A CONFERENCE TOWARDS SPIRITUAL CONCORD

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**Participant Messaging System
for Insight Capture**

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PARTICIPANT MESSAGING SYSTEM FOR INSIGHT CAPTURE

Consider a low-cost opportunity to **maximize the use of the intellectual resources assembled,** namely the many conference participants who will only get a limited opportunity to speak. Within the usual conference framework, at any one time most participants are obliged to adopt a passive mode. This fails to exploit the ability of intelligent people to listen and be productive at the same time. The experience can be very frustrating for the more creative participants who cannot be offered much opportunity to contribute or respond to speakers.

Associated with this challenge is a real problem of how to capture insights emerging from the conference process if access to microphone-time is necessarily limited. And yet insight capture and cross-fertilization of ideas are principal objectives of the event.

One **simple proposal** (which has been tested in equivalent contexts) is the following:

1. Provide participants with a stock of half-sheets of paper on which to formulate comments, reactions to speakers, questions, etc. in a maximum of 50 words (say). The sheets may be pre-printed with instructions or a single instruction sheet may be provided.

2. Arrange for the message sheets to be collected, whether via collection boxes and/or by attendants during sessions (church collections provide a model), or even from the conference hotel.

3. Type a series of such comments into a word-processor file, numbering the messages, and appending the participant name (if not anonymous). Inappropriate messages could be screened out.

4. When sufficient messages have been accumulated to fill a one (or two) side sheet (possibly formatted in 2 columns in a smaller type), then edit and spell-check the file. Then print a master copy. This may bear an appropriate CNN letterhead and document number. Topic headings could be added by editors to individual messages, if not supplied by the participant.

5. Make sufficient photocopies for participants.

6. Distribute copies to participants (and speakers) either between sessions (possibly for a token charge) or, preferably also during sessions.

7. Repeat steps 1 to 6 as necessary throughout the conference process. It may be used as a common messaging link between plenary and workshop sessions.

8. Participants and speakers are now in a position to interact in an additional mode. Whether in spoken or written mode, participants can pick up on the numbered written comments when and if appropriate. Panelists can choose to respond in writing to some points, or initiate their own comments.

This process takes the pressure off microphone time whilst augmenting insight capture and cross-fertilization of ideas. Screening for "irrelevance" can be less stringent than during a verbal intervention, thus increasing satisfaction of contributors -- it provides a "safety valve". The collection of messages can be mulled over by participants if a speaker fails to hold their attention.

The resource requirements for this process are very modest. It is a creative secretarial job with as much editing effort as you might judge appropriate. Ingenuity can be used to maximize turnaround and to deliver documents back into the hands of participants before a theme has gone cold. **It can be readily set up and adapted at short notice in response to changing circumstances.**

Additional expertise is available on some of the finer points and special software had been developed to facilitate some of the steps. But this is not necessary.