

EARNING YOUR LIFE

Last night in Baltimore I was invited to a very fancy dinner to meet a lot of important people. One of the women at this particular function had been told by the hostess that this new family in Baltimore was rather unusual. They traveled a great deal and were very interested in the future of our society. She apparently had the same kind of interest so she cornered me and asked me to tell her about what we did. In what I thought was an unbelievably clear, succinct and powerful way, I told her exactly what the Institute was doing. I placed special emphasis on the Social Demonstration projects and described in some detail the philosophy and comprehensiveness and our track record in 5th City. She looked at me and put her hand on my shoulder and smiled and said, "We are doing the same thing in Baltimore." She said, "The way we are doing it is with window boxes." I don't know what you would have done if you had been in that situation, but I put my hand on her shoulder and said, "Amen."

This is April the 9th, 1976. That does not mean a lot unless we get clear about something that has happened. We live in a particular time in history, but beyond that, we live in a time when there is a very sudden lucidity about the condition of the world in which we find ourselves. What I am trying to say is, there is a definite awareness all over the world about the facts we have been talking about over the last two, three, four years. That used to be edge talk---controversial talk, about the age of transition and the forming of a new post modern, post-industrial society. What has happened recently, is that the whole world has plugged into this fact. Maybe the leaders have not, but the world has. Maybe that is a message we ought to think about for a moment. The people of this earth are suddenly aware of the fact that they are living in a period of unbelievable transition. We used to say that once or twice a millenium something like this happened. That is not edge talk anymore. That is the way it is. People understand that. It is not necessary to describe the details or the hard data that will support that kind of thesis or presumption. We don't have to talk about the chaos and pain and struggle that exists in the world today as we try to form new ways to live. The tension between the infinite demands and our finite resources, the collapse of values, the collapse of social structures from nation to family, the economic, political and cultural upheaval has become headline news.

I was shocked by a Harris poll recently. It had to do with the vacuum of trust today, the vacuum revealing that trust is a quality we somehow seem to have lost. The statistics are awesome. I want to read them to you because I am impressed with statistics. I am a businessman and numbers mean something to me. They ranked in order from top to bottom the particular areas of society that the American people believe and trust in or that they do not believe in. I want to read the numbers to you. The top area of trust in these United States today is medicine. The statistics state that 42% of the people like you and me trust medicine. In 1966 the number was 73%. Now remember, that is number one. The second most trusted element of our society is higher education. 31% of the people trust higher education. There is a little pocket of entities that are in the 20% bracket. They are in order: TV news, the military, the Supreme Court, the press and religion. Then there are what they call the bottom four: the bottom four

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strangely enough are headed by corporations: 16% of us trust the corporations, 11% of the people trust the executive branch of the government, 10% trust labor, and 9% trust the Congress.

Now in spite of all this, and maybe because of it, I am thankful that we live in a time when people from the Isle of Dogs are fed up with the way they are living their lives. They are sick of waiting for their leaders to take them across the sea of frustration that they have been living in for the last decade or two. Maybe because of this unbelievable global social awareness of local man, we can get clear on the particular moment of history in which we are participating.

There is a yearning for what Daniel Bell calls "civitas." Now that is a new word for me. I am not trying to impress you with it. This man wrote a book, Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, and I want to quote from it. He describes civitas by saying, "This is a spontaneous willingness to obey the law, to respect the rights of others, to forego the temptations of private enrichments at the expense of the public will, in short, to honor the city of which one is a member." I think that is a powerful statement of what people the world over yearn for. The fact that people are ready translates into something like this in my language: the sheer weight of global public yearning for humanness is about to break loose.

There have to be some leaders. Now there are very few guys whom I consider to be leaders. I am not too sure whether the public is going to create them or whether they are going to hang on to and back the few that exist. One of my heroes is a man called Willy Brandt. He was interviewed one week before the Isle of Dogs Consult. One of our ICA staff members from Germany used this in a House Church witness on Sunday morning after the Consult was over. The interview that Willy Brandt gave was with a German magazine called "To The Point". The pre-ambule to this is that he was forced to resign as the West German Chancellor in the spring of 1974 after the discovery that his close personal assistant was spying for East Germany. Brandt has recently reentered the political arena in Bonn. At a conference in Brussels of the European movement toward central government, Brandt, now sixty-two years old, announced that he would seek election to the European Parliament. A reporter said to him, "In recent years frustration and disappointment have been felt, because things seem to be moving too slowly, have you felt the same?" This reporter was talking for the world when he asked that question of Willy Brandt. His reply was, "Pessimism has been fashionable and there have been many complaints about the lack of progress, certain Doomsday prophets have even predicted the decline of the West. But all this is getting nowhere. We Europeans have heard many great words and noble principles during the last twenty-five years. Now is the time to work on a real political, mind-forming process which will give conscious citizens the chance of personal involvement. That is the reason, for example, I have presented myself, publicly as a candidate. What we are trying to achieve with new efficient European institutions, the free association of peoples embarking on a step unique in modern history will clearly tell a tale: the free association of peoples embarking on a step unique in modern history in terms of time and nerves. But it has to be done". What Willy Brandt was saying is that people are ready, that they want to participate in creating a new society and a new future.

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When we talk about the Guardians I am reminded of many things. One of the things that intrigue me is Kenneth Boulding's two-word image held up for us years ago in the book, The Meaning of the Twentieth Century, "the invisible college." His point was that at any point in history there is always a bunch of people around the world, he called them the invisible college, who give a damn about the future. I think that Guardians, known or unknown, comprise what I call the middle management of the institutions of the world. And it is those institutions and those middle management people who have an unbelievable responsibility relative to the future. This is not because we have anything special to say or any particular wisdom or any particular insights. At this time in history we just happen to be in the right place at the right time. I would say that your leverage and mine, in terms of having a say in what tomorrow looks like, is multiplied by ten because we happen to be who we are, where we are, when we are. That is a challenge. I think that most of us like challenges. I think the unbelievable work done by many of you sitting in this room in Town Meeting has had an unbelievable impact, no one quite knows what it is yet, on this nation. Then I think of the privilege that some of us have had in participating in Social Demonstration. Having just come from the Isle of Dogs Consult I have some realization of the impact, power, drama, meaning and significance that comes out of that kind of opportunity. To know George Flint whose letter I quoted from earlier this evening, to know the crane operator, John Harris, who sent a cake to the Bridge House in London last week decorated with the words, "Thank you, ICA", to get clear about the hope you have given to the people you have touched and the programs that are directly related to the Movement's thrust, is an unbelievable happening in your life and mine. Multiply that by ten because of where we live, the time in which we live, and who we are, and you have some idea of the significance. To use Kazantzakis' quote -- the "riverbed" you have a chance to form for those who are going to follow after you, is what happens.

So I would leave you with this opening message and ask you the question. The question is: "How do we describe our vocation to ourselves?" One way to talk about it is to talk about "my vocation is how I earn my living." Another way to talk about it is to perhaps say, "my vocation is how I earn my life."

Don Moffett