

LIVING INTERNATIONALLY

Grace and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

GREETINGS It is my privilege to deliver the opening address to this International Training Institute for churchmen and women drawn from nearly all established churches and all walks of life. This privilege is also a responsibility. It calls upon me to render an appraisal of the Spirit Movement in India as well as to share my concerns with you.

FUTURE SHOCK I stand here in awe and wonder as a person living in the year 1974. Today's world is witnessing revolutionary changes which overwhelm us with their speed, novelty and diversity. The 1960's have, in particular, witnessed breath-taking changes. The 1970's have brought these changes so close to us that none of us can escape them. These past four years have been years of no less radical changes.

Governments of many countries around the world have toppled down or changed unexpectedly. The cost of living has gone up. Prices of essential commodities have doubled in less than twelve months. Oil has made us global citizens overnight. What has the Lord of history in store for us next?

NEARER HOME Our own country is passing through a series of convulsions which are tearing down traditional structures, shaking lives of authority, shifting loyalties. We are faced not with one crisis but a convergence of crises. We are bewildered and confused.

Our Churches are in no happier position. Old missionary structures which provided them security and sustenance are crumbling. Trends towards nationalization of private institutions, restrictions on private property and flow of funds from abroad are forcing us to reorder our priorities in mission, to search for resources rooted in the soil and to move from maintenance to mission. God says to us as he said to Moses: "You have been going about this mountain country long enough; turn northward." (Deut: 4:2).

LIFE TOGETHER Resurgence of ancient faiths and cultures and the world of religious pluralism in which we live challenge us to dialogue and participation with other in building up a secular religious community which is concerned with man's common humanity alone.

Can we discern in these developments the Spirit of God leading us today to a new understanding of God's ways of working with men?

DYNAMICS
OF
RENEWAL

As I stand in awe and wonder as a person living in this day and age, so do I stand in awe and wonder as a man called to be the Church, and in this still continuing season of Easter, the time of the risen Lord.

You who are assembled here are the sign of the renewing dynamic waiting to be grasped. Through you the word of possibility is declared to the world being born. This is the witness of the prophet Isaiah:

"Cease to dwell on days gone by and to brood over past history. Here and now I will do a new thing; this moment it will break from the bud. Can you not perceive it?" (Is. 47:18-19, the New English Bible)

BUILDING
A NEW
WORLD

As concerned church men and women you are open to the signs of the times, sensitive to the new settings of your day, and prepared to engage in the terrifying but exciting task of building a new world. You are like men and women whose loins are girded and whose lamps are burning, waiting to serve their master in freedom and responsibility. (Luke 12:35-40).

A LIFE-
GIVING
RIVER

My association with the Spirit Movement over the years began initially with appreciation of the methodologies of the movement and the dedication of its sponsors. It has now grown into a deeper understanding of its dynamics and theological bases. Looking over the history of the movement during the past five years, what has impressed me and many others is its vitality and dynamism.

We may liken the movement, in the words of the prophet Ezekiel, to a mighty life-giving river, flowing from below the threshold of the temple, growing wider and deeper as it flows, bypassing all obstacles on its course. Wherever it flows it brings fertility and life. On its banks grow all kinds of trees, their fruits provide food and their leaves bring healing (Ez. 47:1-12).

INVASIONS
OF THE
SPIRIT

The vitality of the movement is demonstrated by its phenomenal expansion; swelling ranks of Spirit colleagues wholly involved in the movement; growing number of religious houses or urban ashrams; development of grassroots resources, personnel and material, and increasing openness of people, both within and without the churches, to the invasions of the Spirit.

DECISIONS
MAKE
RESOURCES

How do we account for this phenomenon? There is no foreign Mission Board to sustain the movement with funds or salaried missionaries. There is no donor agency of the Vatican or the World Council of Churches to feed ecumenical oxygen. The movement is sustained and nourished by being in mission. Its missional orientation focuses on human decisions rather than material resources; for in today's world it is not the resources which make decisions but it is the decisions that make resources.

**MISSION
IS NOT
AN OPTION**

The movement has succeeded, more than any other Christian movement in history, in grafting structurally the concept of mission into the very woof and warp of its life and liturgy, signs and symbols, operating concepts and tactics. Mission is not an option but the very life of the movement.

The grassroots people are the vanguard of the movement. They are the movement. They respond in faith to Christ and in obedience accept responsibility for the world.

**GLOBAL
VISION
IN LOCAL
SETTINGS**

The movement avoids the pitfalls of indigenization or accommodation to what is local and temporal in the cultures of man.

Its global consciousness and faithful responsiveness equip the Spirit men and women to sift the husk from the kernel, to discern and absorb the dynamic elements of the cultures of man, and to keep their global vision fresh and untarnished by the encrustations and trappings of particular cultural settings.

**MISSION
WITH
RISKS**

This is what makes the task of global men and women always precarious and provisional, yet exciting and challenging.

To be in mission is to accept risks; to witness to the word of possibility is always hazardous. The truth we have received constitutes a danger and the gift we have to share is a personal risk and responsibility.

**OPENNESS
TO
SCIENCE**

The movement brings to bear on all its operations all available experience and expertise. It subjects them to the most rigorous scientific methods of research and inquiry, experimentation and evaluation.

Its pedagogical insights and methods encourage self-initiated learning and release the potential for creative endeavours.

**DOING
THEOLOGY
IN
CONTEXT**

The movement finds nourishment in its decision to do theology in a way appropriate and authentic to the world that is already being born in our day. It is a theology that emerges in dialogue with the world and in wrestling with the burning issues of our day - justice and peace, human liberation, struggle against the dehumanizing systems of our day which shower blessings on affluent societies and inflict cruelties on the poor of the world.

**A CRISIS-
ORIENTED
FAITH**

Attacks on the theology of the movement stem from semantic confusion or a second-hand faith that avoids creative conflicts within itself or exposure to the anxieties and vital currents of today's world.

A Church seeking a hideout in abstract formulations and empty rituals deprives its members of the adventure of living as human persons in the emerging dimensions of history, both locally and internationally.

THE
AMEN

A Church in mission prepares its members to set their face steadfastly toward the city of man and to flesh out their faith in the world through their hopes and fears, griefs and anxieties.

Every time they say "Amen" they declare their faith "in a decision that has already been made, and assent given once and for all to the reality of God, an absolute readiness to obey, an irrevocable act of being cast upon God and grounded in him." (Gogarten).

REORDERING
PRIORITIES

Today, if we are to address the word of possibility within the brokenness of the world, we need to return to the virgin soil of our faith and draw our strength from "the rock from which we are hewn and the quarry from which we are dug." This is God, creator of us all, whom we call Father through the grace of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Jesus saw, once for all, the urgent need for re-ordering human priorities. The old order, which replaces God with the gods of this world, must radically change so that God takes his rightful place in his creation and man is liberated from the domination of the powers and principalities of this world.

When this happens through the gift of God's grace man becomes responsible to God alone and, in obedience to his will, becomes responsible for the world. The grace he receives from God becomes his commission, his privilege, his responsibility.

LIVING
IN
RESPONSIBILITY

This close interconnexion between grace and commission, privilege and responsibility, giving up and receiving, losing and finding, serving and being served is crucial in Jesus' thinking about the world dominated by its piety and the Kingdom of God which ends this domination through faith.

"We would still be in the position of the two disciples of Jesus who asked him to grant them to sit one at his right hand and one on his left in his glory. (Mark 10:37). But, in fact, not merely the receiving of life, but also the abandonment of the old life, is in accordance with the will of God only when it takes place in faith." (Gogarten).

Jesus stands as the one who is responsible to God alone. He invites us to transcend the piety and absolutism of this world, to hear afresh the voice of God, and to receive the gift of life within the matrix of faith, and give it back to the world.

FREE TO
SERVE

The parable of the Good Samaritan vividly points out to the absolute and closed universe of the priest and the levite which cannot or will not respond to the demands of contemporary human situations.

This is in contrast to the open-ended world of the Samaritan which makes him act, in freedom and responsibility to the demands of a living event. He does not carry on his back the burden of crippling laws and commandments; he is not even aware of them. He is free to serve and respond to living events.

"For the will of God always demands more than such a commandment. It demands that we be open to whatever the living event, into which we may be drawn at any time, should demand of us. When someone is open in this way, it may be possible for him to do what is desired, without having previously been taught that it was something demanded by God. This is shown in an astounding way in the examples of the righteous at the last judgment and the Good Samaritan. But in any case it is possible to recognize what is required as the will of God, and to put one's trust in this will, only when one dares to do what it demands." (Gogarten).

**PRIORITIES
FOR
RENEWAL**

For the renewal of the churches in our day what we need is not more worship, more education, more money, more buildings. To be sure, these are needed but they cannot be the priorities of a people engaged in mission to the whole world. What is urgently needed is more risk-taking, more faith, more action, more people open to the world and living their lives for the life of others.

These are some of the questions you are going to ask and answer in this ITI. However, they will have meaning and relevance for you only when you yourself become a part of this questioning-answering process and recognize the reality of your being in the questions you ask and the answers you give.

**LABORATORY
FOR
LIVING**

The ITI invites you to participate in the living events of your life and time. It is a wonderful laboratory in the techniques of living internationally and in the disciplines of self-giving. It is a call to render obedience to God by assuming responsibility for the world.

Much strength and undergirding have come to the Spirit Movement through the ITS's. The ITI is releasing a new future for the world by enabling local church men and women to pick up the task of once again being the Church in mission.

**IN SEARCH
OF A NEW
FORM FOR
THE CHURCH**

The ITI equips men and women to pioneer, in what M.M. Thomas calls, finding "a more proper form for the Church in India", which can effectively integrate Christian self-identity and secular solidarity with all men.

This has become urgent as fresh theological thinking in India is questioning the presuppositions of Christian missions: Why should we attempt to incorporate a Hindu or Muslim through baptism into an organized church which is more rooted in the Western culture than in the Gospel?

Can the meaning of Christ be expressed in forms of religion other than Christian? Can we replace the Old Testament by other scriptures as a preparation for the coming of Christ? Can there be a Hindu, Buddhist or Muslim Church of Christ?

IN
DIALOGUE
WITH
INDIAN
THEOLOGY

The time has come that the Spirit Movement develop closer rapport with Indian Christian theological thinking with a view to enrich its own concepts and at the same time assist in the search to find a proper form for the Church in India.

It is an exciting news that a new religious house will come into being at Bangalore. Today Bangalore has become an important center of fresh theological thinking in India.

LIVING
EFFECTIVELY
IN THE
NEW
SOCIETY

The movement has already effectively penetrated the secular world through its LENS courses. It offers its insights and tools of social research to secular organizations and business communities. Though it is a purely secular course it is entirely within the framework of Christian perspectives.

The churches in India, in their organization and management, confront problems and challenges similar to those in secular organizations. They need to use the resources of LENS teams to wrestle with their problems and tensions and help their people live effectively in the new society.

IN
LOVING
CONCERN

I cannot close this address without a word of friendly advice and counsel. The ITIs, as I have already said, have done a marvellous job of discovering, enlisting and training leadership for the local communities on a large scale. There are today hundreds of ITI grads all over the country.

However, in places like Jabalpur and Bombay, where the ITIs have been held, the total impact on the local people has not been quite constructive and has, in fact, somewhat detracted from official support from the churches. The deficiencies relate particularly to selection of participants for the ITI and relationships within the ITI.

There are bound to be deficiencies in any program involving a large number of people. I am only pointing these out so that you may be conscious of them and do whatever is possible in this ITI to improve on the past.

You are living in a glass house, open to the scrutiny of the world. The way you live and move, eat and drink, work and worship, and relate to others will go a long way to strengthen your witness locally and in the churches you represent.

May the blessing of God our Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Ghost be with you. AMEN.

—Bishop R. D. Joshi

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