

Permeation Division Meeting
December 21, 1970
Order Base

NSV/PERMEATION CONTEXT - JWM

Continuing the Work on the New Social Vehicle

I wanted to spend two or three evenings with this division in the last ten days, but certain dimensions of the local church experiment which had to be worked out by January first made that impossible. The reason is that before we can blink twice, this summer is going to be here. Last year a group of us, along with many PSU's on the weekends, spent nine months getting ready for last summer, and this summer is far more difficult--and I didn't think anything could be more difficult than getting ready for last summer. Not only that, but we've got our ræk out, in that for the first time that I ever remember doing so, a year ahead of time we said what we were going to do the next summer. That is, the new social vehicle. Maybe some of you remember that we said the following year was going to be on permeation, in which we deal with the guild construct on the local and on the inclusive level in the Church. I think things have speeded up, so that we cannot wait a year to do that, but that we have to do both of those at once this summer. I don't even know what that means.

In the light of this--and I dare not see how I cannot go to the World Council of Churches meeting and be back in March--I would like to suggest a couple of things. When I get back I would like to join Permeation Division. I would like to be assigned here. That means I have to find a way to keep everybody off my back every place else, which is not easy. That would roughly give us four months to get ready for the summer. It would seem to me that it's this group that has to do it. This means that we have to have a construct where we do a year's work in four months, in such a fashion that perhaps a group like this carries the ball, and then work out some kind of a PSU construct where the rest of the people at Order Base figure in on weekends according to some rational scheme, pulling in data, etc.

What I wanted to do now if I could have done it right was to spend one evening or two evenings listening to where you think we are in the new social vehicle. But not having done that, I'll just risk myself, and if I'm off the beam, you can straighten me out later as to where we are.

It seems like this to me: I think the work you did in that great big thick thing in June 1970 wrapped up the first stage of moving into the chaos of attempting to draw together the insights of our time into an abstract vision of the new social vehicle. It's almost as if when you move into any kind of chaos you take the Platonic method. You come from the abstract, and you begin to organize what you can get your fingers around into enough of an abstract model so that you can move into the empirical, or begin the Aristotelean approach. I think that you have accomplished and wrapped up that abstract task. Now we have to go the other way round.

As I've thought about it, we have to get on top of what has been learned since World War I, and more particularly since World War II, in the concrete, in the various aspects of the construct of any kind of a social vehicle--the political, the economic, the educational, the symbolic, and what is too loosely called the style. What has been going on in Asia, concretely? This is no place for the idealist, the dreamer, the one who is too quickly enamored. We'd be after just raw data. You have to be like a cold machine as you try to get hold of it. Maybe you're further along this line than I know.

This means that we have to do some intensive reading. More important, perhaps, we have to begin to pick our minds. Think of our work on the electric grid.: When you walk into Room E where the electric grid covers the back wall all the way up to the

ceiling and half of the side wall, it just shocks you. The shocking thing, in a way, is how in two days could that kind of thing be done? It could only be done because we've begun to find a method whereby we can wire into many many minds. There are around 180 to 200 adults gathered at Order Base now (it's also hard to know what an adult is). But the amount of knowledge in the area of the new social vehicle that's in that collective head is probably unbelievable. In creating the electric grid, if a lot of work had not been done to get a model with which to go into that weekend, the electric grid could not have been produced. And that's what we have to come up with--enough of a model so that we can begin to yank out of each other's minds what we know about how society has changed or how the new social vehicle has been coming for fifty years, let's say. I think we would be astounded by what we could come up with in a weekend if we had some kind of gimmick and if we had the whole order that's here working on it, as in principle we did when we worked on the electric grid. So I do not think that we need to take two years off to read. We've been reading all our lives, so to speak, in this particular area. Anyway to get it out and get it organized is what is needed.

Then also we have to bear in mind that about six inches beneath the surface of the consciousness of those of us in Permeation Division is an unbelievable amount of information about the new social vehicle that has come tangentially to us out of our own experiment in corporateness and the spiritual dimension of life. I am more and more persuaded that no new construct of human relationships ever emerged apart from the fresh flowing of the wellsprings of the spiritual dimensions of humanness. I think you can document that right down the line. Also that would help you understand the ones that were not new but were fresh alterations of the one that was already there. What I'm trying to say is that we know a great deal more through our own experimentation about the shape of the new social vehicle than probably at this moment we are aware. Again, if we had enough of a method, one weekend in which our whole group put their mind on that would bring out just an unbelievable amount of data. Not only that, but if we can find a method between now and let's say the first of March, our religious houses across the world can be geared into this with us. And not only that, but the awakened spirit people across the movement, if we can find a method, can be geared into this. Oh my, if I thought the local congregation was complex, even just to think about this seems to be many times more complex! But in one sense, we have in principle several thousand minds if we can find a method of doing it. The method has to be rigorous. It has to be hard-headed. It has to be thought through. March, April, May, June four months. . . .

I don't know how far you can go this quarter with the idea of networks to work on these problems--I believe you could do it in the division this quarter and maybe with the whole group next quarter--where we divide ourselves into five master PSU's which is really one PSU. In the new social vehicle work one would be working with the economic, one the political, etc., so that for one quarter or if you could get it started, for two quarters--you might very well have to have something like two teams or two divisions in each of the PSU's, where one weekend one of them would be on and the other off--but where that PSU every single week would just be driving down the line and during the week you would find a time where you could organize and get the rest of the people who were not on that weekend caught up on what had happened on that weekend. I have hoped that we could get started on that even this quarter to see how far we could get on that. I wish we had another two weeks where we could think through more just how you would go at this.

The time has come when the work the social workers, for instance, have done in what ought to go on and what can go on in this area of life can be drawn together

and pushed through in terms of--I don't know how to say it, I don't know enough to know how to say it--what you would build into the social fabric. Or imaginal education. About two weeks ago the chancellor of Temple University went to somebody's office that I know and cried because he had to give a major speech on what the new education ought to look like, and he didn't know how to do it. He was referred to us and we checked with some of you people and some of you said that in a couple of hours you could give him something to work on. Well, he chickened out. We've known him for some time and didn't feel free to call him. Maybe we should have. But the point is that we know things in this area that now we can begin to spell out in terms of the broad social fabric. In polity we know things. Anyway, these PSU's would begin to get this organized over a quarter.

Also in these groups we need to think about the methodology of going about this. For instance, July. How would you run that thing? That itself would begin to belch up into the open, various insights on the new social vehicle.

And then you need three or four people--you don't need much more--like I could be one of them--that would be here during the week, whose job it would be to get on top of all that data, and by the time that weekend came again to be able to feed back that into the total machinery, so that every mind was working over against every other mind for the beginning.

Permeation: 1971

It is pretty obvious that the local congregation experiment cannot go on if the work on the new social vehicle is not ready at the very latest a year from July. That's when we are going to be on the parish. But it has to be broken loose a long time before that, in my mind by next December we have to be down the line on this. So moving on the new social vehicle and the permeation construct is just crucial to this experiment. We cannot put it off.

But there is something far deeper that is going on here. It has to do with the new cleric. What the Permeation Division as no other division we have here is pioneering is the new cleric. I mentioned the other day that in working with the pre-Reformation reformers, we found three emphases present in all of them (this shocked me). The first was the opening of the scriptures, but we mustn't reduce that too much. It was the flowing of the spirit. They stumbled upon some kind of method that began to release the deeps of humanness.

Next I'm going to give the third one to put it in the middle, and that was lay engagement. Lay engagement was creating a new form of the cleric. History has never existed without the cleric. And it will never exist without the cleric. But the trouble is that at any given time you get some silly form of the cleric mixed up with the cleric. That's our moment now. I get a little nauseated when I hear myself say that history has always had the cleric, because I have to break loose from an image that I represent. I do not mean that I am a cleric. I do not mean a clerical collar when I say that history has always had this. New forms, new forms, new forms Nobody is going to know what the new forms are going to look like. But always the new form of the cleric came from the lay. It always came from the lay. And what I mean by lay engagement is the new form of the priest-hood who watches over the deeps of humanness on behalf of all of mankind.

The other thing was popular preaching. Claudia Cramer helped me on this. What would popular preaching look like today? It's hard to say. You can't go into

the past and get much help on this. We have to forge it. Claudia said that we are down the road to popular preaching in telling stories. Then I got clear that what we call spinning, or spirit conversations, or something that has to do with the scripture conversations--is the ground of popular preaching. I can see any one of us go into a cocktail party and do this. And I've been having fun on airplanes recently. There are a couple of guys sitting next to you, and you just start spinning. And my gracious, they get caught immediately. They don't know what you did to them, but I am sure that I could point to ten or twelve people that got off that plane and will never be the same human being again, and without any knowledge of what really happened to them.

Now how do you do that? Well, you see, the Permeation Division is made for that, because you are the direct reach out into the masses. How this quarter even, could you begin on a highly rational and systematic way to experiment? You have to use your heads. I mean you have to use your heads. If you think we know how to do this you are wrong. That is why we should dance very lightly. Byt I don't know, somewhere buried over in the archives is a report that a division worked out five years ago on a "minute curriculum," in which you give RS-I in one minute roughly. I guess there must have been five hundred entries of various short courses on that. It was huge. And if you add to that what we have learned in the meantime, you could almost with great caution assign yourselves as to what story you were going to spin.

You may know that the word "Quaker" was a derogatory term. They were quaking. And the word "Shaker" similarly. Sometimes I'd like to see the Order remembered as the "Spinners." And you see, the interesting thing about this is that because we are aware that within every situation is its own meaning that God put into that situation before the foundations of the world, to speak mythologically, you can take any situation and make it spin. Here it's the method that we have to get hold of.

It's almost as if we have gone a full circle. It has now become very clear that the Church's fundamental task, in order to serve mankind, is to get the volleyball of creativity of the last soul in this world operating, to put it in secular language. And out of that creativity will come the new forms of human relationship.

At the moment, I don't see any other place where that kind of experimentation can legitimately go on. Permeation is now the experimental edge, where you forge the new understanders of the keeper of the spirit deeps in history--that's the new cleric--by working at the problem of what's called popular preaching, or how--and let's say we are the People of God--how the People of God literally guard the spirit deeps of mankind. It's a problem something of that fashion. I don't see any other place where we can get the knowledge we have to have except in this kind of group. The strain, and I'm assuming it's a strain, that there has been in Permeation Division in the last several years, I am anticipating is going to pay off, and pay off soon. Heaven help us.

My last word is this. It has been extremely clear to me that the best minds, or is it experience, or is it both, in our group have not been thoroughly used, because those minds have been in this group and we have never found a way to use those to the full. I would be willing to bet that in the local congregation model, if we had a series of minds out of this group that were available constantly, that we would have saved ourselves a huge amount of effort. A couple of you recently have given me written out essays on how to solve one of the difficult problems in the local congregation mode, which were extremely useful and helpful. It's that we didn't have an authentic means of how we could do this. I think that as we move somewhere in the direction

that I've been talking about now, that problem is going to be solved. And it has to be solved, not only for the sake of us, but for the local congregation. This is exactly who and what they are.

Final Comments

QUESTION: How are we going to do all this work on the new social vehicle?

One thing that I'm clear of is that we will not be working in this a matter of weeks in the fresh way that we have to be in it, before we discover more than we have ever discovered before, that what we meant when we first began to talk about a new social vehicle is not what we are going to come up with. I've even thought that it would be so radically different that all you would be doing would be making a little more clear what a creative style of life is. Wouldn't that be funny? Now I don't mean that. That's just an illustration. (I probably ought to have said that what we would discover is that we all have to become elephants, or something like that.) It's going to be different.

I think that study in the ur images is going to be simply crucial here. I would like to know a great deal more about the social construct of ancient India, or ancient China--no romanticism here, just hard-headed realism. I'd like to get back closer to the sources of the invention of a social vehicle, so to speak. That's one thing that I would be looking for. I would be extremely interested in getting much more than information, though that is there. I would be after a much greater feel after the new society that has been built in China today. Some of you that went around the world saw in Hong Kong that movie on China that was made by Japanese. Bishop Yap in Singapore took me to see that movie. It is just about everyday life in a factory town. It was exciting. Here is probably the best illustration of a direct and comprehensive effort to restructure a social vehicle in our time. For a while it looked like it was going to happen in Africa. It has not, though I would want to be reading further--and we have done a lot of that--on the social philosophy of certain African leaders.

But back to Asia; I would want to look extremely carefully, this time in a very creative and positive sense, at what the Westernizing of the East really means. And let us just be very sure, no romantics here, that the West has won and it has won forever in the East. There is nothing you can do about that. So the question is now, how must the East forge and fulfill its own destiny on the other side of this having happened? I remember one day an Indian woman who was not very popular among the Indians that were present, when the British came up in conversation and one Indian made some comment, came forth and hit the bull's eye. She said, "From now on the British rule of India is as much a part of our history as anything else that ever happened to it." She wasn't saying that was good. She was just saying fact, fact. Well, I would want to look at that--not only to get hold of Asia, but to have it bounce back as to who we are right now as a social phenomenon. Something like that is how we need to proceed. But that's not a good answer. I don't know. I don't know.

Also as part of our study we have to pay attention to the revolutions, but in a different way than we have, for different reasons. All of us know that something radical has happened relative to work, money, success. You can say it a hundred times. These young people in the world today are not going to ever work again under the rubric of the Protestant work ethic. That is gone. It is synonymous with the capitalistic approach to life. Money is gone. Money economy is gone. Something is taking its place. That is connected with this. How can we get this complex web of insights together into a gestalt? This seems to me one of the ways to come at this. One time I said to one of you that the time has come when we have to list the economic problems of the world--but I don't mean problems--I don't have another word--economic going-on-nesses,

or going-on-nesses that have to do with the economic--and begin to draw those together into a new gestalt.

QUESTION: Could you say more about how the style of the new cleric is related to the method of the new social vehicle?

I don't know, but the new cleric is going to be invisible. That's not true, but it is true. He is going to be invisible not because people can't see him, but because when they use the word cleric, they are thinking of some character like me. Therefore, they'll know this one is a different one, but they'll call him "xxxxx." They won't see he's the new cleric.

I would judge that this new cleric is going to be the basic strategy for actually changing the structures of society. This is to say that what we call the "spirit movement" will be interested in nothing else than in actualizing the model of the new social vehicle. This is where the popular preaching comes in. They are going to spin here, spin there, spin there, spin there, and if you're across the world, let's say you are going to have ten thousand, fifty thousand, a hundred thousand. I sometimes think that in this country we probably have touched--most of them probably are a little bit under the surface--over two hundred thousand people, that can come up to the surface again when the right button is pushed. You get these spinning. And this is tied to the guild construct, which one day has to come into being in the movement and in the local congregation. Those are going to be the new clerics. They are just going to be spinning this out in every office, cocktail party, football gathering--spinning, invisible spinning.

I do not think that you can take too seriously looking at ourselves, and we are going to have to look at ourselves in a new light and a new depth. What is going on here is a clue or a key. How is it that a group of people--young people like you--how is it that you are willing to expend yourselves without economic reward? Why are you doing this? We need to look in a new way--again, no romance here, realistically--at how we are able to work together? I have said that I am shocked at times in being aware that we have never had any crucial internal problems. We have never had any. Why? Now don't somebody go out and start one!

Comments to Permeation following Division report, March 1970--JWM

This is the most important division report I ever experienced. This is the answer to the second year tactics of the whole local congregation right in this report. I've been struggling with how you come at it, and this is the answer. For me, that's as important as the invention of the atom bomb, at this moment in my history.

The second this: this report broke loose for me what has been hidden relative to the parish. We've never analyzed the parish. We've just had holding categories. This enabled me to do it. I've known since last fall that what has happened in the Permeation Division was just unbelievable, but I could not quite see the relationship. And I'm now beginning to see it. I don't know how to get this said; if you gave me twenty-four hours, I think I could. If you could take that report and rearrange the categories, cutting across, like this, you'd get those boxes the content of which, the instruments for which would begin to come clear. If this be true, and I believe it is true, what all of us have dreamed of is going to come much quicker. I would encourage you people to take new courage in Permeation, just new courage. I know it's hard. --Just shove, and that means shoving yourself, because you will probably be the guinea pigs--just shove it. I don't think now you have as much time as I thought you had. You're farther down the road and ready to go. I tell you, I'm impressed. Whoever wrote that letter to Rick Loudermilk, prior of the Oklahoma City Religious House, about what permeation is--well, that's just a genius. I didn't really read it before because I didn't have a context.

One last thing. This coming weekend when we come to analyze the relation between the sodality and the other dimensions of the ecclesiola and the parish--the key to the whole thing is in this report. That I believe.

Time is running out in several different ways. Therefore, I think I want to say this. This has to do with the parish. The parish, which is a religious overlay of human community, deals with three realities at once. One is the reality that the overlay overlays, human settlement itself. That has to be put there. The second is the natural aspect of the overlay, or the continuous discontinuous aspect of the overlay. That I want to insist is what your guild has to do with. This is the spirit man operating in the normal dynamics of human settlement. And he's an overlay. He's not like anybody else. But you can't tell it from the outside. Let's call those for a moment guilds, organizations of those people. The third part of a parish is the super-natural aspect of the overlay, or the discontinuous continuous. This is the total congregation operating as the ever-ongoing revolutionary force as a unit in the community. In this last aspect, then, is where you have to do with sectors, what we used to call guilds--and I want to say we don't do it any more--and stakes. So then that would be sectors, communes or soviets (you can't use that--I don't have the right word)--call them societies or unions--and stakes. Then guilds have to do with that second aspect of a parish, or the first overlay. This can clean up our terminology.

Then, a sodality is that dynamic which relates this highly complex dynamic that I've just described, called the parish, in terms of the actual functioning of that. That makes for me, maybe not for you, that sodality double complex. And I think that's where I've been boggy. You've got both the sustenance of the natural overlay and the operation of what I call the super-natural overlay.

One last word. I called the first overlay of the reality of human settlement continuous discontinuous. The continuous comes first there, because it's out in the normal structures with discontinuity shoved into it through the spirit man participating. The other one I called the discontinuous continuous. This is your structural revolutionary, which the congregation is.

Now, I don't know how this falls on you, but at the moment I am tremendously excited and broken loose in a way I haven't been for a long time, and it would be great if we could come back tomorrow and shove this hard relative to the job, and when you think you've got one year to do this next stage which right now I think is as complex as the last 16 years when we've been working on the first stage of the intensification of the local congregation--and, I might say, more important. Everything we've been doing up to now is for the sake of this. In that sense it's more important. God help you.