

THE GUARDIAN AS THE PARAVOCATED HUMAN

I am impressed. I am impressed with having been invited to speak at the Guardians Meeting. I remember the first time I heard about the Guardians: I had the image that these were "rich guys". I had no problem with rich guys, because my father spent most of his life trying to be a rich guy. When I grew older, I used to carry on an imaginary conversation with him about this business of being a rich guy. I would ask him, in my imagination, what would you do if you were a rich guy? And I could imagine him answering, "I wouldn't to anything - I'd be rich!" Being rich doesn't have to do with doing anything - it has to do with being rich! I was impressed. I was impressed with the idea of a bunch of people existing who really didn't do anything except be rich, and yet who were going to come and work with the movement made up of people who did a lot of things, and were never rich.

I began to work with those who called themselves Guardians and my image changed. They were obviously not rich guys. A number of times I got hit up to buy them a beer. They convinced me that they were not rich guys. Either that, or they were extremely stingy, which obviously wasn't going to do us any good anyway. So their appeal must lie in some other direction, other than in being rich guys. I began to play with the image that they were those whose avocation was the work of the movement - a sort of sideline, a sort of deeply engaging hobby. But that image shifted rather quickly when I began to encounter Guardians in this building. I encountered people who put in long, long hours, and who ate the non-Guardian food that we serve when there's not a scheduled Guardians meeting, and they seemed to be able to exist on this fare with no problem!

Then I had an amazing encounter. I went to do the Consult in Cano Negro, a great place in the jungles of Latin America, and ran into many, many Guardians there. As we worked together, I made a startling discovery. It was not the discovery that the Guardians put in long hours (for that was to be expected), without sleep (for that was to be expected also), or lived off the land (for that, too, was to be expected). It was not even that they cared about the village. Hopefully, that care about the village was why they were there in the first place.

As I worked in that Consult, I received a brand new gestalt shift with respect to my image of the Guardians, and what dawned on me was that the Guardians cared. They simply cared. They cared, period. They cared profoundly. They cared passionately. They cared with their entire lives, and with their very beings. I realized that I had rather smugly and unself-consciously told myself a story that my care was of a different quality than the care of the Guardians. I didn't set out to do this, but it had happened. Yet, I discovered that there was no difference between my care and the care of the Guardians - it was the same care. It was not a different aspect of the same care. It was not a different quality or a different quantity. It was the same care. The care I experience for the future, for mankind, for the globe, for the life of the cities, for the welfare of those in the villages came, I discovered, from the same deep well as the care of those who call themselves Guardians. It was exactly the same care. My care and their care was the same care. We didn't



have two cares. There was one care, and in that one care we both shared and participated. There was no difference in the care. It was not that the Guardians had achieved some kind of bogus equality. The fact of the matter, as I discovered it, was that that care had been there all along. There never had been a difference between the deep abiding and profound care that impelled us into mission and impelled us into ridiculous situations. There was no difference between that care. So when I was asked to address the Guardians Meeting, I was impressed. I was impressed because I had another opportunity to talk with my colleagues - with colleagues who are in a profound sense, members of the same league to which I see myself belonging.

I want to read to you a little bit from the Journal which is on your plates. I was interested in the passages for the last three days; they are very interesting. For October 13th, the day this Guardians Meeting began, the passage is this: "What we do here will influence every part of the world." Isn't that interesting? "What happens in every part of the world will influence us, so we are faced by the most difficult problem of all, that of man's dealing with his fellow, on a basis of mutual respect and good will." That was the day we started this meeting. Then the journey continues. On the 14th, yesterday, the reading was this: "There was an uneducated man who asked me something, and I could not say a word in reply. I merely discussed the two sides of the question and was at my wits end." Does that sound a little bit like yesterday? Now listen to today's passage: "Moment by moment, I water it for fear its green leaves fail. Night and day I tend it, but I get no wine. I would as soon have briars and thorns, that I would wage war upon it and burn it all up, unless it grasps me as its refuge and makes peace with me. Unless it makes peace with me." That's not bad. Somebody, maybe, created the Journal by plotting out the days of the Guardians Consult, and then built the rest of the book's passages around those appropriate to this event.

The Guardians, whatever they are, are not an organization. Guardians are a dynamic that is crucial to the life of anybody who is interested in changing the world. This business of changing the world has caused me acute embarrassment, for most of the time I have been with this body. Whenever I am introduced to somebody, and my brother is around, and I am asked what I do, my brother immediately pipes up, "Oh, he's saving the world!" And that used to embarrass me. But now when he says that, I just smile and say, "That's right. I'm saving the world. What do you do?" Now that is not as smug as it sounds. There is a profound sense of pain and sorrow in the business of saving the world.

I thought we could do a lot of things up here after I made my brief witness. We could read from a statement, compiled by the task force which worked on the Guardians Meeting planning, about the Guardians. Would you like to hear it?

"The Guardians support and protect the flanks of the missional forces of human development. The Guardian addresses the Word in order to bring fulfilled living to others. The Guardian offers no excuse for living life's journey in the struggle to fight for humankind. The Guardian is an iron man, serving the globe at the local level. The Guardian uses vocation first to honor the establishment on behalf of the mission. The Guardian cares for self through being an informed practitioner. The Guardian symbolizes care through celebrating engagement in the world. The Guardian corporately engages in building responsible global communities. The Guardian demonstrates and uses methods of human



development in all situations. The Guardian maintains constructive objectivity on behalf of the movemental vision and priorities. The Guardian exposes self to combat innocent suffering in the world. The Guardian bridges the 15%/85% gap. The Guardian catalyzes the participation needed to effect social change. The Guardian does necessary deeds. The Guardian uses his own expertise as a resource to create future structure. The Guardian intentionally disciplines his own life in order to give time, money and talent to advance the global task." That's one way of talking about the Guardian.

I think another way is to use the term "paravocation". We have struggled and wrestled with that term for many years now, and I was beginning to lose hope of our ever being able to put some content beneath it - until last night. Last night we went to a fine play with the Academy as a celebration. It was entitled "Red Rover, Red Rover." The title was probably the funniest thing about the play. It was intended to be a comedy, but it made all of us rather sick because of our heightened sensitivity to the need for caring for the globe. For others, in other circumstances, I guess, it could have been a comedy.

The play was about a man who longed so desperately for community, that whenever his friends came over for dinner, he would scheme ways to make them stay longer than they had intended. He let the air out of the tires of one family, and hid the car keys of another, and made sure that his car was blocked by the car with the flat tire. He further contrived to have the two visiting couples finally stay overnight in his house. He lusted after community so deeply that he was willing to forgive anything that resulted, except, of course, not having a private bath. He was unable to forgive that. But in the midst of this extended visit, all kinds of insights and truths about the other couples began to be revealed. It was revealed that the husband of each couple had proposed, in some fashion, to the wife of the other couple; and it became clear that each wife was dissatisfied with her marriage and one woman had even been married to two of the other men in the scenario. At the end, they all resolved, after tremendous struggle and numerous revelations about each other, that they would stay together, and form a community.

I think that what addressed me about the play was its expression of the longing for community, which is generally reflected in the world today. Human beings long deeply for community; however, we know that community, without mission, is doomed to failure. In terms of your own lives, to be paravocation is to pass over accomplishment into action. Somehow we have to find a way to get ourselves clear that while things must be done that no human life will ever have its significance proven by what it does.

There was an Academy participant who said that what he wanted to do was do something that would go on forever, and he asked me if I thought that was possible. I began to reflect on his question, and I asked him, "How many people in Pompeii were sincere? How many people in Pompeii remained faithful to their wives? How many people in Pompeii paid all their bills? How many people in Pompeii were really loving individuals? How many people in Pompeii got up early every morning and did all their chores? Nobody knows. All we have is a few pots and a few lava-encrusted spoons. And that's the truth about human existence." While all those things are important in our struggle to be human, nevertheless, they do not last forever. Our accomplishments, or do's are finite, just as we are: and yet what it means to be paravocated is to pass



over accomplishment, to go beyond deeds into action. Action has to do with the positing of care - not in deeds that show fruits, but in the positing of care here and now without any sense whether the fruits will ever be made known.

When I think of this kind of dynamic I think of the Foundation Trilogy by Isaac Asimov. In that book there is described a group of people who were living at the time of imperial crisis. The Galactic Empire had collapsed. It was starting from the outside and collapsing inward. Only a few could see what was going on. "Now, look around you. See how many motor cars we have in the imperial Galactic Empire. What do you mean, it's collapsing? Things are going great! They've never been better." But the few who could see said, "Nope, things are collapsing." They tried to analyze the trends of history and come up with suggestions as to what to do about the present state of the empire. You know what they discerned? That if things continued as they were going, there would be 10,000 years of anarchy and chaos throughout the whole Galactic Empire. So they set their lives to the task of reducing the 10,000 years down to a thousand. That was their task.

That has something to do with paravocation, and it has something to do with going beyond accomplishment and deeds to action and care. A paravocated human being lives on nothing other than his or her own decision to care - not on the fruits of his labors. We know our task will never reveal final fruits. A paravocated human being lives all his commitments and his care. Paravocation has something to do with passing over from being mission to being the mission of being mission. This is a profoundly transparent category. Paravocation has to do with calling forth mankind, local human beings, to their vocation. It is being a caller: being the one who demands a response and gives the opportunity for people to pick up their life's work.

Most people go through their lives laboring, yet never doing their life's work. That is the fate of most of mankind. When I talk about the tragic gap between the 15% and the 85%, I am not referring to the fact that most of the 85% don't get a chance to live like Ozzie and Harriet. I wouldn't wish that kind of life on anybody! Where I sense the tragedy is that they go through their lives like laboring animals, yet never have the opportunity, or the option to do their life's work, the work to which they have decided to dedicate their lives. Instead, they labor and labor and labor unto death. Being a paravocated human being has to do with crashing into the situations where people labor without end, and presenting them with the opportunity to do their life's work. That is why I think that Town Meeting and Social Demonstration are such a big thrill around the world. It's not that they're perfect and don't have any problems. But when people encounter those programs, they encounter the possibility to do their life's work.

Somebody in Gibson said, "I've figured out this Consult business." I said, "Oh, Lord. Please don't let her figure out this consult business." She said, "I've figured out all you guys are doing is helping us do what we already wanted to do. You aren't telling us anything new. We already wanted to do these things." "That's right", I said, "but you all weren't doing them, were you?" She said, "No." And I said, "Do you know why? That's the other side

of this Consult business. It is that you were not doing what you always wanted to do, and you didn't know why you couldn't do what you always wanted to do. That's the trick to it." That's what it means to be paravocated: to call forth mankind to do its life's work ; to break into the incredible dehumanizing cycle of labor without end, and give people a new option - to not go through something different, but to do in the midst of their labor their life's work.

Finally, paravocation, it seems to me, has something to do with passing over from being a Guardian to Global Guardianhood. I think that has something to do with grounding the dynamic of paravocation in any situation. When you see one Guardian who is paravocated, you see all the Guardians - you see the Global Guardians. I mean the Japanese Global Guardians, the Korean Global Guardians, and the African Global Guardians . There is only one Global Guardian - it's you and nobody else, and that one Global Guardian is all the Global Guardians, at one time. It's the whole dynamic, in fact; Global Guardianhood is a dynamic. It's really not an organization at all. We must pass over in our understanding to conceive of a Guardian not as an organization but a dynamic.

We are all paravocated. We are all called on to play the role of Guardian in various situations. I have had to play the role of Guardian, and when they first told me that I needed to, I said, "I'm not a Guardian. I live here. I wear a blue shirt." And they said, "So do they." And I realized then, that a Guardian is a dynamic, a role in history. Historically the role of Guardian is the role of those who have decided to take the investment that society has made in their lives and return the investment: but not return the investment to themselves - return it to society. It is as if society invisted in your becoming an engineer, and you return the investment to society by engineering a whole new society. If society invisted in your becoming a doctor, you return the investment by serving the ills of mankind: by creating a whole new understanding of medicine in the local situation. Being a Guardian is simply returning the investment. Those who have decided to play the role of returning the investment are who we are; we are all paravocated.

We are all in the same mission. We are all Guardians. We all have the same path ahead of us and the same struggles within the task. And so, when I tell you once again that I am impressed, I'm not impressed because I got a chance to come to this Guardians Meeting, because I've attended meetings like this for the last ten years. I'm impressed because of all the good champagne that we never seem to get up in the Academy.