

PRIMAL COMMUNITY

As we look at the Primal Community Experiment and see it in all of its vast complexity -- everything from Guild formation in Bombay with Hindus and Muslims and Christians all working in the Cadre -- the questions are: What in the world in our time is the global glue of that experiment? What will be the basis of commonality so that whenever you look at that experiment anywhere you would know that that is what you are seeing? What if the story of the Primal Community that you now are able to tell yourself as you look at the Movement thrust for the coming year? How do you speed it up or slow it down or turn it or stop it? Finally, what do you see as the edge or the next steps in our responsibility towards Primal Community?

About two years ago, I used this same reading in another lecture and it seems equally relevant or even more so than it did then, so I am going to read it again as we begin to think about the care and responsibility for the Primal Community:

When we started I did not think of moving my people from our encampment on the bank of the river to the plain in anything but a straight line of march. Even now I can not say why we didn't go straight to the plain. But each day we spent in the forest seemed to give my people something they did not have before we left the encampment. Nightly as I move from fire to fire I hear talk about it. What will be built? Some claim it is for one purpose. Others say it is for something else. People often come to look at my carvings (Those are his models.) The task that lies before us is beginning to bind my people to one another.

If I can think of any reason to remain in the forest, it is to overcome my people's fear of leaving the forest - of moving out to the plain and living in the place where they believe the spirit of the dead also lives. My people are of the forest, and I am taking them out into the open where they will do what they have never done before. Our march through the forest brings other people of our tribe to us. Some follow at a distance. These, I have our hunters watch. I do not want to give these silent watchers the chance to raid the column. There are also others who come and speak with me. They ask our purpose and I tell them we are going to build for the Giver of Life. Most don't understand. They shake their heads even when I show them my carvings, and go their way. Several ask if I will give them meat when the snow flies. I tell them that the Giver of life will keep his word if we keep ours. A few join our lines for no other reason than to receive meat when the snow comes. The days pass. The sun gives the day more light than there is darkness at night. My people are weary of moving through the forest. I have taken them from one end of it to the other and back again, Some of the men ask me if the Giver of Life has given me a sign where we are going to build. I shake my head and the next morning we are on the march again. When the same question is asked over and over again and when the people speak about it over their fires at night I know they're ready to leave the forest.

The next day as the sun is almost at the end of its Journey across the sky and the clouds are pink I lead my people out of the forest. They don't follow.

I stop and turn. "Come," I call. "Come." They don't move. "The place where we will build is there," I tell them, gesturing toward the plain.

"Ronstrom," one man shouts, "No man lives there. Spirits of the dead claim this for their own."

"We will build there," I answer, pointing to the distant light rise of the earth."

"This is not for the living," another man calls.

"We come for the Giver of Life," I shout back. "He will protect us. He will give us food. He will protect us from harm."

Still none come. People talk among themselves. Then one shouts out, "Let him give us a sign that he is with us."

Anger rises in me. "I am your sign," I thunder back at them. "I am your sign!" I turn and without looking back, I continue to walk to the place where we are going.

A wind comes up. It tugs at my hair and my beard. And in its singing I hear, "You've spoken well, Ronstrom. The people come." I turn. Moving slowly toward me are my people. I stand on the small hill and wait for the people. I look at the clouds. Shafts of light come through them, and touch the earth where we will build.

What we must build suddenly comes before my eyes, and I say aloud, "It will be built." My words ride on the wind and rise up over the plains till the sky is filled with their sound.

I want to mention four things this morning. The first has to do with the only things we have to do. The second has to do with the things that you do not have to worry about this year. The third has to do with the arenas in which we will probably make creative strides. And the fourth is the one we have to focus on. Now, that is confusing; that is 3-3-3 and 1. In the midst of all of the various images, methods, models, screens, philosophies, rationales, images, what it is that we have to do. So I want to just suggest what I think we have to do.

There are only three things to do (and yet they are really only one) to catalyze the direction of the thinking, organization, and actions of the community so that it authentically participates in the world society in its locality, or to put it another way, to lead the community toward its destiny. That is all you have to do. Now I say that is all you have to do. because it seems to me that unless we get something like that said we get all confused by non-transrational thought about which screen we ought to use, which form we ought to use, which methods we ought to use. I want to suggest that whatever brings you to this point in the move on Primal Community, is just fine.

There are only 3 things to do - yet they are really one.

Let us look at a couple of those in terms of the thinking. In the realm of thinking our task is to release the images, symbols, rites, rituals, stories and rationales which significate the meaning of community and vocation, and, therefore, selfhood in this intra-global world thus evoking awe, the awe

without which life is not worth living. This points to the depth dimension of the social situation where the world has no way to symbolize its vision, where the self-stories of man do not relate him to the doing that he is doing in his world situation. Our task in Primal Community is to work with the symbols in such a way that they again lead man to see the power of his vocation and his engagement in life. We are well-equipped to do this in every dimension of the community. We have worked for years in the local church, in the local religious institutions, in the indirect methodologies by which you take a symbol system and illuminate both its ancient grandeur in talking about today's world and raising up new symbols that free people to engage. That is the catalytic indirection that we are about. If that dimension is not present, nothing else that we do in the Primal Community will make much sense. A great thing that has been happening all over the country these days, and now all over the world that excites me is our posters that say. "Byculla 5 is a great place to be alive" --the attempt to reengage people and ground them in the community in which they live, not for that community's sake, but for the sake of that community's participation in the destiny of the globe. It seems to me that what we are doing in Town Meeting, especially with those stories and songs, is moving people toward a new way of articulating the stories and symbols out of which they will live.

The second thing is the organization. We are called to give structure to the latent vision through forms of corporate human care and for historical engagement, which portends the necessary direction of the globe and therefore, takes into account all aspects of the human process in every facet of community. As we turn in our work towards the Primal Community in terms of organizations, our great discovery (perhaps it should not have been a discovery at all as we dealt with Town Meeting and the local community) is that the perversions of the local historical institutions are exactly the same perversions that we have talked about for 15 years and are present with every community. There is a bureaucratized kind of organization that is parochial, that is issue-oriented, that is expertise-oriented, that does not care for all of the facets of society. And we are called to be the ones who through the metro Cadres, through the forces of the movement, begin to illuminate what the structure of the future needs to be.

I want to make a big point of this because it is easy to do the experiment in such a way that we do not illuminate the new and necessary structures for the future. You can use old structures and do "good things", but save that we are at every point in our work attempting to illuminate the intraglobal structures of policy and action and care that the future needs globally, then all of the end results of anything we do are for naught, for they have not illuminated the direction a community needs to go and have left untouched one of the key issues that community is struggling with. As far as we are able to understand, at least, we are called to be, within our own structure as a Movement, as an Order, as Religious House, as Metro Cadres, signs of what the structures of the future are and what they need to be. The structures of the Religious House and the Metro Cadre are not incidental to the Primal Community. They are signs of the structure which needs to happen in every community across the globe. We are called (to call on Niebuhr again) to abolish within ourselves any structures that are bureaucratic, expertise-oriented, issue-oriented, or parochial so that we, in fact, operate as a global society that is a sign for any community of the way in which they can structure themselves for comprehensive care and responsibility to the community.

Thirdly, in action we are to provide the avenue for effective engagement of the community, so that it is acting always upon the contradiction of the whole earth, and therefore knows expenditure as the foundation of life as Community. As we have turned to the local, as we have turned to the primal community, I experience that this is probably the easiest concern in our work to lose track of, not because we have not imaginably thought about it, but because it is so easy to be sucked into the local, to the next thing the local community sees it needs. Indeed, if we work tactically out from within the structures and

the concerns of the local community (as the body of people called to care for the whole earth), we never lost track of being sure that every local is a microcosm of the global, that every local is, in fact, what the total globe needs.

On Long Island we had a Town Meeting for a Jewish community, and now they want more training and want to move into the Guild. Locally, you would say "That is exactly where we need to move! That is what this community needs! That is how we will catalyze this parish, this community!" But the other eye always has to be on the question, "Is that what we need globally? Is this where the Primal Community Experiment requires us to go as we look at the total picture of the Movement?" That is the incredibly horrible tension that we are going to live in more profoundly in the coming year than we have up to this point in our history. What does the globe need at this point in history? That is our question. We are called this year to deal with the miracles that illuminate and effectively capture the imagination of the community in seeing that it has the possibility of revitalizing its life.

Now there are a couple of things I want to say in relationship to that. One of the struggles we have had in the last year in terms of action, organization, and thinking, is that there is a lot we do not know and this has been frustrating. I would like to suggest, because somehow we feel we ought to now the new form of the community that we ought know to know the new shape of the Church, that we ought to have clarity on a lot of these things, and therefore be able to move head on into community organization.

I would like to suggest three things that you do not need to worry about this year, because of the fog. By that I do not mean vagueness. I mean that until we move out with Social Demonstration and have the practical implementation of those 8 places, or 24 places, there is a great deal about the shape of community and its dynamics, in the practical, that we will not know; and therefore, the Primal Community Experiment is dependent upon the practical research of engagement across the globe-- that those social demonstrations will be.

So of the 3 things you do not need to worry about, one is the future shape of the church. I think it was Joe Matthew's the other day who said that it is probably in our midst, but we cannot see it yet. The fact that we do not know how to make in terms of building concretely that new shape of the church to come is something that should not worry us. Instead, it ought to be that which we brood upon in the evening hours and begin to forge out as we take note of the experiences of Town Meeting, of the Local Church Resurgence Mission. and the experience of the Ward and Stake development. We must not find ourselves consumed by that or we will be paralyzed. We are called to work within the local religious institution, to try to turn it towards its parish, so do not worry about the shape of the church to come. Brood on it. Study it but do not worry about it.

Secondly, do not worry about the shape of the community to come. We are only hinting at the direction that the structures of society need to go in terms of our work in the parish this year. They are important hints, but the interrelatedness has not yet become clear. We have had to struggle through the year with the relationships between the geographic community and the sociological community. What is the interrelationship and how do they fit together? Those are brooding questions, but they in no way hamper our work and engagement and action and the raising of signs in the community. We still stand before the 5th City vision of the direction which community is called to go even though we are unclear in terms of the total shape it will be.

And thirdly (though this is probably minor to all of us at this point in history), we do not have to worry about clarity on the Local Church triangles. We know that until we have more engagement that that cannot become clear. They are very useful instruments for us right now, but they in no way block your engagement. They in no way block our responsibility to raise a sign and create the miracles and to create the directions for reengaging and awakening human community.

Now, three areas in which I think we are going to make creative strides in this coming year (and we already have, I think in some sense): One is, waking up a community to itself. That Uptown Festival the other day was just incredible in terms of allowing people to capture their apace. The power of the mural, the power of festivals in creating the kind of new self-consciousness in parishes-that is giving people a sense that there is hope for their community. If there is any rubric for this year, perhaps it is that the waking up of a community to itself is a sign of giving back hope, a sense of engaging, to the community itself.

That waking up of the community has to do with the building of the core of the community, of the Cadre. Further it is waking up the very frame of the community, the economic, political, and cultural dimensions. It means waking up the congregation to the fact that they live in that pariah. And by the way, maybe this is a parenthesis, but one of the things that broke loose to release us to move again with the historic Church was the discovery that the historic Church in the community is part of the social framework of the community, and therefore you work with it as a crucial part of the frame. We worked for about 15 years with the local religious institutions, and then we got discouraged because everybody in the religious institutions did not become the Cadre. Well, if it gives you any permission they are not going to become the Cadre, any more than the whole community become the Cadre. Beckoned forth from that local religious institution will be those with a radical election to be the Cadre. But that does not block the fact that that total religious institution can be a vital force along with every other dimension of the community in the revisioning and the revitalization of that community. That means that you do not have to ask everyone functioning in a local religious institution to step across the Cadre imaginal line. Instead this gives the capacity to work with clergy who will never be Cadre, laymen who will never be Cadre, but who are ready and willing and yearning for their congregation to be engaged in that community, or starting where we are with the state of the church and the state of the world,

The second thing we are going to learn besides how to wake up the community (if you lost the point there in all those parentheses) is how to catalyze life-giving occasions and how to do it quickly and how to do it effectively. We are going to find out this year how to do consultative work with all kinds of groups, agencies and congregations (not to make them the Movement, per se) but to illuminate their participation in the intra-global world as a local community. We are going to find ways to do that quickly; we are going to find ways to do that that illuminate the structures necessary for these bodies of people, that show concrete engagement in action, and to transform their symbols of what it means to participate in society today. We are going to work with the Wards and the Stakes in the community, as life-giving occasions where local man in his own back yard begins to think in depth of what it means to participate right in that community in a global world, where the conversations of those gatherings, those meetings, will profoundly affect the depth reflection or every man, woman, and child in that community.

The third thing we are going to make creative strides in is engagement in sustaining of the cadre. Someone said yesterday (and he's probably right), that we will probably have small Cadres and large Guilds. In fact, I can not figure that it has ever been different than that. As the great Guilds gathered, the Cadre went off and figured out what to do next. We are going to find out, however, how to sustain the Cadre with new spirit methods, with rational and transrational time designs that release the engagement

that they are more than ready to give. We are going to find this year as we sustain one another in each of those Primal Community Experiments, that more important than ever before will be the Data Exchange. I do not mean those silly little reports that we turn in, though those are crucial to our life. I mean models. I mean, "This is a proposal that works, why don't you try it?" We will discover a network of sustenance that will be incredibly illuminating and helpful. We owe it to one another-- let me put it that way, There is no reason why one body should have to start all over building a model in Oklahoma City, or Rochester, or Atlanta when it is effective globally. (Of course, if it is not effective globally, we have to ask why they built it).

Finally, the one thing that we are called to focus on in the Primal Community, as in the total Movement, is the Global Community Forum: that to be doing the Community Forum is to be doing Primal Community. To be creating that network of awakened people across the Metro and the Region is to create a readiness in them that is going to terrify the readiness in us; that of thrusting their life if they catch the vision, precisely in their local community. This mean" that the energies of our Cadres need to be in Community Forum, We need to be able to tell ourselves the story that in doing Community Forum we are dealing with the thinking organization, and action of a community, and that this community is acting on behalf of every other community in our Metro.

It means that there is a slowing down of the Primal Community in terms of other things to do, but that slowing down, I think is inherent in the Experiment itself and in the care of local community. There is a fast way to do local communities and that is for the Cadre to do it, If you do it you can have a fruitful result. But, somehow, the slow march of Primal Community is nurturing and sustaining and training and beckoning forth and retraining every local man so that he, in fact, is doing the Primal Community and you are not. That is why it is not possible to do it fast. That training takes time. That engagement takes time. The forming of that Guild takes time. The beckoning forth of those local religious institutions that just burns and burns takes time. It is inevitably a slow march. If it is a fast march, beware! Beware of whether we have engaged the community, whether we have illuminated the symbols that are actually adequate, whether we have actually worked toward the new structures that are required.

Well, Primal Community is one experiment. There are not 100. There is only one. Primal Community Experiment is foundational to everything we are doing not the experiment, but Primal Community. The Experiment is a tool for this foundational Primal Community of the New Social Vehicle. The Experiment will pass away. We "went for broke" on the Primal Community, you recall. You heard it said that we "went for broke" on the Local Church. Now you hear people say that we are "going for broke" on the Town Meeting and we are "going for broke" on Social Demonstration, When I first heard that it bothered me, I said, "No! No! We went for broke on the Local Church"; And I say, "That's right! That's right! We went for broke on the Local Church. "That is Social Demonstration and Town Meeting and the local religious institutions and the Primal Community. We have "gone for broke" on that.

The heart of the Primal Community is profound consciousness. The heart of the Primal Community is those who care--that is the Church. Everything we have been talking about and everything we are doing is beckoning forth that body who cares to sustain, to catalyze that profound consciousness in every man. The heart of Primal Community to profound consciousness, through the Parish Cadre or the Metro Cadre. That is what we are about.

If those three arenas of working with the thinking organization, and action become your clue to the march of the missional effectiveness, then I believe that all the questions of whether you have a Guild or a Galaxy or a Cadre or an Auxiliary or adequate manual and methodology, will all take care of itself. I

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do not mean we do not have a structure or an experiment. But if you get trapped in that then you fail to see the marks of the mission. The terminology does not matter. We are called to be those who release the creativity of every local man in the community that he not die without knowing his destiny and participation in the creation of history itself.

Justin Morrill