THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE

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Master's Project

The men and women of the New York Religious House filtered downstairs from their apartments into the collegium room at the regular morning hour: Five o'clock. The offense of the 4:30 wake-up--an even, loud knock at every door--still showed on the pairs of sleep-heavy eyes.

Each took a seat at one of the four rectangularly arranged tables, guiding his vacant stare from the chalice, broken bread, pebbles, incense, candle and African statuette in the center of the tables, to the styrofoam cups and plastic coffee pots within reach.

"Turn to page 26 in the songbook," the man who sat alone at the head of the quadrangle said, forcing a little zip into his voice. "Let's sing the one at the left."

It was 5:05. Almost all of the 24 adult house members were present now. They opened the gold, soft-bound "Songs of the Spirit Movement," spotted the familiar words written to the tune of Guantanamerra, and searched their throats for sound.

"All life is open!" they began, picking up the song's calypso beat in hoots and claps. "Embrace the future with vision! Die your death for the living. The mystery has received all..."

Just past the chorus, the group's star voices rose to offer striking harmony. Smiles, laughter, opened eyes. The rest joined in full, if less than melodic volume:

> Our knowledge falters and crumbles
> Our thoughts turn banal and senseless
> Our feelings flood in to drown us
> Our hearts cry out 'Push no further!'
> But don't stop now, lead us onward--
> To what we know yet cannot see...
> All life is open!...

Collegium, the early morning meeting of the members of what is informally called the Order of the Ecumenical Institute, happens every weekday at 5:00 in 63 cities throughout the world, 36 in the United States and Canada. In ten years, the Order has grown from 14 concerned men and women into 1500 "structural revolutionaries" who have catalyzed a global movement that has touched over 200,000 persons. And slowly, deliberately, comprehensively and literally, they are bending history.

Somehow, what the Order is giving birth to is not just another movement. The members thrive on an intense visionary fervor that they inject into the most mundane tasks--typing, teaching the same course for the 2,000th time, cleaning a bathroom. What sets the Order apart is that every action is "pushed to the comprehensive." The stance seems to be: "If my life is utterly significant--as I have decided that it is--why is doing this necessary for full humanness to be released throughout the globe?"

Stephen C. Rose, long-time critic of church renewal efforts, called the stance "tremendous urgency built around trivia or routine." Yet perhaps that reflects more of Rose's own cynicism than legitimate criticism. For finally, no matter what the vision or goal, what we find ourselves caught up in is the particular--often distasteful--work needed to get there. There appears to be great wisdom in deciding that each particular job should be performed with seriousness and care.

Rhetoric, the Order's full of. Obtuse jargon, the likes of which you've never heard. Models, plans, tactical systems, strategies, sub-tactics, goals and timelines exist for everything, from doing dishes to approaching the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox church.

It all could stop there--in some in-group lexicon and visionary paradise, but it doesn't. Models are built and rebuilt and rebuilt as experience and wisdom give them tougher flesh. Tactical systems for the reconstruction of the local church, matrices of contradictions in the reconstructing of the local church, designs for local urban reformulation, tactics for recruiting clergy for courses, tactics for recruiting laymen for courses, models for the house internal life, weekly, quarterly, and annual time designs.

And as the models begin to be actualized--models that everyone has participated in building (for "all the

decisions belong to all the people,"they say), you begin to see those models not as glorious vision, but as actual possibility. That is, if enough people are willing to risk their lives to see them through.

In October, Joseph W. Mathews, the Dean of the Ecumenical Institute and decidedly more than symbolic head of the Order and the movement, sat across the conference table from Canon Purdy in the office of the secretariat on Christian Unity at the Vatican. Canon Purdy is a prominent member of the Secretariat, on the Curia.

The two were discussing the role that religious orders had played throughout history. The Canon said that they had always developed out of a particular societal need. For instance, the Jesuit order came into being to respond to the need for mass education.

The Canon suggested that again the need was there, but for these times, he said, a new order would have to be ecumenical, it would have to be built on the concept of the family, and it would have to be concerned with developing lay participation within the church.

He paused and smiled. He realized that what he had described as a hypothetical need already existed. The Canon had described the foundation of the "Order" of the Ecumenical Institute.

The Order, which is also the core teaching and research and development staff of the Institute, is

about 90% white, bourgeois, five years this or that side of thirty in age, ex-suburban, very secular religious families. More brown, black, yellow and red faces show up in Chicago each year, however, as the movement expands abroad.

They have come from all income levels, sold their homes and moved their families into the regionally located Religious Houses, an Institute experiment now in its fourth year. A larger grouping of 250 families (some are single-person family units) are at "Base" in Chicago, the central research center and Institute location.

In Chicago, the Order families live in two places: a run-down former seminary campus in the heart of the West Side ghetto; and more recently, in what was the Kemper Insurance building on Sheridan road, an 8-story gift the Institute received from the Kemper family last Thanksgiving.

Gramercy Park is the site of the New York House. It occupies four floors and the downstairs kitchen of the parish house of Calvary Episcopal church, the gothic landmark on the corner of 21st Street and Park Avenue South. Calvary rents apartment and office space to the Institute.

In all of the Religious Houses and at Base, each family has its own apartment rooms, without a kitchen, for common meals are one of the base stones for group unity.

At meals, "spirit conversations" are held, usually about the Scriptures, the geographical area the House is responsible for, the global movement, or plans for the near future. Workshops and planning sessions happen at the morning and evening collegiums, special children's curricula are prepared for after-school hours and for the pre-school age children, and there's lots of singing. The Order uses a team system to take care of housework. In New York, for instance, three House teams rotate the cooking and cleaning chores.

About half of the Order members work at regular jobs, thus allowing the Order to be self-supporting. In New York, eight of the adults are "assigned out" or are considered "permeators." Two are secretaries, two involved in prison reform, one social worker, one Catholic high school teacher, one bank officer and one museum technician. Three are university students (one at Union Theological Seminary) and five in junior high and high school. All children over 12 live away from their parents as part of their rite of passage into adulthood.

Five of the New York House members are "assigned in" to care for the front desk, the children not yet in school and the administrative and custodial work of the House. Two, the auxillary prior family, Fred and Sarah Buss, are assigned by Chicago to oversee the corporate life of the House and to coordinate the movement in the

New York region--from south of Hartford, Conn., to north of Princeton, N.J., and from Newburgh, N.Y., to the Atlantic Ocean. The globe has been "gridded" into 324 such regions on nine "geo-social" continents that defy established geographical boundaries.

The Order is entirely self-supporting. Families receive stipends according to the government's published standards for poverty-level incomes. All stipends come through Chicago. The Institute, on the other hand, is supported by foundations and business donations, as well as a wide-spread grass-roots contribution network of individuals who have taken courses or otherwise support the Institute's work.

"Because we're spread all over the world," Glenda Long, female half of New York's Third Prior family, explained, "And because we choose to be 'corporate," we hold certain symbols in our religious and study life that are common to all the Religious Houses and to Base--like collegium, worship, workshop and study methods.

"Without that common symbolic life," she said, "we'd have no way to maintain that corporateness."

Corporateness--not corporationism--is the word the Order uses to explain itself. Consensus forms the basis of the group's polity, and the fact that any Order member--anywhere--may make a decision that can effect the whole group, cuts across any tendency to bureaucratize.

"So we live out of the successes and failures in Tokyo as well as the ones in Chicago," Fred Buss said.

But Order families do not choose to live co-operatively for the same reason that people form communes. Most of them prefer the suburban homes and privacy they've left behind. Religious Houses exist for only one reason: to expedite the mission. And the mission? Theoretically stated, "To renew the church so that it can recover its ancient memory and once again care for all of society." And deciding that the church is the structure to do that--in these times--is a revolutionary's talk.

The Order began more or less formally in Chicago, in 1962, when Mathews was appointed Dean of the Institute and insisted on bringing six of his colleagues and their families along at salaries of $1 per year.

But the constructs on which the movement is built go back ten years earlier, to the University of Texas in Austin.

It was there that Mathews was director of studies at the Christian Faith and Life community, a group of 135 students and staff who seriously experimented with "the dynamics of being the 20th century religious."

Not only did they develop a strange liturgy, replete with tamborines, cultic chanting and African drum beats--to reverse the "pious-ity" (perverted piety) and individualism that had crept into church worship, but

they delved into the intellectual bottoms of Christianity, striving to recover what the Christian story--in its archaic sense--had to say about everyman's life. It was also there that the movement's vision and strategies were born.

Joseph Mathews' incomparable style is to walk into any situation, sense where the awe is, and gather it all up. Then carefully and oh-so-intentionally convert it to liquid, drench the room with it, and leave nothing or no one dry. His colleagues and critics all have appraisals of him: "prophet," "evangelist," "visionary," "powerful," "frightening," "wild," "Fiery," and, whispered within the Order, "saint."

Older Order members delight in telling interns the tales of Matthews, now 60, in the early years. Stories of how he could make real a vision, even if it meant tearing down a frame house with a crowbar. Which on one occasion, to create a parking lot, he did.

"It's funny," he told an assembly of clergy and laymen in Boston last fall, "I see the church--the historical church--as something like Van Gogh's 'Starry Night.' It's a spin, it's a whirl, and in times, in moments of tribulation, the mother church spins off galaxies which become the movemental church--the ones who forge change.

"For twenty years, the Institute, as the movemental church, has had a master plan. Whether it be good or bad, this has been it. The first job we set out to do was to create a course and a methodology that could, in a short

period of time, jar people awake to the sickness of the church and the possibility of the Gospel in the post-modern world."

The group in Austin, long before 1962, began to develop and teach "Religious Studies I: The Theological Revolution." It was, and still is, the first and primary movement strategy.

Mathews often rehearses for movement colleagues and friends those understandings on which RS-I and the whole movement are built.

The Institute understanding of the Jesus figure is key. In a lecture he titles "The Christ of History," Mathews said in discussing Jesus, "I mean, a man was born, lived his life, and experienced death. Just like us. Yet there was a plus. Not a metaphysical plus, but a plus in specifics. I mean, he lived a life essentially like that of anyone else, except he really seemed to live his. However one chooses to account for it: special mutation of genes, unusual neurotic tendencies, peculiar environmental influences, unique occurrences of lucidity--that's not what matters.

"Here was one who apparently not only lived, but <u>lived</u> his living. He appropriated his life as unqualified gift and bore it as significant mission."

The question about Jesus, Mathews said, insinuates an unmitigated revolution in self-perception. The implication is that life is not in the future, it is in the present, it is not in some other circumstances, it is in

those at hand; it is not to be sought after, it is already given.

Mathews credits many of his own theological insights to his years at Yale Divinity School, under the tutelage of H. Richard Niebuhr.

"The Jesus-Christ symbol," Mathews said, "confronts everyman with the awareness that there is no messiah, and never will be. And furthermore, that this very reality is the Messiah."

But to follow in the steps of the representational Jesus is not to imitate his words or reproduce his deeds. "It is to be and do as a free man. It is to walk out across the ambiguities of life in gratitude, humility and compassion, with sure confidence that this very walking is the meaning of life."

So Mathews and his Austin colleagues devised a way to recreate that "unmitigated revolution in self-perception in RS-I. They fought against the temptation to make it academic or intellectual, though the curriculum is built on the six signal theologians of this century: H. Richard and Reinhold Niebuhr, Rudolf Bultmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich.

"RS-I is not some course," Fred Buss said. He had been a member of the Faith and Life community while an undergraduate in Austin and, like Mathews, studied for the ministry at Yale.

"RS-I is about what it means to be a human being in the language of the historical church, but so that 20th century man understands that language to be just the way it is for him. That language--that God, Christ, Holy Spirit, Church--is not some supernatural something that his grandmother said he should believe in. It's about what it means to be a free man--what it means for him to authentically give his life.

"It's a vehicle--using the latent memory of the church--to expose humanness."

And to ground the language of a Niebuhr or a Tillich in the lives of both the truckdriver and the professor, in the same 44-hour period, is some feat. For when, say, a professor reads a Tillich paper, he looks at it as one man's experience of life rather than the life experience, witnessed to by a man.

When during the course, the professor hears the truckdriver articulating his life-depths in response to a reading of Tillich, the educated one often assumes that the truckdriver has been manipulated into the response. For how, without years of study, can one grasp Tillich?

But the methodology of RS-I negates that academic line of reasoning. The course sacrifices exciting academic dialogue and interesting sidelights for the sake of asking only one question--which all participants have the background to respond to: "What does Tillich--or this

particular theologian--have to say about the way I experience life?"

"Life confronts everyman with the same damn question," Buss said. "no matter what his situation. And that is, 'How am I going to die my death?'"

The question, of course, has no answer. Yet RS-I leaves participants with the suggestion that "a man's life be given on behalf of all men. That you decide to be the 'church.'"

That is, the church as H. Richard Niebuhr described it: that sensitive, responsive part of society that dies its death, of lives its life, for all mankind.

"We're not out to convert you," an RS-I pedagogue told one Jewish participant. "All we ask is that you decide to be the church. That you give your life wholly to whatever you decide to do." For as RS-I suggests "To give your life, is to receive your life."

No question that the course is chaste to its purpose. It is out to awaken each participant to the reality of his own life. That he is caught in the tension between his own decisions and the way he bumps up against the Mystery--God. It is out to smash each participants set of false gods: money, family, jobs, friends--to smash those walls that prevent him or protect him from living before the utter ambiguity that is his life.

Where RS-I smashes an illusion, it creates a void. And then it offers a possibility--for the participant to redecide about his life. The pedagogical style does not

allow for tangential questioning--or any escape from the issues being dealt with. And it's no wonder that partipants often come out of the weekend not knowing what hit them. The RS-I methodology has even caused many--especially among the educated to accuse the Institute of brainwashing. The accusation makes Fred Buss grin.

"I always regret when people use that word, for I find that those same people might completely agree with what we have to say, even find the same approach necessary and congenial to their purposes, but they would use different language or methods to explain it. Theyuse the word 'brainwashing' perjoratively. I guess to answer the question of whether or not we do brainwashing is to put yes-or-no limits on the question 'are you still beating your wife?'"

He continued: "Every serious educational attempt today presumes that the critical human question in every situation is one of mindset, or operating context. Therefore, new possibilities can only be introduced with a startling shift of images.

"I associate what I call a 'paradigm shift' with the most exhilarating and illuminating experiences in my own life. I don't know if you can call what caused that shift brainwashing or not.

"And if it was brainwashing, then that would merely mean that someone or some group has made a decision about a curriculum in order that a certain illumination--or paradigm shift--should occur."

Buss said in that instance, the question has nothing to do with brainwashing, but rather with what is the context for the curriculum and what are the purposes for teaching it.

Roy Philbrick, religion editor of the Chicago Tribune, described the RS-I methodology as a kind of positivism, designed to motivate and spiritize people.

Yet to compare RS-I to some Norman Vincent Peale-ish gnostic approach is a tremendous reduction. RS-I is a rearticulation of "the Word" for the 20th century. It announces that all that is, is good. That all that I am, is received. That all the past, is approved. And that all the future, is open. There's no picking out the good things and weighing them up against the bad.

Even Steve Rose, who finds Institute style appalling, affirms the theological stance. RS-I veers its participants away from the personal Jesus and the two-story universe ("the other world exists in the midst of this one.") to an understanding of the Christian story as one religious system's historical dramatization of the way everyman experiences life.

"The other strategy behind RS-I," Mathews said, "was to get a thousand people through the course by pressing upon the church. After RS-I there are training courses we offer in which we press upon those thousand to belch up, if you please, a hundred, for further training. From them, you belch up ten for further training, from which

you belch up one who has guts enough to stand within the church as a symbol of renewal. That's been our strategy."

That "poetry" explains why, in a given church that has had many congregants through RS-I, there might be five or six die-hard "cadre" members, another twenty or thrity strong supporters, many more "friends" of the movement, and an assortment of those who are extremely hostile or just plain indifferent.

Mathews said that the second strategy had been the Religious Houses or wayside inna, as he called them.

"When the awakened person went back home all by himself and tried to take a stand, he found that was next to impossible. So we created nurture centers and called them Religious Houses, for lack of a better word. I think there are 63 of them now," he said. "And they only exist to offer nurture for those in local situations who choose to stand for the renewal of the church."

What the Religious Houses do besides worship, work, sing, and build models for the new society, is recruit for courses. Over 4,000 people have had RS-I in the New York Region, almost all of them recruited by word of mouth or by personal visit. The Houses also sponsor meetings and events for regional colleagues, stand as a sign of movement presence, and nurture the Local Church Experiment, the third movement strategy.

"Those of you here who know us," Mathews said, "and some of you have known us for many years, understand that it took 20 years to build the tactical system for the reconstruction of the local church. And it wasn't the Ecumenical Institute that did it. It was the awakened people across this globe who began to push their minds together and came up with this tactical system."

Five hundred people, about half from the Order, gathered at the Institute's Chicago headquarters in July, 1970, to mathematically draw together that system--so that the Local Church Experiment could be put into action.

The Experiment involves 552 local congregations in North America, who begin the experiment in groups, a year apart. It demands a six-year covenant with participating churches--eighty of which began the project last year, 64 more this year and next year, and 64 more the following year. The understandingis that if it can come off in all sorts of churches on this continent, then it can come off anywhere.

Don Cramer, who heads the Local Church Experiment office in Chicago, explained that the Institute has cradled the project "to release the grassroots man."

"After RS-I presents him with a picture of himself as integrally part of all of society," Cramer said, "he needs a structure to sustain that understanding. It's been ages since the church fulfilled that task locally."

For the Experiment, four churches of different denominations in close proximity, become a "galaxy." That is, their ministers and key laymen meet regularly to keep an interchange going on the Experiment and to collect new insights for their respective churches.

"The interchange also prevents that 'turned-in-ness' that causes groups to forget that they're part of a big world, that they are responsible for neighbor," Cramer said.

The emphasis on ecumenical galaxies makes no attempt to amalgamate the denominations into one, but rather, to point up the various denominational gifts. The interdenominational-ism also points to what Cramer calls "the contentlessness of the Word."

"The Experiment very much insists that church jargon ("The Word in Jesus Christ," "God," "Holy Spirit") never be jargon. That dogma and liturgy never be an end in themselves. But that they enable one in any religious system to stand before the Mystery and life, by rehearsing those stories."

But if the Word and the Experiment are contentless--that is, applicable to any man's life--does that mean the Institute intends to deal with the Buddhists, the Moslems, the Hindus, the Jews, and the primitive cults?

"That's the futuric part of the vision," Cramer said. "But they're definitely on the timeline. First we have to break open ways to express the Word in our own culture."

The Rev. Don Steinle is pastor of a church in Passaic, N.J. He and the congregation of the First Congregational church began the Experiment last September.

"The key part of the project," Steinle said," is that it causes the laymen to be intimately related to the ministry, in just the way the Experiment's structured.

"I guess we all know that social change in these times is crucial. And that if it's going to happen, it has to come from the grass roots. And what's needed for that change is a change in grassroots mindset. Now to do that, either you have to take an already-established institution or you have to build a new one. As I see it, that issue is up for grabs," Steinle said.

"Well, if the decision is to use an already extablished institution, you have to decide whether or not you're going to work within it or outside it. And if you decide to work within it, then you have to decide which institution has the most power and resources and is located in every single local situation. And that's the church."

Steinle said that since the Experiment began in Passaic, he has noticed "a whole new spirit in the life of the congregation--in their capacity to sing, to participate in worship."

In the way of concrete evidence, there has been a 35 per cent increase in financial gifts since last year. "This will be the first time in 10 years that the church will meet its budget," he said.

"This congregation has for 10 years been in a hopelessly drowning path. The Experiment has provided new hope--especially since it allows the congregation to realize that they have the capacity to reverse bad trends," he said.

Steinle's congregation is blue-collar, "predominantly C-student mentality." "These are people who have not made it culturally and live out the 'victim image' in its extreme form. They've given up on the Great Expectations of the world.

"The Experiment has proved to them that they have capacities to lead, make decisions, and learn, beyond their imaginings. Though they have to be continually reminded of their past successes."

The Family Academy, which replaced the old Sunday School concept,is one of the Experiment's star features. "Kids are coming out of the woodwork for the programs," Steinle said. The intention of the school is to push at both Biblical tradition and contemporary society, using the Institute's methodologies. Everyone studies the same theme at his own age level and the curriculum is built by teachers from the congregation. Rather than replace family religious education functions, as the old Sunday School did, the Academy attempts to reinforce the family as the center by giving it more tools.

"One mother said she had five other mothers call to say that her daughter kept talking about the Academy

to their children at school, and they wanted to know what it was about." he added.

Steinle said that another important feature was that it made the structures more important to the congregation than the individual minister. "That way," he explained, "if a pastor leaves a congregation, it won't be faced with collapse, but will have something tangible to work with--namely, an alive congregation."

At a luncheon in New York recently, Father Ignatius Ropollo of St. Jospeh parish near New Orleans, gave a report on his congregation, one of the three Catholic churches in the Experiment. He practically echoed Steinle. In fact, the only difference in the kind of life the Experiment has brought to the congregations is in the way they've both decided to reclaim the church bazarr. Father Ropollo's church will be celebrating the history of their community in its theme, and Steinle's church is having an International Fair, celebrating the various international cultures and communities.

Steinle explained that as a New York region galaxy pastor, he and his wife Jan worked daily in his local congregation, bi-weekly with the Galaxy for a weekend at the Religious House with Fred and Sarah Buss and quarterly in Chicago with all Experiment pastors. Also, he and Jan or members of their congregation go on "consult weekends"

to galaxies in other regions. There they serve as a national presence as well as witnesses to the common problems, contradictions and successes the churches have in enacting their tactics and strategies.

The Experiment is primarily concerned with reclaiming the concept of parish--or how it is that the churches in a community authentically serve that community's needs. Experiment churches divide the community into three categories: cadre, congregation, and parish, and attempt to awaken and serve each of those groups. For instance, Steinle's church is now negotiating the opening of a day care center--as a parish tactic. With that kind of a system, church programs never become random or "busy," but they serve a decided end.

This summer, as part of the Institute's Summer Research Assembly, those present will begin to construct parish tactics on a systematic basis.

"Last summer," Mathews said, "we gathered some 900 people from all over the world--laymen and clerics alike--to begin work on what I call the practical model for the New Social Vehicle--and I don't mind telling you it's a long way from completion."

Mathews explained that, in his understanding, there has been an ideological insight that has been injected into the social process, "something like you would put a certain program into a computer," he said.

"From many arenas in our time, man has become aware, as he never has been in history, that 'all the earth belongs to all the people.' Now I tell you that is a glorious statement. But it is a frightening statement to anybody who is still operating out of the programming that went into the middle of last century," he said, recalling the deep ideological insights of Marx, their interpretation in the Communist nations, and the response to that interpretation here.

"When you break that statement down, that 'all the earth belongs to all the people,' that means that all the goods of nature belong to all the people, period. Now, what inequities must essentially be there is on the other side of subscribing to that basic principle. And then, that means, in the second instance, that all the decisions of history that affect the destiny of people, belong to all the people.

"Now it's not the kind of pseudo-democracy that we've slipped into in this country. It's the kind of democracy that's way down underneath that.

"Finally," he said, "this means that all of the images of humanness from East, from West, from South, belong to all the people. All of the wisdom of mankind belongs to all the people."

Here it is necessary to digress. The Institute

understands itself to be only one interpretation of how it is we bring about social change. They have decided to use the church as the instrument to do that. And in one very real sense, that job is done. This year, for example, the Methodist Conference in Atlanta matter-of-factly past resolution after resolution that they had practically tarred and feathered Mathews (and people like him) for 20 years earlier.

"But of course," Mathews said, "when that kind of marriage takes place between the established and the movemental church, the vision never gets actualized as the revolutionary had envisioned it. But then, that has always been the nature of his victory."

So it comes that the Institute is a force that has exceeded its destiny. The secular community reformulation project in Chicago's West Side ("Fifth City") now has indigenous leadership trained to assume complete control of the project. The Institute's only purpose in the 16-block area was to train community leadership to build the models and tactics to make a debilitated ghetto into a thriving community. This is the seventh year in a 40-year timeline for the community. Now the Institute is raising funds to pay off the Fifth City buildings--rehabilitated apartment houses, shopping centers, a health outpost, program and day care centers, employment offices, extermination centers, etc., etc., so that they can be given to the community. The Institute's original intention

was to walk itself right out of a job in Fifth City as quickly as possible. The community is at a point now where that day is fast approaching.

Incidentally, to reinforce the Institute's contention that the Fifth City model is "contentless" and could be duplicated anywhere, they began the project in an Aboriginal community near Derby (at the Australian government's invitation.) Of course, in that decidedly agricultural setting, sheep and cattle guilds replace things like rat exterminators in the original Fifth City model.

So here the Institute and the Order stand in 1972, knowing that "the edge" is no longer community reformulation or church renewal. The job now, as Teilhard de Chardin said it, is "to rebuild the earth." And as Mathews puts it, "Well, if you've got trained troops, you might as well march."

Summer '71, Mathews said, yielded an understanding based on the most conventional of wisdom. That every society is made up of economic, political, and cultural dynamics, like three triangles fitted into a larger triangle. In the ideal sense, the inner triangles--that is, the economic, the political and the cultural--should be in perfect balance, or all equilateral.

"But what has happened in our times," he said, "is that the economic has rendered the cultural into a state of bondage, and then rendered impotent the political. So

the economic triangle is three times the size of the cultural--for the economic is where all our emphases seem to lay."

As explanation, he said, that education has tyrannized the dimensions of style and religion. Then, within education, technological education has made the humanities inconsequential in society and has "squoze out" religion--or in a secular word--the area of final meanings.

"So if you're going to correct the imbalance in the triangles, you have to start right there at the top of the cultural pole with just why the youth are asking 'why bother.' You have to start with religion.

"And you've got to awaken the whole arena of religion, the top of which is the church. You see, the church is never the people that carry out the social revolution; they are the ones who forge the practical vision."

Hence, RS-I, Fifth City, and the Local Church Experiment.

"Now if the church is sick, as it was a hundred years ago, it fails, "Mathews said. "I don't want to misuse Marx, but Marx at least came along with a construct for society--economically reduced though it was--while the church was sitting around on its can doing nothing. And we've spent the last hundred years saying 'tsh, tsh, those nasty old Marxists.' Well, we live in an era, an age radical beyond comparison to 1848, and the chance for

the people of God--the people who stand before the Mystery--to be God's people, is for them to forge the practical vision of the new social vehicle for the 21st century."

The understanding of the People of God as social pioneers is as old as the Israelites. That's what the Institute means by "recovering the latent memory of the historical church."

The Hebrews forged the "new social vehicle" in ancient times. As Niebuhr explains it, the Israelites were that part of the human race who pioneered in understanding the vanity of idol worship and in obeying the laws of brother-love.

They didn't carry out the social revolution, as Mathews would say. But they forged and lived the practical vision--representationally--on behalf of all men. The mark of their success is what were two radical proposals have now become the consensus of civilization.

At Summer '71, the 900 who assembled built "The Social Process Triangles," a highly theoretical model that divided societal dynamics (procreative schemes, marital roles, law enforcement, etc., etc.) into triangles, into triangles, into triangles, down to the sixth smallest level. And if that's confusing, it should be. The work is barely begun. At Summer '72, and expected attendance is 1,500, the models will begin to be given substance.

What will happen to the Order and the Institute on the other side of the summer is anybody's guess. The future of the movement, particularly the next 20 years, are common talk in the Order. And the possibilities for both success and utter perversion are endless.

There is the possibility of the Vatican recognizing them as an historical order. There is the chance they will fall off into cultism, or merely become another sect of the Christian church, no longer understanding themselves as the movemental. There is no real place in the Order's lifestyle for artists and musicians; that could have repercussions. There is the troop swell, with its potential for diluting the revolutionary fervor. There is the movement's increased efficiency in its work, potentially cutting across its brute effectiveness. There is the temptation to bureaucratize. There is the possibility of being no more than American imperialists in their work abroad.

Then, there are the problems with existing troops. Those who have joined the Order to work out their ego drives, to escape the financial tyranny of this society, to seek instant purpose and significance, to save their marriages from collapse. If they who stand for those reasons--rather than out of deep conviction --cannot be transformed into men and women genuinely willing to lay down their lives, then you've got a Salvation Army, not a movement.

And there is the possibility that forging the practical vision of a global society which honors every culture and religious heritage and cares for all of life, is too ambitious a goal.

Order members would say even that kind of questioning is demonic. For it speaks an unfaith stance. And as RS-I teaches, all the free man can ever do, is observe, judge, weigh-up the values, decide and act--knowing himself to be responsible only to that which is named God and--in that awareness--responsible for all the world.

That's ambiguity,all right. That finally, you never know what's right. You just have to decide.

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