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THE WAVE OF HISTORY

The historians tell us that the Marshallese were able to travel over a million square miles of ocean from island to island with no other navigational device than a "stick chart" and no other clues than listening to the sound of the waves as they hit the bottom of their outrigger canoes. The stick chart used tiny shells to represent islands and straight and curved sticks which denoted the perennial currents and the wave motion from island to island.

One of our resident oceanographers described to me the physics of wave motion. There are swells in the ocean that perennially traverse long distances in straight lines; whenever they hit an island, they are diverted into secondary waves and go off at angles. If you know that general flow, you can travel and tell where you are. Before the Marshallese began making charts of sticks and shells, a Master Navigator would simply draw the grid on the sand. The person who was about to take the trip would duplicate it, and then the Master would erase them both and draw it once more. The apprentice was to duplicate the grid one more time without looking at the original. If he succeeded, he could go ahead and take the trip. If not, he went home.

Listening for the waves of history is what we have been about as a revolutionary body during the past few months. This task is important for several reasons. It allows us to distinguish between the ripples, the currents and the waves. The ripples are surface disturbances. Currents have to do with what we normally call trends, where water moves over long distance in a particular direction. But waves are something else again. They are swells. They don't have anything directly to do with the movement of the water or the surface disturbances. They are where the power is.

There are several characteristics of an historical wave. First, it is objective, not interpretative. It is what the interpretations interpret. It is the going-on-ness that the Lord has put into history. Our resident oceanographer tells me that nobody really knows where waves come from or what causes them. Likewise, these waves of history are just there and nobody knows their origin or cause. Secondly, a wave is sociological, not psychological. It is what our psyches are responding to: the objective givenness that is in society. When you name one, very often it sounds obvious. One of my colleagues said a clue to recognizing a wave is that when it is named, your heart "soars like a hawk."

Riding a wave is different from flying a kite. When you fly a kite, you just determine which way the wind is blowing, and that tells you what you have to do. Such a procedure is a liberal approach to social change or social analysis: determine which way the wind is blowing, and be directed by that alone. The problem is that this approach is ineffective. It simply doesn't work. What we are after is not based on the assumption that a trend must be followed rigidly. Trends have to be taken into account, but, are made to be bent, particularly by revolutionary bodies. Perceiving the wave, and standing in relation to it, allows you to be effective in bending the trend.

Discerning the waves is the route to effectiveness. For example, the early Church discerned that the wave of the future had to do with the collapse; had to do with the Roman Empire. That fact was perceived quite early. The Apocalypse of John paints that wave in very graphic detail: Rome is presented as the Whore of Babylon, riding on a seven-headed beast and its fall is presented with great rejoicing. Perception of this wave allowed people not to be sucked into the particular currents of each emperor's program or persecution. It released them to respond to that wave.

When that wave hit the beach, some two or three hundred years later, and anarchy prevailed in Rome, there was one group of people that had a common ideology, discipline, and organization, which were to mitigate the anarchy and keep civilization going, to keep the roads open and the aqueducts flowing. This group was the Church. They called the head man of the Church "Pontifex Maximus," which means, literally translated, Chief Bridgebuilder. This was not a theological epithet, but a sociological description of a people who decided to serve civilization by being clear about where the waves are. Discerning a wave is the way to be effective in service to the world.

Discerning a wave is hard. In the opening rituals of the guilds this summer, we used a quotation, the gist of which was, "I don't know who discovered water, but it certainly wasn't a fish." Discerning a wave takes distance. Yet we are all in it so much it's difficult to see a wave. Our research on the social process triangles and the Other World screens gives a perspective on which to stand as we begin to look at events and currents to see the waves.

Discerning a wave smacks of prophecy and prophecy is risky business. Suppose you are wrong. You stand there responding to a wave that doesn't come along. At the very least, you will look silly. The Bible is caustic in its critiques of false prophets: "They did not have an eye to discern what in fact was going on."

With these general observations and disclaimers, I would like to lay out what seems to me to be the waves of our time, as they were discerned this summer. The waves of our time have to do with a radical upheaval in our society, a collapsing of the old and a bringing into being of the new in virtually every social arena. I want to name the eight great waves of our time in four groups of two. If this comes out rational, that is probably the first clue that we have not got it yet. There is something extra-rational about this sort of work.

- 1) The maturation of the economic dynamic. The economic sector has grown to mammoth size and complexity. In the process it has grasped its social responsibility. By maturation, I mean not simply growth in size, but an assumption of responsibility for the social process
- 2) The emergence of an effective global cadre dynamic. The creation of the global cadre, the invisible college dynamic, or "the League" has shifted in such a way as to include the business community. It is no longer restricted, as we used to think about it, to the intellectual or ecclesiastical community, but involves business.
- 3) Political upheaval. The political sector is a boiling cauldron as we are discovering the inadequacy of virtually every known form of polity now accessible to us.
- 4) The emergence of local man. Local man is now insisting on engaging himself in the decision-making process.
- 5) Concern with ecology. Man has radically altered the balance of nature in such a way that human life on this planet is threatened.
- 6) Technological revolution. The world now possesses skills and methods for resolving problems that here-to-fore have been considered an unalterable part of the human predicament.
- 7) The transparentization of time. Mundane and secular events have become the locus ~ Mystery.
- 8) Emergence of a global culture. The global village has become an operating reality, no longer simply the image of the idealist, as transportation and communication bridge the gulf that formerly separated nations and Ur-groups.

Regarding the maturation of the economic dynamic, it seems to me that our category of "Economic tyrant" as a description of the imbalances of the social processes is no longer either appropriate or accurate. It is not strategically appropriate for obvious reasons of authorization, but it is not even accurate these days. The economic dynamic has to be sure, grown to mammoth size and complexity. The inflation which is touching everyone on the globe is largely a result of that growth. Business Week notes that we do not have an economic theory that takes into account the complexity of our situation. All our formulas for predicting and manipulating the economic process simply do not work.

In the midst of that global struggle, the economic dynamic is becoming socially responsible. When you look through magazine advertisements, various art forms or significant quotes, that we could use on the walls around here, stand out. And your heart soars like a hawk. Then you see down in the bottom right hand corner, "Atlantic-Richfield," or "IBM," or "Conoco" or "Exxon." Companies are taking pains to present themselves as socially responsible groups. I think we have to acknowledge that they are becoming just that.

This social responsibility does not have to do, in the first instance, with philanthropy. We learned in the '60's how much you can count on philanthropy. But the fact-of-the-matter is that in this complex world, the economic dynamic must, for its own self-protection, take account of the political situation. The political and the cultural have become the concern of the business and industry. In one sense, it's encouraging that the most powerful and influential dynamic in the world has decided to take responsibility for society at large. The methods of such responsibility have become the question.

The wave of the emerging global cadre has to do, again, with those people within the business sector who are the sensitive and responsive ones. Anybody who has done LENS marketing could name people who are genuinely responsible and collegial. The other day somebody was passing around a book written by a former Chairman of the Board of the Bank of America, called, *The Future Without Shock*. You might not want to suggest that it contained the most thorough or profound analysis, but one chapter in it sounds like a lecture from the Movement on the economic imbalance in our society today and some of its social consequences. People like that exist today in the business structures. Our LENS marketers have found there is a global network of sensitive and responsive businessmen ready to move. One might say the global cadre is teetering on the brink of effectivity.

The wave of the political upheaval hardly needs any grounding at all. It runs the gamut of society, not just among nations. The other night, in a private three-minute brainstorm, I was able to list eighteen major governments that have undergone traumatic crisis in the last two years. Each one of these is attended by unique ripples or currents, but the scope of it suggests that there is a wave there. Carrying this turmoil to the absurd extreme, there is a struggle in the state of Alaska over the location of the state capital. It is now in Juneau, which is a very small town in the panhandle. There is a movement on to get the capital moved to Anchorage. But there is also a movement among the populace of Juneau to keep it there. They launched a statewide campaign to keep the capital in Juneau and locate the headquarters of the state campaign in Anchorage.

That is an absurd extreme, but this struggle of the political sector dynamic to bring order to our present society is going on wherever you turn. It takes a number of forms. There are places in the world that are moving towards nationalism and places moving toward internationalism. Yet you sense in both of those movements, an attempt to create a form which will allow for participation in a global community with diversity. Our current forms were not made for such a social reality. This wave of political upheaval is likely to continue.

In some relationship to this wave is the wave of the emergence of local man as an effective political force. In this country, it has been manifested through the effectiveness of the opinion poll. The struggle in this country over the presidency of Mr. Nixon had to do with conflict among the three pressure points of the political dynamic: Legislative Consensus, Bureaucratic Systems, and Knowledge Access. That is, it had to do with Congress, the Administration, and the press. Knowledge access, or that process which shapes and molds and expresses indeed, the public opinion, has been extremely effective here.

In the emergence of local man, "dissatisfaction" is not a strong enough word for the cries from minority groups -- they are demands for an effective voice. You could go around the world listing the various minority revolutions in process. The point is there is a determination on the part of local man to have a say in the decisions that affect his life.

On the other hand, you have to say that mass rule is the synonym for anarchy. The form coming into being is not going to be some kind of "do-your-own-thing-ism." It must be a channel that effectively allows local man to participate. I am not talking only about nations, for this goes on also within the economic community. We were talking to an industrialist in Australia who was describing some of his labor-management problems. The demand from labor was for a voice in the policies of the company. So they devised a system whereby management would consult with labor in workshop groups. They even crossed department heads so that you would not be talking to your superior, but across department lines. This industrialist had just come from a session and was radically shaken. He said there had been a six-hour session of griping and no constructive presentation. The question is how? What is the new form of democracy that will effectively take the voice of local men and weave them together into an operating consensus that works. Local man is no longer content to acquiesce in the decisions of some representative bureaucracy. He is determined to have a direct voice in the formation of the policy.

Regarding the concern with ecology, all you have to do is walk outside and take a deep breath, or go upstairs and try to see the lake today, to realize that we have a problem with the balances of nature. It was announced on the news this morning that the world now has twenty-seven days' supply of food. That is the extent

of the reserve. We are tremendously dependent on this year's crop coming in well. What new relationship to nature has to be devised in our time? If we are in danger of famine, there has to be more than high-mileage auto engines and public transportation and smokestack-filtering devices. Something more radical is required.

Wherever we have been on LENS teaching trips, we find people listing pollution and population as major concerns. The issue has to do with the balance of nature. We have conquered nature in our time but the victim has come back and is threatening to overtake the conqueror.

A parallel to this wave is the technological revolution of the Twentieth Century. The mid-point of the inventions humanity has made throughout history is the year 1957. As much has been invented since then as was invented throughout history before. Another dimension of this wave is illustrated by an article in Saturday Review :World, talking about the technological revolution.

"I shall tell you not of Einstein or penicillin, the miraculous laser or even the computers that out-magic Aladdin's lamp. I ask you merely to glance around the room you are now in, or stroll around your home, and note the marvels with which human ingenuity has, in half a century, enriched our lives.

"I put it to you that neither the Pharaohs nor Montezuma, neither Croesus nor J.P. Morgan nor the mighty Manchus dreamed of such wonders as even the unrich among us take for granted.

"Do you own a hi-fi? What shah or sultan of the past could hear what you hear? Pompeii could not be enthralled by Mozart; Queen Victoria would have adored Richard Rogers; and the profligate czars were bereft of Heifetz and Casals, My Fair Lady and Guys and Dolls.

"Zippers. My God, zippers! And aluminum foil. Dry cleaning. Kleenex. Spray paints. Staplers. Air conditioners -- why, we have conquered hell itself.

"You may sniff that all this is sheer surface, trivia ripped out of the fearful tragedies half a century has spawned. Sniff away. I am grateful to be alive now, heir to such splendors and comforts and miracles as the world of man could not offer men before."

One would not want to be Utopian about it; it is also technology that has created our problems, particularly in ecology. A doctor commented to me a few weeks ago that pneumonia used to take care of the elders, but now pneumonia is easily curable, we have the problem of how they are to be cared for. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has printed on its cover a "doomsday clock" which has had a hand reading twelve minutes to twelve. Two weeks ago, they moved it up to nine minutes to twelve. Technology is not an unmixed blessing. But it is not going to go away. It is an objective, sociological wave.

Concerning the Transparentization of Time, in our era, the mundane has become the locus of the Mystery. On a dock in Sydney, there was a Japanese fishing boat tied up to the dock. An old Australian man stood looking at it, shaking his head and saying to himself, "It don't make sense. It just don't make sense. Thirty years ago I was killing them and they was killing us. Now here he is in my town." Historically it makes perfectly good sense; but that is not what that man was experiencing. It was sheer wonder and mystery that breaks through in the midst of the mundane.

I suspect that religious symbols, these days, have more power than they have had in the last half century, to dramatize and express the wonder in the midst of daily experience. One of the best spirit conversations that I have been part of lately had to do with working on social methods for the LENS seminar. We were talking about the process of indicative battleplanning. In that two hour conversation, all 144 states of being of the Other World were just blazing. My warning buzzer was going on: "Watch out, you'll incinerate any moment." There was fire and transparency there, as we began to sniff the possibility of effectively engaging society

Not much needs to be said about the emergence of a global culture. The event that clinched it, was the picture of the earth sent back from the moon. All of a sudden, we were able to see the oneness that is earth. When you talk about globality in a LENS seminar today, nobody blinks. Even six months ago, people blinked twice. Now globality is an operating assumption. Its manifestations are obvious. English can get you around anywhere in the world. Most airports look alike. We are coming up with a global culture.

The oil crisis made it apparent that this culture is a necessity and not simply gift. The interdependence of the world was dramatized there very vividly. Whatever form that global culture takes, it will be a unity in the midst of diversity. I suspect we will have to deal with a counterwave for the recovery of one's cultural heritage in the midst of a global community.

Let me touch briefly on the implications of these waves. First, resurgence is not a time for relaxation. Resurgence is a very critical, urgent and dangerous time. When human passion is loose, the capacity for destructiveness is at least equal to the capacity for creativity. Secondly, this is a penultimate time. It is unlikely that we will live to see the final fruits of our efforts. One might look at the history of Egypt a century or so before they built the pyramids, for an analogous period to ours. What was going on there? How were they discerning the trends? What was the wave that manifested itself a century later in the pyramids? What was going on a century or so before the Renaissance?

The book of Revelations holds a clue to such time periods. The People of God in the early centuries lived off their eschatological vision of what was coming, but not likely to be manifest in their lifetime. What would it mean for us to recover the dynamic of living out of our perception of the wave that was one day going to break. Our task would be enabling that wave to do its work creatively.

There was an essay in Time recently, about the type of leadership required for our time. It was in apparent contradiction of much of what I have just said, but it observed that these are times in which we do not need great visionaries, for people have the vision. We need strategists. In our terminology, that would mean tactical thinkers, those people with not only the vision but the method and the moxy to implement that vision.

--John Epps
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