THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE: CHICAGO
A Descriptive Study

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I Introduction

The Ecumenical Institute, Chicago describes itself as a "missional community" which functions as a "research and training center dedicated to the task of the renewal of the church through the renewal of the local congregation, for the sake of the entire world in which we live."¹ It is located in Chicago's West Side at 3rd and Congress Parkway in a predominately Black ghetto.

II Research Methodology

In studying this organization I used the method of unstructured observation. I also gained much information from knowledgeable informants within the organization, and from the wide range of printed material produced by the Institute's printing shop.

Upon my initial contact with the organization it was suggested that I attend a weekend RS-1 course to gain a basic understanding of the belief system and programs of the Institute. This suggestion was followed, and proved to be most valuable. Subsequent to this course I was able, through the kind cooperation of the Institute's staff, to arrange to interview some people who have extensive knowledge of various aspects of the organization and its work. I was also able to observe parts of the Institute's impressive pre-school education program.

At this point I felt that I needed, in order to gain the most from my research efforts, a better grounding in the past research conducted with similar groups. A rather extended period of time was spent studying the literature. Although this effort yielded much interesting information, little of it was directly applicable to my present research effort. In retrospect I think it is clear that my time would have been better spent in the Institute rather than in the library.

When I realized that, at least at this stage of the game, the literature offered little of value, I renewed my contact with the Institute and attempted to make up for lost time. Further interviews were conducted, and I participated
in a sojourners program during which, for two nights and two and one half days I lived at the Institute and participated in their daily routine. This was a valuable experience, and provided much information.

The report which follows is limited in some ways in that it ignores entire areas of study. This is true of any research report, but the lack is felt rather strongly in this report in the omission of one area of study in particular: an inquiry into the personal backgrounds of the order members. This omission may be attributed to two factors; 1) the unfortunate mistake of my spending too much time in the library. This left me with insufficient time for an adequate study of personal backgrounds. And 2) the inherent difficulty and time consuming nature of a study of the personal backgrounds of members of an organization which is so demanding in its time schedule that the members have almost no free time for private discussion with a researcher.

Information was recorded during the observation and the interviews through the use of notes and, occasionally, a tape recorder.

**III Brief History of the Institute's Formation**

Before dealing with the structure, beliefs and programs of the Institute, perhaps a brief history of its formation would be in order.

One of the basic decisions reached in the 1954 meeting of the World Council of Churches was that there is needed in America and elsewhere organizations equivalent to the lay academies of Europe in order to involve the laity in the serious study of theology. However, the Council provided no funds for the creation of such organizations. But fortunately Walter Leibrecht, a rich German living in Evanston, Illinois, decided to organize and finance in Evanston an independent lay study center, which he did in 1955. At this center classes were conducted in which the teachings of modern theologians were analysed and discussed.

When the Vatican Council was held, Leibrecht was invited as an observer. He
never came back to America after that, preferring to stay in Europe, his home. The lay study center was thus left in need of new leadership. It was decided that it could no longer exist as a completely independent organization, that it had to be tied in some way to the historical church, so it joined the Church Federation of Greater Chicago, becoming a division of that organization.

The Church Federation serves primarily as a communications center for its members. Someone in the Federation knew of Joseph W. Mathews who was head of the Faith and Life Community in Austin, Texas. The Faith and Life Community was an order, headed by Mathews and his family and seven other families, which was attempting to renew the church. It dealt primarily with college students. Mathews was asked to come to Evanston to head the lay study center for a $10,000 salary. He said he would come, but only if the seven other families could also come. The center wrote back that it would be impossible to pay all these people, but Mathews replied that all eight families would live on his $10,000 salary.² So, in 1961 they came to Evanston and took charge.

Mathews and the others who came with him from Austin knew that the organization, to be a revolutionary force, could not be merely an order and an educational institution, but had to go into the community and practice what they had learned. They also knew that Evanston was not the best place for this type of activity, so they spent a good deal of time searching throughout the Chicago area for a suitable building and community. Finally they found the set of buildings in which they are now located. It had been a denominational campus. They got it for a good price, moved in, and named it the Ecumenical Institute.

IV The Institute's Physical Plant

The campus covers a couple blocks, and consists of about five buildings. The main building is on the corner of Congress and Trumbull. This rather large, elderly, five story block building houses the administrative offices, many of the
classrooms, and most of the living accommodations for the order. The building seems basically sound, but is in dire need of renovation. The floors are tile or linoleum and are quite worn. The walls, a faded yellow, need fresh paint. The light bulbs are bare, the plumbing is in appalling condition, and everything is old. The building has been cleaned up, but except for a few sections of the building apparently relatively little money has been spent on modernizing. Obviously this is an organization whose members are not overly concerned with their own comfort. And yet, as we shall see, they are spending a lot of money reformulating the 16 block neighborhood called 5th City. This is in keeping with the ascetic, revolutionary atmosphere of the place. They seem to be more interested in social and cultural revolution, than in living in comfort.

V Group Structure, Decision Making Processes, and Related Subjects

The order has something less than 200 adult members plus a large flock of children. It has, however, no recruitment policies. When a person who has learned of the order in any one of a number of ways wishes to join he is admitted as an Intern. Internship lasts for one year. During this period the Intern will be expected to participate as a functioning member of the order. This includes, as a minimum, the following factors:

- attendance at worship, at the ceremonial daily breakfast meal and Sunday evening meal...and the acceptance of any assignment designated as necessary for the mission or the life of the community by the corporate body or its appointed representatives.3

The Intern will find that membership in the order requires a total commitment on his part. It will allow him almost no free time, and will require him to perform effectively and efficiently the tasks assigned him. If he does not resign within a year, the order feels it likely that indeed his commitment is total, and he is accepted as a Fellow -- that is, as a full member of the order. As a Fellow he will be expected to meet the above mentioned requirements, and in addition will be expected to participate in the decision-making process which determines
corporate policy. (Interns are not allowed to participate in decision-making.)

But it is not the Fellows who are at the very center of the decision-making process. This spot is reserved for the Permanent House Church, the members of which are known as Confreres. This group is comprised of Mathews and most of those who came with him from Austin, plus other order members who have been with the organization for at least three or four years, and who have demonstrated the firmness of their commitment to the order and its goals, have substantial knowledge of their jobs, and have exhibited ability as a Fellow in the decision-making process. Participation in the Permanent House Church is strictly by invitation. As a Confrere, one is expected to participate in the forming of whatever major policy decisions the order may be called upon to make.

Mathews is the Dean of the Institute. Officially he is merely a symbolic head, and has no more power than any other Confrere. In practice, however, due to his great knowledge and leadership ability, Mathews is the most influential person in the organization.

Decision-making, be it among Fellows or Confreres, is always by consensus. Those in the group most able to express the group consensus assume leadership for the group during that particular decision-making process. What usually happens is this. The issue in question is presented to the group, and then for a period of time the issue is discussed, and each person is encouraged to offer his opinion and his suggestions for a solution. Finally when someone feels that he has a solution which may possibly reconcile a number of conflicting views, he will say something to the effect: "May I offer a consensus?", and then presents his views. Perhaps a consensus will be reached based on this view, or perhaps others will offer a consensus, but eventually a consensus is reached by the group.

Reaching a consensus is a time-consuming process. The members of the order consider this expenditure of time a wise investment, for through the extended discussion involved in reaching a consensus many important facets of the issue in question
come to light which may never have been realized and taken into consideration had the discussion been terminated by an arbitrary vote. Furthermore, it is felt that only a consensus is capable of evoking the whole-hearted support and dedication of all members.

During my interviews with both Confreres and Fellows it was repeatedly emphasized that the organization does not have a rigid hierarchical authority structure with a clear-cut chain of command. All but the most important policy decisions are reached among the Fellows, and thus only the Interns and the children are excluded from most decision-making processes which affect the entire order. And it is inconceivable that the Confreres would force a highly unpopular decision upon the order. Furthermore, all order members have direct communicative access to all persons in authority. There is no chain of command which one must utilize when one wishes to speak to a Confrere, or even to Mathews himself. And finally, each Fellow knows that if he performs exceptionally well and demonstrates that he can devote himself completely to the mission of the order, he will eventually be invited into the Permanent House Church.

It should not be thought, however, that all Fellows are striving mightily for membership in the Permanent House Church. A Fellow is an incredibly busy person, but as a Confrere he is expected to do even more work and accept even more responsibility. Although most Fellows would undoubtedly be honored to be a Confrere, it is a position for which few if any are desperate.

Perhaps a word can be inserted here concerning communication. As I have mentioned above, in theory there are no impediments what-so-ever to communication within and between levels of authority. In practice, however, there is an impediment in that those in authority are always so very busy, and have often so many people trying to see them at the same time, that only the quick and/or the patient succeed in reaching them. This problem becomes most acute when one wishes to see Mathews. The subject came up informally during a meeting I attended, and it was
jokingly suggested that lassoes be sold in the bookstore so that one could lasso Mathews as he leaves his office.

For purposes of the physical and spiritual care of its members, the order is divided into five colleges. The colleges meet separately every Tuesday and Thursday morning at 5:00 AM to study assignments of religious significance, and dinner each day except Sunday is had within the separate colleges. When the entire order meets, the members sit in a segregated pattern according to college affiliation. At such meetings each college presents an account of its members, indicating verbally the members present and absent, and the reason for each absence. There is a moderate level of identity with one's own college, but I detected no traces of competition or hostility between the colleges.

Each college has eight Priors. A Prior is a leader of the college. It is decided among the college members who will be a Prior. Usually they select people who have been in the college a long time and have leadership ability.

The college exists for the physical and spiritual care of its members, but what is involved in the word "care" warrants further attention. Concerning physical care, it does not mean that each college serves as its own doctor. Rather it means that the college is responsible for being aware of any illness within the college, and must make sure the ill person receives proper care, whether it be from college members or from a qualified physician. Physical care also involves making sure that the college members are physically present at required meetings. In this respect, "care" becomes a polite word for group pressure upon its members to conform to college and order standards. For example, at one college meeting I attended the subject was raised of one college member who was habitually absent at the morning Colloquium and Worship Service. (This person was also absent from the college meeting under discussion.) The person who raised the issue asked how the college could better "care" for this individual, when actually what he meant was how could the college make sure that the individual conforms to accepted standards of attendance.
When the word "care" was used only one person smiled, indicating that she probably caught the humor and irony in the use of that word in this situation. The rest of the order accepted the use of that word seriously and as a matter of course. In all fairness I must add that the person using the word "care" probably believed that attendance at the Colloquium and Worship Service would be to the deviate individual's own good. And furthermore, the "care" agreed upon was not of a coercive nature; it was decided to ask the deviate person if she planned to attend the meetings the next day, phrasing the question in such a way that the individual could decide either way, but was forced to come to a decision. Nevertheless, no matter how noble the intentions and gentle the pressure, the fact still remains that "care" in this usage involves group pressure on the individual to conform.

The colleges' spiritual care of its members is attended to primarily at the 5:00 AM Tuesday and Thursday college meetings during which they study assignments of spiritual and religious significance. This study apparently concentrates on writers -- often novelists -- who have, in Mathews' words, "...attempted to build a map of the interior spirit travel of man." The purpose of this spiritual training, it has been repeatedly emphasized to me, is to enable the individual to devote himself completely to the work of the Institute. It is the work (5th City, teaching, etc.) which is of primary importance. Spiritual training serves merely as a base to enable the members to successfully perform their tasks. It is a means, not the end, although it is considered essential. As long as a member is performing his tasks well, it is unlikely that he will receive any special spiritual care. And even if he is not performing well it is unlikely that he will be taken aside and given individual spiritual council. More likely he will be assigned a job which has a rigid time schedule and performance requirements -- such as working in the printing shop.

The colleges are the order's care groups, while the divisions are the order's task groups. There are six divisions: Formulation, Permeation, Enablement,
Penetration, Implementation, and Base. Tasks within each division are usually divided between various groups called guilds. Formulation is concerned with the Institute's work in 5th City. Permeation is involved in establishing relations with outside organizations. Guilds within Permeation include Church and World, Public School Teachers, Social Workers, University, Pre-School Teachers, etc. Enablement keeps records, runs the telephone switchboard, and handles financial matters. Penetration is responsible for recruitment for the many courses taught by the Institute. Implementation is involved with research, publication, brochure design, and related tasks. And finally, Base has the job of communication and coordination with other Institute organizations throughout the U.S. and the world.4

VI The Institute's Religious Beliefs

This is perhaps the logical point to discuss the work programs of the Institute, but I think an understanding of its programs is contingent upon a fundamental knowledge of its religious beliefs.

Getting immediately down to fundamentals, let's examine the order's beliefs concerning God. God is the limits, the mystery, the power, the ground of being which drives our lives this way and that despite our best laid plans. God is not transcendental, God is nothing other than these forces here on earth. This concept is primarily the same as that offered by the theologian Rudolf Bultmann. Indeed, a section from Bultmann's Essays: Philosophical and Theological5 is used for study in the RS-1 course when the Institute presents its concept of God.

The question immediately rises: "Why name the mystery which drives us this way and that and which hedges us in 'God', rather than merely calling it 'fate'?" The answer is to be found in man's relationship to this mystery, this power, for God cannot be separated from man's faith in God. Man's faith gives this mystery which we call God meaning.

What, then, is faith in God? To have faith in God is to have the courage to
say, in the face of the enigma and the darkness, "nevertheless."

It is the courage to designate that dark enigma, that sovereign power as God, as my God. It is the courage to assert that in the knowledge of this power every being acquires its meaning, that in knowing this power I also realize I belong to it, and that the limit which fences my being about is inwardly removed.... Faith in God is the courage which gives utterance to this 'Nevertheless'."

Faith in God is not a lasting possession or a permanent insight. Rather it is a form of knowledge which must be grasped and confirmed in the moment. "Real faith in God always grows out of the realization of the questionableness of existence, which cannot be learned and retained in the form of a proposition, but of which one is always becoming conscious in the moment of living." At another point Bultmann explains: "This saying 'yes' -- this 'Nevertheless' does not mean elucidation of the enigma by the insight which comes from observation, but is born only of the moment, that is, from surrender to the claims of the moment -- from the sacrifice of the ego."

How does this faith differ from the attitude of the stoic? It differs in that for the Christian, faith in God incorporates faith in God's Word as revealed by Jesus Christ. "...faith in God simply cannot and must not arise as a general human attitude, but only as a response to God's Word and that it is this one Word; this Word which is passed on by the preaching of the Church and which keeps reassuring the hearer that God is, that God is his God!" And the Word is that all is good, that all is received, that the past is approved, and that the future is open.

Like faith in God, grace is not a lasting possession or a permanent insight. Grace is something which we gain and then lose, and then gain again. It comes to us through the Christ-Event. A Christ-Event is any traumatic experience in our lives which produces a change in consciousness, a change in the way we see our situation, which destroys forms of false consciousness, and allows us to see more clearly the reality of our situation and to deal effectively with it.

We cannot make a Christ-Event occur for us -- it either happens or it doesn't,
and this is independent of our will. Paul Tillich's concept of grace is the same as the one accepted by the Institute. Tillich does not use the word "Christ-Event," but in referring to that moment (Christ-Event) when grace strikes us, he writes:

Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of an empty and meaningless life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual.... It strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us..... Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks into our darkness, and it is as though a voice were saying: "You are accepted".... If that happens to us, we experience grace.... In that moment, grace conquers sin, and reconciliation bridges the gulf of estrangement.\(^\text{10}\)

Through grace we are able to say 'yes' to ourselves, to others, and to the world. We are made whole, and hate and contempt disappear.

Grace conquers sin. Sin, as defined by Paul Tillich and by the Institute, is not an immoral act. Grace may help us overcome acts which we define as immoral by allowing us to face them squarely, but these immoral acts are not sin. Sin is separation -- separation from ourselves, separation from others, and separation from God.

This three-fold separation constitutes the state of everything that exists; it is a universal fact; it is the fate of every life. And it is our human fate in a very special sense. For we as men know that we are separated,.... We know that we are estranged from something to which we really belong, and with which we should be united. We know that the fate of separation...(is a thing) in which our whole personality is involved, and that, as fate, it is also guilt. Separation which is fate and guilt constitutes the meaning of the word "sin".\(^\text{11}\)

Grace and sin are bound to each other, for we cannot know one without having already experienced the other.

As stated above, through grace the Christ-Event destroys forms of false consciousness and allows us to see more clearly the reality of our situation, and thus potentially to deal more effectively with it. Grace thus gives us freedom, and if we are aware of what is happening to us when we receive grace we can capitalize upon this gift of freedom even when we are not experiencing grace.

Freedom, of course, is not an escape from God -- that is to say, it is not an
escape from the limits, the mystery, the power, the ground of being which drives
our lives this way and that. Nor is it an escape from responsibility. What, then,
is freedom?

In explaining its concept of freedom the Institute relies upon the writings
of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Freedom, Bonhoeffer tells us, is possible only when
related to responsibility.

The action of the responsible man is performed in the obligation which
alone gives freedom and which gives entire freedom, the obligation to
God and to our neighbor as they confront us in Jesus Christ. At the
same time it is performed wholly within the domain of relativity, wholly
in the twilight which the historical situation spreads over good and
evil; it is performed in the midst of innumerable perspectives in which
every given phenomenon appears.... Precisely in this respect responsible
action is a free venture; it is not justified by any law; it is performed
without any claim to a valid self-justification, and therefore also with-
out any claim to an ultimate valid knowledge of good and evil.

... The free deed knows itself in the end as the deed of God; the decision
knows itself as guidance; the free venture knows itself as divine
necessity. It is in the free abandonment of knowledge of his own good
that a man performs the good of God. It is only from this last point
of view that one can speak of good in historical action. 12

To complete this lengthy, but nevertheless rather sketchy discussion of the
order's belief system, I need only refer to the order's concept of the church and
its responsibility. The church is the sensitive and responsive pioneering part
of society that responds first on behalf of the whole society to God and his
teachings as expressed by Jesus. It repents for the evils of society on behalf of
all. It repents by first eliminating the evil from the church itself, and then by
leading society to do the same. The correct role for the church is defined as
that of a revolutionary cadre in the forefront of social and cultural change. To
foster this change the church must create new images of how things could be better,
create effective programs for achieving these aims, and conduct a massive educa-
tion program to educate people to the need of change, to explain how things could
be better, and to present them with the necessary methodology for initiating this
change. Only in this way will our congregations become true churches. In the
words of H. Richard Niebuhr:

This seems to be the highest form of social responsibility in the Church. It is the direct demonstration of love of God and neighbor rather than a repetition of the commandment to self and others. It is the radical demonstration of faith. Where this responsibility is being exercised there is no longer any question about the reality of the Church. In pioneering and representative action of response to God in Christ the invisible Church becomes visible and the deed of Christ is reduplicated.\textsuperscript{13}

I think it can be seen that the beliefs I have described in this section all tie in together and support one another. It is justifiable, I think, to look upon the entirety as a belief system.\textsuperscript{14}

This belief system, the order members are certain, provides the basis for all their programs. According to the tenets of their belief system it is the group's action which is of primary importance, but this action is seen as possible only because it rests upon the firm structure of this belief system. The system, the members believe, provides the spiritual force which allows them to be effective in the execution of their program -- a program which itself is seen as the practical outcome of this belief system.

Indeed it is true that all their programs can easily be seen as based directly upon the belief system, but this does not necessarily mean that the order members are without their own personal psychological reasons for their actions. I believe it quite likely that such reasons do play a role. A study into the order members' backgrounds combined with a careful use of projective methods should yield most interesting information, and the lack of this information in this report is seen as its primary weakness.

Nevertheless it is important that such personal psychological reasons are not seen by the order members themselves as the basis for their actions, and a conscious effort is made to keep these reasons from becoming important. They are told by their leaders that they must be selfless in their devotion to the cause (this point was made with emphasis by Mathews in a Colloquium meeting I attended), and their belief system tells them that "It's in the free abandonment of knowledge
of his own good that a man performs the good of God."

Besides serving as the basis for all their programs, the belief system of the Institute also serves as a basis for their religious study groups, and it is expressed in the songs, prayers and discussions at group meetings and meals, and in the morning worship service.

Since the demands of the Institute take up almost all of the members' time, there is almost no opportunity for an order member to get away from it all -- to escape the demands of the Institute and its belief system. Many members only rarely leave the Institute grounds, and those that do are almost always on an Institute assignment of some kind. Some of the members do work outside the Institute. (The order covers its own living expenses by allowing some members to hold outside jobs. Money from these jobs goes into a common fund to support all the members.) But even these jobs are part of the Institute's mission, for they are of such a nature (teaching, social work, etc.) that the individual has an opportunity to promote the goals of the Institute through the job, and he is expected to capitalize on this opportunity.

A few words should be said concerning the Institute's use of such symbolic words as God, faith, grace, sin, and church. The Institute is quite aware that these are symbolic words (as are all words), and they believe that each age must reinterpete these words so that they will be meaningful for man in the historical situation in which he finds himself. The Institute's use of such words is largely in keeping with their usage by the great modern theologians, but this is not an important point, for the Institute believes that its theological interpretations are based upon life rather than the thought of modern theologians.

...the logic is inductive rather than deductive;...(it) is not arrived at by taking a survey of church opinion on the meaning of the doctrine of God, or even a survey of the theologians. Instead, the procedure is to describe the critical ongoingness of life, and then name them in theological categories.16
They maintain that each age reinterprets the Christian symbolic words to fill its own needs. But is some periods of history this effort is less effective and complete than in other periods. During such times the interpretations from a previous period are maintained, and because the symbols are illadapted to the times, the teachings of the church become meaningless to the people. (In this respect the order seems to unconsciously accept a primitive version of the culture lag theory.) During these times the church is perverted. We are living in such a time.

Perversion is a well used word at the Institute. In effect what happens is that all current theological thought and practices which contradict the belief system of the Institute are denounced as a perversion. This means, for example, that belief in a supernatural god and in heaven is a perversion. (They call this perversion acceptance of the "two-story universe.") But at least some order members push this concept even further by seeming to assert that the Institute's belief system represents the true core of Christian thought for all time, and that the concept of a two-story universe has always been a perversion. Such an assertion does not follow logically from the beliefs of the Institute, and indeed in a way contradicts these beliefs. Unfortunately I was unable to learn if the Institute has an official position on this matter, and if so what that position is, but I think I can safely say two things: 1) at least some order members seem to be a bit confused on the matter; and 2) if there is an official position I didn't learn of it.

It is believed by many sociologists that in any institution there are three levels of ideology: 1) the ideology the members tell strangers; 2) the ideology they espouse among themselves; and 3) the ideology they act upon. It is possible a more complete study of the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago would reveal these three levels, but it is my impression if indeed these three levels exist, there is relatively little difference between them.
VII The Worship Service

Six days a week at 6:30 AM the order meets for the worship service which lasts about twenty minutes. The purpose of the worship service, in the words of Mr. Mathews, is to allow the group "to understand itself anew before the Word of God in Christ and hence before the God who gives that Word in Christ." A copy of the worship program, titled "The Daily Office of the Ecumenical Institute" is found in Appendix 2 of this report. The following comments are to understood by referring back to that copy. The "L" stands for the Liturgist, the "C" for the community (the order members), the "C. Left" for that part of the community on the left side of the room, and "C. Right" for those on the right. Throughout most of this service drums are being beaten in a fast rather wild beat. Except for the individual prayers, the words of the appointed witness, and the readings from the Bible, it is all read in a high monotone. This gives the readings a slightly mystic sound. During the service the community sways gently from side to side. The only musical instruments are the drums, cymbals, and a gong which is struck to signify changes in position. These positions are "facing the East" -- which actually means facing the southern end of the room, "facing the table" -- which actually means facing the center of the room, and kneeling.

Near the very end, where it says "Here shall the peace be passed to the Community" a rather interesting event occurs. Starting with the Liturgist at the northern end of the room, and commencing down each of the eight or so rows of chairs, each person in turn clasps the hands of the person immediately to the south of him in his row and, after saying the person's first name, follows with "the peace of God is yours this day." After receiving the peace, the person turns to the individual immediately to the south of him in his row and says the same, and so it continues down to the southern end of the room. During this time the order members are clapping, and the drums are being beaten fast and loud.

At the very end of the service most members give off a kind of warhoop.
This service has a mood of its own, and I really don't think I'm capable of describing it, but I can say what it is not. It is not the mood of serious sober thoughtfulness. It is not the mood of mushy sentimental communalism. And it is not the mood of wild free revivalism. If you can imagine this group, dressed in casual clothes, meeting in what was a gymnasium which in the way of decorations has only some large rather modernistic symbolic paintings on the walls which look not at all religious to a non-member, reading this service in a high monotone, often changing positions, swaying from side to side, with the sound of drums being beaten -- then maybe you can get some idea of the mood. But really I think one must experience it to understand it.

Each order member is expected to serve as a Litergist or appointed witness at one time or another.

VIII Marriage and Interpersonal Relations

During the middle of one of the worship services I attended it was announced that a couple were to be married. It was asked that "if any of you know just cause or impediment why these two people should not be brought together will you now prepare it." (15 second pause) "This is the second time of asking." When two order members plan to marry this ritual takes place a set number of times. If no one can give a good reason why they shouldn't be married, they are allowed to marry.

Concerning marriage, there are three types of order members: those who are married, those who are single but who plan to marry if they can find the right person, and those who plan to devote themselves to the order as ascetic celibates. This could well be the first religious order in history to include married couples and their children.

Relations between the order members are never of a mushy sentimental nature. This type of communalism is found in some orders, but not in this one. Such a relationship is considered a perversion of the true meaning of Christian love,
and is considered detrimental to the task of getting work done quickly and efficiently. Relationships between the members are personal and friendly, but still a bit formal and proper. They seem to come no closer than the average educated American to what Erich Fromm calls "central relatedness." 19

A large percentage of the interpersonal relations outside the individual conjugal families relate to work roles or religious studies, for there is little time to sit around and gab.

And even interpersonal relations within the conjugal families are comparatively limited. The parents work all day, usually at separate jobs, and the kids are in school most of the day from the time they are 20 days old. Furthermore, the children do not eat with their parents, but rather eat among themselves as a group. Thus, the only substantial block of time when the entire conjugal family is together is late at night.

IX The Programs of the Institute

The programs of the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago are impressive to say the least, and deserve lengthy discussion, but such discussion will not be found in this report. My main interest at present is with the order rather than its programs, and I present this brief discussion of its programs merely to demonstrate how the order's belief system is actualized.

The Ecumenical Institute: Chicago, as a revolutionary cadre, is attempting to provide a proto-type for the operation of the local church, and its entire missional program is a unified effort to present this proto-type model. Nevertheless, for purposes of analysis it may be divided into two general areas: 1) the program in theological education; and 2) the 5th City community reformulation project.

The Ecumenical Institute: Chicago's efforts in theological education consist of a curriculum of 16 intensive courses of study, usually given over a 44 hour weekend. Normal enrollment for these courses at the Chicago campus usually ranges
between two and three hundred per weekend.

The basic course -- a course which is a prerequisite for all other courses -- is RS-1 The Theological Revolution. This is a course focusing on the basic spirit questions in the post-modern world; problems of authentic self-understanding, decision-making, vocational significance, human relations and creative participation in civilization. The aim is to enable the participants to think through for themselves who they are and how they can involve themselves in the present age.20

The main task of this course is to present the belief system outlined in section IV of this report, and, with its use to help the student come to grips with his life, face the reality of his existence in society, recognize both his freedom and his responsibilities as a Christian, and to act within this freedom to meet these responsibilities. Indeed, this may be said to be the task of all the courses.

The curriculum is divided into two sections: Religious Studies and Cultural Studies, and within these sections a further distinction is made between courses designed primarily to give theory, and courses designed to present models by which this theory may be actualized.

The primary value of all of these courses is not that they convey new information, although they very well may. Their chief value, however, should be understood as that of drawing together a confusing welter of almost common cultural and theological insights into a unified picture, or gestalt. It is not the purpose of these courses to impose any particular set of views on anyone. But they do present a firm stance and interpretation of the ongoing events of our time which can enable others to crystallize and mature their own thinking.21

It is hoped that such crystallizing and maturing will result in individuals willing and able to act effectively in renewing their local churches.

There is one important course designed specifically for church leaders -- the Parish Leadership Colloquy. Its specific aim is to provide church leaders "with practical tools, methods, parish and local congregation models for the renewal of the Church."22
The fundamental aim of the program in theological education is the renewal of the church. It is realized that fundamentalist religious concepts—such as that cluster of concepts called the "two-story universe"—are in some ways detrimental to this renewal. Through their teachings the Institute presents an alternative theoretical base which it feels is better suited to the present historical situation. Nevertheless, the primary goal is not to attack fundamentalist religious concepts, but rather to turn local congregations into revolutionary cadre. If the local congregation can meet its responsibilities to the world and still maintain its fundamentalist views, this is fine as far as the Institute is concerned. But here, I think, we can see a measure of inconsistency. The Institute's entire belief system is considered an absolute necessity for its members if they are to effectively meet their responsibilities, but the entire system is not considered necessarily essential for the renewal of other church groups.

The method of education developed by the Institute they call "Imaginal Education." Its aim is to "draw together each discipline in a series of mental pictures, or 'images,' rather than through a set of abstract constructs," and rests upon the conviction "that genuine creative thought occurs most readily on the level of mental image formation." In all courses extensive use is made of visual and verbal symbols.

Teaching is the responsibility of the entire order, and each member is expected to learn to teach each and every course. However, teaching assignments are not made until the member is fully prepared, and since such preparation is a lengthy process, at present some of the most skilled and knowledgeable members are carrying an abnormally heavy teaching load. Teaching assignments are for courses taught at the Institute as well as elsewhere in the Mid West.

The other main area in the missional program of the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago concerns its work in '5th City.' Fifth City is a 16 block area which the Institute is organizing in the task of community reformulation. The Institute
grounds are located within 5th City. Fifth City is approximately 95% Black, 2 1/2% Mexican-American, and 2 1/4% White, and incorporates about 4,560 people.

This reformulation effort is being conducted 1) to present an example of the kind of activity in which a church may engage in meeting its responsibilities to society; 2) to build a model for community reformulation which may be applied anywhere in the world; 3) to present a means by which the order members may actualize their belief system; and 4) to help the people of 5th City help themselves.

The name "5th City" comes from a typological scheme in which the people of a metropolitan area are classified into sub "cities." For example, the people of second city are those who have returned from the suburbs to the central city, are living in downtown apartment buildings, are liberal in orientation but who are not working structurally for the reformulation of the city. The people of fifth city are those who are working actively to reformulate the metropolis.

In their research conducted before the 5th City program began, and through their experience in that program, the people of the Institute have learned certain truths which now serve as basic presuppositions.

Presupposition 1: A community reformulation project must be conducted in a limited geographical area. To be effective, reformulation must be comprehensive. Any one group can execute such a program only within a limited area at a time. If too large an area is tackled, efforts are dissipated and the program will fail. Furthermore, a sense of community identity is essential, and such identity is most easily fostered within a set, relatively small geographical area.

Presupposition 2: Community reformulation must deal with the depth human problem to be found in the area. It is believed that "Every man and every people operate out of a primordial self-image. Their practical action results from that image. The American Negro has an interior image...that tells him that he is a second-rate human being. All the benevolent, upgrading gifts -- public or private --
will not alter this state." They suffer from a "victim image." This image operates in a vicious circle to create a self-defeating life style. In order that the Black ghetto dwellers may help themselves, they must be helped to overcome this victim image. This is what is involved in dealing with the depth human problem.

Presupposition 3: The key to the identity building phase of community reformulation is the intentional use of symbols. In my brief discussion above of Imaginal Education I mentioned the Institute's belief in the importance of images and symbols. In their efforts in 5th City they have made wide use of all kinds of symbols to help the people build pride in their race and their community, and to help them feel a need to assume responsibility in community reformulation.

Presupposition 4: Community reformulation must deal with all of the critical problems of a community simultaneously. Ghetto problems reinforce one another. If they are not all dealt with at once, the ignored problems will defeat your best efforts. Ghetto problems may be divided into three areas: economic, cultural, and political. Effective programs must be developed for each of these three areas.

Presupposition 5: Community reformulation must deal with all age levels in the community. Like community problems, the attitudes of the various age levels within a community tend to reinforce one another. Therefore programs must operate "from the cradle to the grave." 25

Four years have been devoted to learning the neighborhood, defining its problems, creating a model for dealing with these problems, and generating a core of local workers and leaders from the community to inact the model. Some 624 separate problems were identified, and the model designates 80 agencies to deal with these problems. At present approximately 35 of these agencies are in existence.

Now that the model is basically complete, the most important agencies are in existence, and a core of local workers and leaders has been generated, the next
four years will be devoted to the execution of the program.

Time and space does not permit a discussion of the individual 5th City programs already under way, but I would like to comment very briefly on one of the most impressive of the programs; the pre-school program, because this illustrates the methods and goals of community reformulation through Imaginal Education.

The Institute runs a pre-school program which handles children from 5th City and from the order from the time they are 20 days old until they are ready to enter the public school system. There is an Infant School which takes infants from 20 days to 18 months in age, a Mini School for children 18 months to 3 years in age, a Headstart Pre-School for children 3 to 5, and a Kinder School for children 5 to 6 years in age.

In the Infant School a strong stress is put on decision. For example, if a child is crying he is told that he can decide to stop crying. Stress is also placed upon the unrepeatable uniqueness of each infant. (See, for example, the Diapering Song, Appendix 1.) Visual and verbal symbols are in wide use to help the infants come to a realization of the world about them. Even greater use of symbols is made in the Mini School -- particularly in the use of song, for at this age the children themselves are old enough to begin singing. (See Appendix 1) On the walls of the Mini School are pictures of news events, and sayings such as the following: "To celebrate is to explain who we are and to say yes." "There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening." "Play is an act of freedom." "Every person is born an island." "The man who reaches out with eager fingers to caress the textures of life in the city finds that the jagged edges which have pierced him have also made him whole."

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X Classifying and Comparing

Are we justified in referring to the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago as a religious group? After all, they don't believe in a supernatural god, they don't believe
in heaven or hell, and they don't believe in an afterlife. On the other hand, their teachings are largely in conformity with the teachings of the great modern Christian theologians.

Religion is an extremely hard thing to define. Most current definitions involve a notion of "ultimate concern." For example, religion may be defined as a systematic collection of rules which are organized around a definition of ultimate concern. J. Paul Williams defines religiousness as follows:

Religiousness is a mental quality which modifies certain aspects of the life of individuals (and through individuals of groups); this quality must have each of the following characteristics in some degree:
1) a belief-attitude that the Ultimate for man exists (however it may be conceived) and that certain aspects of life derive from the Ultimate;
2) a belief-attitude that the derivation (from the Ultimate) of the aspects of life is beyond empirical demonstration;
3) a belief-attitude that these aspects of life are of supreme importance (at least potentially) for the concern of the individual (and perhaps of groups and/or all men.)

I think it is clear that by these definitions the Institute must be judged to be a religious group.

Beyond this, I'm not sure it is useful to try to pin labels on the order. Some, perhaps, would wish to call it a sect, but I think this is probably unjustified. Sects tend to be primarily interested in the salvation of their members, and in saving others by encouraging them to forsake their old beliefs and adopt entirely the beliefs of the sect. The Ecumenical Institute: Chicago does not follow this pattern.

Nevertheless, there are many similarities between this order and the typical sect. The following is a list of characteristics which describe both the typical sect and the order at the Ecumenical Institute. The list is taken from Part IV of Bryan R. Wilson's Religion in Secular Society. (This list does not pretend to be exhaustive of the possible comparisons.)

sects tend to compromise less with the social order than do churches, and present alternative patterns of religious commitment. sects practice religion without an established professional ministry
sects are committed to the concept of the priesthood of all members
sects believe that all members should be equally and totally committed
sects tend to condemn certain cultural dispositions of secular society
sects often reject or regard as irrelevant the political arrangements of
society. (This is partially true of the order. They work with some political
groups, but also consider many of the national political programs to be
irrelevant and useless. For example, in an RS-1 course we were told that
it doesn't matter who wins, Nixon, Humphrey, or Wallace.)
sect membership is by achievement
sect membership implies a heightened sense of commitment and distinctiveness
sect membership provides a context of social involvement which demands respon-
sibilities of a much more compelling nature than we find in most organizations
sects usually express a concern for mankind at large
sects provide a total reference group for the members
sects provide a close context in which individuals can seek status, acquire
power, and exercise talents
sects bring into being an actual fraternity in which norms and values can
find expression and social application

XI Weaknesses and Potentials of this Report, and Suggestions for Further Study

I have already stated what I consider to be the primary weakness of this report.
Furthermore, no theories were substantiated or rejected by this study, nor even
presented. This has been, quite clearly, a descriptive study, and displays the
limitations of all descriptive studies. Nevertheless, I think it can serve as a
valuable base for further study. I would suggest background and depth studies
of the individual order members; study of the group as a whole using, for example,
modern systems theory; study of the Imaginal Education program; and study of the
efforts in social and cultural change in 5th City.

I hope to do further studies myself, and I am willing to lend this report
and any of the information in my file to anyone else who may be interested in
studying the Institute.
APPENDIX 1 - Songs of the Spirit Movement

The people of the Ecumenical Institute, Chicago have written a great number of songs. I present only a few by way of example.

Songs of Church Renewal

"Glory Be To Thee, O God"

Tune: Michael, Row Your Boat

Refrain: Glory be to Thee, O God, Hallelujah
         Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Hallelujah.

1. Praise the Lord, Christ is risen, Hallelujah;
   He is risen indeed, Hallelujah.

2. All the world has been received, Hallelujah;
   It has been received indeed, Hallelujah.

3. All of life must be embraced, Hallelujah;
   It must be embraced indeed, Hallelujah.

4. Men of faith can live their lives, Hallelujah;
   They can live their lives indeed, Hallelujah.

5. Men of faith have been set free, Hallelujah;
   They have been set free indeed, Hallelujah.

6. Men of faith can die their deaths, Hallelujah;
   They can die their deaths indeed, Hallelujah.

7. The Church of God has been renewed, Hallelujah;
   It has been renewed indeed, Hallelujah.

8. The gates of hell shall not prevail, Hallelujah;
   They shall not prevail indeed, Hallelujah.

"God"  (Words based on writings of Rudolf Bultmann.)

Tune: Blowing in the Wind

It is God that is always driving man
   To care about the coming day,
And yet God is the mystery who takes
   Each man's security away.
It is God that makes man seek happiness,
   But does not allow his joy to stay.
It is God who gives -- every man his life,
   And God who takes his life away.
It is God that drives man to search for love,
   And yet man is constantly pursued
By that force which finally casts each one out
   into loneliness and solitude.
It is God that drives man to knowledge and truth,
   But always denies him certitude.
It is God who gives -- every man his life,
   And God who takes his life away.

It is God that gives the desire to achieve,
   And yet death leaves man's work undone.
It is God that summons man to do good,
   And neglect his duty to none.
And yet God is the voice that pronounces guilt,
   For man's war with self is never won;
It is God who gives -- every man his life,
   And God who takes his life away.

"Good News"

Tune: Good News, The Chariot's Coming

Refrain: Good news, all is good,
   Good news, all is received.
   Good news, all is approved.
   All is possible.

That's the word of life he came to bear;
That's the word of life he came to bear;
That's the word of life he came to bear;
That's the word, the good news.

It's an affirmation, life is good...

Whatever you are, you are received...

Whatever your past, it's stamped approved...

All is possible, the future is yours...

Songs of Community Reformulation

"Marching Song of the Iron Men"

Tune: The Battle Hymn Of The Republic

Deep within the hearts of Black Men
Charred by bitterness and pain,
By three hundred years of slavery,
O injustice, fear and shame,
Burns the spark of human dignity
Which history will claim
As the destiny of man.
Men of iron, we stand together;
Men of iron, we stand together;
Men of iron, we stand together
For the dignity of man.

From the blackness of the West Side
Now the spark bursts into flame,
Rushing outward from Fifth City
From Chicago whence it came;
Spreading forth to every city,
Every nation to proclaim
The dignity of man

Men of iron, we march together...
For the dignity of man.

See the vision of a lifestyle
Stretch before the eyes of man,
From Brazil to France to China,
From the Congo to Iran,
Where all men can live in freedom,
Claim their power and their plan,
Full humanness for all.

Men of iron, march on together...
Toward the destiny of man.

"We've Got To Build Fifth City"

Tune: Lonesome Valley

We've gotta go out and build Fifth City,
We've gotta build it by ourselves;
Ain't nobody here goin' to build it for us;
We've gotta go out and build Fifth City by ourselves.

Oh, you can't blame it on the devil,
Oh, you can't blame City Hall;
You can't blame the way life is,
You gotta go out and build Fifth City by yourself.

Can't depend on Mr. Do-Good,
Can't depend on city gold;
Oh, we can't depend on Mr. Charley;
We've gotta go out and build Fifth City by ourselves.

We're going to build it with our blackness,
Goin' to build it with our soul;
Oh, we're going to build it with our power,
We've gotta go out and build Fifth City by ourselves.

We're goin' to build it in Chicago,
As a Sign to all mankind;
Of the power of the people,
Who decide to give their lives to change the world.

(Repeat first verse.)
Songs for the Pre-School Children

"Diapering Song"

Tune: Mary Had A Little Lamb

You are unrepeatable, unrepeatable, unrepeatable.
You are unrepeatable.
You are unique.

"Universe Man"

Tune: This Land Is Your Land

We are the Black Man.
We are the Red Man.
We are the Brown Man.
We are the Yellow Man.
We are the Tan Man.
We are the White Man.
This is the land for you and me.

Chanted:
Black Man! Red Man! Brown Man! Yellow Man! Tan Man! White Man! Universe Man!

"Heritage Song"

Tune: Version of Chopsticks

I'm the Greatest. You're the Greatest.
That's the way life is.
When you know it, when you show it,
You are free to live.

I'm a Black Man. I'm a White Man.
That's the way life is.
When you see it, when you be it,
You are free to live.
FOOTNOTES


2. This story concerning the $10,000 salary and the 8 families was related to me 3 separate times. Evidently it is a story in which the Institute takes pride as an indication of the selfless devotion of its leaders to the cause.


4. The Ecumenical Institute; Chicago, the subject of this study, is the head parent organization to a number of other permanent Institute organizations. There are two other such organizations in the Chicago area; one in Rockford, and the other on the South Side. In addition there is a permanent organization in Boston, Atlanta, and San Francisco, as well as one in Australia and one in Malaya. Furthermore, there are mobile teaching teams in a number of countries in Europe, Africa, Asia and South America.


7. Ibid. p. 4

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Paul Tillich, You Are Accepted (Chicago: Ecumenical Institute printing shop) P. 5 & 6.

11. Ibid. p. 2.


14. This is not to say, however, that the system is looked upon as necessarily being logically foolproof.

15. See Appendix 1 for a sample of some of the songs.


18. I have a tape recording of a service which I will play for anyone interested,


23. *op. cit.*


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