

QUALITIES OF THOSE WHO CARE

In the past couple of years, as we've been caught up in a whirlwind of Town Meetings and Social Demonstrations, we've been noticing some peculiar characteristics in people who care, whoever they are - whether illiterate Indian rice farmers or brilliant Italian bankers or enigmatic Korean diplomats. Or maybe it's not the people who care but the life of care itself, which keeps calling for those qualities which we've been talking about as concern and corporateness and courage and creativity.

- a concern that drives you to corporateness
- a corporateness that drives you into situations that demand courage
- a courage that drives you into creativity

We all know about these things very well. It's as if this weekend, at whatever point you looked at it, was a gathering of concerned and corporate and courageous and creative people. We don't have much else in common, maybe, except these profoundly human dimensions - always special, unique, sacred in their manifestations, yet universal.

They're not a sequence, actually, though they occasion each other. They happen altogether. Just-like-that. The moment you are struck by concern, I become your brother, your comrade-in-arms in corporateness, and in that same moment courage is born - in me, in you, Kreuzberg, however you look at it - on planet earth, if you like - which simultaneously releases creativity.

CONCERN

You can talk about this concern as something that in the first place just happens to you - it sort of moves into line with you. Because you heard a cry in the street or you saw a death in the family or you felt you own mutilation - because of this, the world's agony became your own agony. An unbearable anomaly, if you will, that has come to stay and refuses to leave.

In the second place, it's not just an accident of experience at all; it is a choice. It's the other way around: you move in to live with distress, despair, a tragic place or a tragic moment in the human journey. In a way, that's what we've done this past year or so. We chose places of overwhelming despair and moved in.

In the case of Town Meetings, we tried to do like Prince Charming - or is it Don Juan? (No one remembers the old myths properly any more.) Anyway the idea has been to move in and give the Sleeping Beauty a kiss so that she wakes up to the godawful predicament she's in and then you slip quickly away again, hoping against hope, trusting against trust, that someone in that town will have the courage and the concern and the corporateness and the creativity to renew and continue the history-long battle for profound humanness. (This cannot be done lightheartedly, as you have seen.)

In the case of Social Demonstrations, we chose places around the world where injustice seemed most flagrant, where despair seemed most overwhelming and moved in to join ranks with the poor (the poor of spirit, the poor of body, the poor of mind) the 85 percent if you prefer the poetry of statistics, saying "We refuse to leave until there is hope in this place where there is no hope, love in this place where there is no love, faith in this place where there is no faith."

This is quickly translated into a matter of reinforced concrete, 5% loans, front-end loaders, 40 centimeter deep holes for Scotch pines three meters from the edge of the road and so on. And it doesn't end, even when Termine does the great triumphal march on June 30, claiming the victory on every front: there are eleven more Termine five minutes drive away.

Once you're caught in care the reality is overwhelming. It requires a kind of impassioned detachment, a universal service, an expenditure that is perpetual.

CORPORATENESS

Such concern requires corporateness. Some things I am better at than others. It takes me a long time to build a rabbit hutch. (One of my colleagues claims to have seen me trying to drive a nail into the wall by beating on the point with a saw. This is obviously untrue and I want to mention the hardships and injustices of corporate life in a moment.) The point is, if you care about getting something done in history you will be corporate. With corporateness, the people of Termine, under the guidance of a skilled colleague can build a 500 cage deluxe, drainable, fool-proof, temperature controlled rabbitry in a day. Without corporateness you might as well settle for keeping the rabbits in your bedroom.

We are not just a group of 40 or 50 concerned people in this room. There are another 2000 or so working on these same Town Meetings and Social Demonstrations. I was very conscious of that last night: there are about 30,000 villagers sitting with us, with the same concern. The work and the songs of Kelapa Dua are getting the project in Ijede done. The people of Termine applauded last night when they heard that the government cement mixer broke down in Cano Negro and so the people mixed the floor by hand instead of letting it wait for another year.

When I think of the Town Meeting participants I say to myself, "Now with 200,000 people hungering and thirsting and labouring and planning and praying and sweating for the exact same thing as I am, we can do something in history!"

The cost of corporateness is high. It binds you to the awful sight of human frailty till the end of your life. You're stuck with incompetent, pompous, narrow-minded, parochial, wicked people for the rest of your days. You are confronted by your own deformities day after day after day, but those who care are in a covenant in order to serve the world. And in that covenant,

they understand and pronounce forgiveness on the unforgiveable. Within relentless judgment, they understand and pronounce mercy. The crew of a boat in a storm haven't got time to be indignant with each other. This is not fooling: it is reality.

Sometimes it is an awesome sensation as well, this corporateness, when you see the dignity and the mystery of your colleagues and - to use old poetry - you feel as if you're sitting before God with the saints and angels. Though you'd be a fool to sit around hoping for such moments.

COURAGE

Now this tremendous life, detonated by the event of concern, is full of dread. There's a line in Old Man River that goes "I'm tired of livin' and scared of dyin'". Every day is a day of agonising choices. So many deaths you die, in a day. You're driven to be courageous. You're sometimes so crushed by some little event it requires courage to just stay - not pack up and leave. It requires courage to call an assembly, buy a sow, to move, move, move, while prudence is saying stop, stop, stop. Hammarskjold had the same experience:

You told yourself you would accept the decision of fate, but you lost your nerve when you discovered what this would require of you. Then you realized how attached you still were to the world which has made you what you were, which you would now have to leave behind. It felt like an amputation; a little death. And you even listened to those voices which insinuated that you were deceiving yourself out of ambition. You'll have to give up everything. Why, then, weep at this little death? Take it to you quickly; with a smile die this death and become free to go further - one with your task, whole in your duty of the moment.

It requires courage to be the presence of hope. But courage breeds courage. When I see Biagio d'Angelo standing tall (Biagio d'Angelo means Blaise the Angel) to address the crowd I feel like a lion. So I figure if I go down the street looking like a lion someone else will catch on. Other good news about courage: it's a decision, it's yours whenever you care to reach out your hand for it.

CREATIVITY

This courage takes you over the threshold of creativity. This is a mystery, how creativity flows from every step that is taken with care and corporateness and courage. Partly it's just that at your wit's end you are driven to invent, create, design new things, new strategems, new models, new images. Every day in Termini is like an Odyssey of creativity from the moment you wake up planning how to stop the rats from falling down the chimney into your bedroom to the moment you go to bed planning the quarterly report that will be read around the world.

As a body, ICA doesn't have a great deal of expertise. Economically we're vague and unorthodox. Politically we're uninformed, on the whole, and unskillful. Culturally, we're unusually uncouth. Yet creativity happens among us over and over and deeper and deeper - unusually decent documents get pushed out all the time, vast bills get paid with no money, water starts flowing in the desert with no proper equipment, songs pour out of depressed and depressing places, prime ministers and secret police listen carefully to what we have to say.

Moving in to live with this world's great agony is also stepping into a whirlwind of creativity. I feel on equal terms with the great symbols of creative genius now, like Van Gogh. There's a picture of him in the wash-room. "Hello Vincent," I say when I go in there. "Hello", he says back. "How's it going?" "It's a goddamn cruel and bitter struggle," he says to me. "I know it is," I say, "but remember the starry night." "How could I forget?" he says.

I feel the slides and singing last night expressed better than this the phenomenon we are involved in, the phenomenon of man as de Chardin called it - the phenomenon of profound humanness creating a new possibility for its own existence.

The sacrifices we make for it are important to us in a way, sort of sacred in a way, but added to those who've gone before us and those who are coming after nothing seems too extravagant even if you only go a century back or a century forward to look. (This is the big pearl, worth a fortune.)

Of course this kind of voyage has always depended on the support, expertise, encouragement, guidance, help, time, money, brains, work of guardians though exactly who's guarding who gets a bit confused as you see the same concern, the same courage, the same corporateness, the same creativity in the eyes of some cabinet ministers as you saw shining in the eyes of a toothless old man on a donkey on the way into town.

We used to say "Take care" to end these meetings. Now we say, "Take care, and corporateness, and courage and creativity".