sophisticated but very pointed and precise. Then one of the Lions got up. He had all the reasons why they shouldn't hold a meeting. Then someone else got up over ther and "bla bla bla..." The consultant was responding very clearly. Finally the key individual got up and made his testimony. Well, it happened. The group was won. However, looking back on the meeting it dawned on me after three or four minutes of dialogue that those Lions did not have a chance. They did not have a chance. They were whipped when the consultant and the key individual walked into that meeting. And at the end of the meeting they decided to vote the next week whether to have it or not. After the meeting almost all of the group came by and said it will pass.

This afternoon we are going to look at an Addressograph Multigraph printing machine. That company is going to put in a table-top printing machine and platemaker in every Town Meeting in the United States. You can just imagine what is going to happen to all those salesmen around the country. There will be 500 salesman or maybe even a 1000 partibipating in these meetings. Even if it is just 250 imagine what is going to happen to Addressograph Multigraph. All those salesmen are going to be impacted two, three or four times with Town Meetings. What about the proposals? How many Kiwanis organizations are going to sponsor meetings? Or the Jaycees, we have been hearing about this week that we have contacted. What is going to happen to the United States and Canada when this comes off? You can't imagine the kind of swirl that is taking place. A brand new nation. A brand new opportunity to face the future.

But it is not just here. It is happening to the globe. Do you know how many community forums are going to be held around the globe to get one per cent of the people? Latin America 13,000, Name 11,000, Africa 11,000, USSR 18,000, Subasia 32,000. Are you tired? 5000 is nothing is it? That just takes a little tiny bit of hope. You just hope a grainful and immediately the 5000 explode. What this has done to us as a Movement! One person said after seeing us together here these last few days, "Man, we really have a Movement on our hands, don't we?" What a quarter, beginning with Foray 21-6! You guys marched in here like victors. You know those testimonies that you gave. Someone got up and said what a great Town Meeting looks like. Everybody else chimed into give their testimonies. Someone else talked about sponsors. Others talked about training, circuit riding, followup of town meetings, network replication, and the explosion. Everybody talked and contributed. One fellow said, "I have never been so humiliated and so frustrated and so elated as today." I think that is true.

Those explosions going on in the Movement are also going on in us making for fantastic creativity. It is just like a skyrocket. Possibility going on out here, boom, boom, boom! And yet it is also inside of us. Whirl, whirl, all over there and another explosion happened. The fantastic thing about that explosion was it was ours. Ours to move into the future. The sky rockets were not just out there. They were inside of us. The whirlwind to change the metaphors was taking place, picking us up and carrying us forward. The only thing you and I need to learn is how to move from a static stationary position of living to living on on a whirlwind. That is the only kind of difference or change that we have to make. All the other instruments, tools, and everything else can then be brought froth and with due understanding do the kind of job that has to be done. Oh, the awe has broken loose this week. It has happened in just four days. It is still going on. Now maybe it won't be as rapid an awareness all the time, but it will happen.

Well, the new form of the church is breaking in all around us. The historical church is being called into radical metamorphosis by Town Meeting/CFC and Social Demonstrations. It does not understand or know what is going on in its midst or what it is being called to be, indeed no one knows yet. We as a Movement do not know either. We are called to have eyes to see what God is creating at this moment. If we can do that then we will be able to put in sociological forms that which today has not yet self consciously been captured by sociological forms. Then every person throughout the world will have an opportunity to beckon forth people to come and join in breaking that new form loose. We all have been doing some work this last quarter with the gospel according to John. We have talked about substituting Mystery for the Son of God. Then back to the text: I and the Father are one. Or Being and the Awareness of Being, is one and the same thing. When you have seen me, you have seen the Father or to know the Son is to know the Father. Therefore today we are called again to be Jesus figures. We can not start out saying that because it probably turns us off. Try using the term "Henry". You and I are called to be the Henry figures. Just Henrys going around. And you, as Henry, and Being are one. So the new sociological form of the church is calling us to take upon ourselves the role of being a sign of what it means to be one with the Father. That is an enormous task. But I tell you whatever else it is going to be bringing the new form of the church into the world we all live in, it will be parallel to the recovery of the Jesus figure.