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November 19, 1971

REPORT ON THE LOCAL CHURCH PROJECT

My Bishop, my brothers and sisters in Christ, I'd like to read a Psalm. We Protestants, we narrow-minded Protestants, need to remember that there were two books in the Bible that made Luther. One of them enabled him to take the Catholic substance and push it to the raw bottom, and the other opened his eyes to what Tillich has called the Protestant principle. The last was the book of Romans, obviously. I am more and more convinced that when he dug through and taught for years it was the Book of Psalms that was the crucial book that made Martin Luther. For if there is not religious substance, finally, the Protestant principle has no meaning and turns into a subtle kind of gnosticism. Luther said about the Psalms that no one can hear them unless he makes a little garden for himself to enable him to hear what they say.

My garden is sort of like that up on the wall; I look down the deep deep bore into the very center of things. One thing about the Psalmist, he doesn't fool around with the temporalities or try to lead you into the domain of the other world, or what I call the center of being in itself. He just starts from the center of being and tells you the way it is from there. I look down through a deep bore into something like a great coliseum, and in the balconies are masses of humanity; all that ever were, are, or shall ever be. Down in the arena are gathered certain audiences. Sometimes the Psalmist speaks to the gods of this world; sometimes he speaks to the people of Israel; sometimes he speaks to the un-right-wised people and the demonic enemies that he experiences in life. And then, right in the center of it all, stands the Psalmist, under a spotlight, and he says the way it is.

This is Psalm 115, and well, just listen to it a bit.

Not to us, not to us, O Lord, but to thy name ascribe the glory. Because of thy true love and constancy. Why do the nations ask "where then is their God?" Our God is in heaven, and He does whatsoever pleases Him. Their idols are silver and gold, made by hands of men. They have mouths that cannot speak and eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear, nostrils that cannot smell. With their hands they cannot feel and with their feet they cannot walk, and no sound at all comes out of them, and their makers grow to be like them, and so do all that trust in them. But Israel trusts in the Lord. He is their helper and their shield. And the house of Aaron trusts in the Lord and He is their helper and their shield. The Lord remembers us and will bless us. He will bless the house of Israel, and he will bless the house of Aaron and he will bless all who fear him, both high and low alike. You are blessed by the Lord, the Lord who made heaven and earth, the heavens belong to the Lord, but the earth he has given to all mankind.

I think I'd better read that last line over again.

All the earth belongs to all the people. It is not the dead who praise the Lord, not those who go down into the deep silence;

but we, the living, praise the Lord, both now and for ever more.

And he brings down the curtain by saying, "O praise the Lord!"
And that's the end of Psalm 115.

I look upon such assemblies as this as the moments in which such people as ourselves give our accountability to the historic Church; where we prostrate ourselves before one another. I am rather delighted that Dr. Edgar Chandler and his rather remarkable bride are here today; for you understand that for some years the Ecumenical Institute was directly under him. I think that a lot of the criticism we got was really meant for Chandler. That's why I've remained so youthful, because we put it all on Edgar's head.

He did a rather remarkable thing, for rarely do you find a prince of the church who also is a radical renewing force. He's been one of them. When the Ecumenical Institute had gone to pieces, he single-handed reached out and brought it under the Church Federation of Greater Chicago and saved it in history, and then he did something far more remarkable than that. After he had nurtured it and cared for it, and defended it, and praise the Lord for that, he advised us, as only a man of his caliber really could do when he saw that we were on our feet, once again to constitute ourselves as an autonomous entity with a Board of Directors of our own. And he was wise, because not too long after that he left Chicago, and you know, you don't find in the positions like he was in there, Edgar Chandlers every day of the year, and in many ways, that twice saved the work of the Ecumenical Institute. Edgar, with great pride I like to tell that story, if you don't mind.

To account to the historical church. I think people like us have to be fanatics. I believe, in the creative sense, that we have to be fanatics. One of our fanaticisms...(this is really the 20th year of our existence, and Edgar, we're in the 10th year in Chicago) in the beginning was the local church, the local church, the local church. Sometimes we've been criticized that our concern was not the local church. But let me rehearse for you a little bit, these 20 years to see if you can understand this kind of fanaticism that has been in us from the very beginning.

It's funny, I see these days 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 from it which are the movemental church, and some of them go off and try to create their own universe and they always come to an end: they burn out. She spins off these renewal forces for her own sake, for these renewal forces always keep the life-line tight and tie it to the historical church. But to the historical church, at times particularly--I think I'm old enough to say--that it's the people who hate the historical church but don't know they hate it that would see people like ourselves as not being a part of the historical church. I don't believe that that is a dishonest statement.

Anyway, through these 20 years, we have had a master strategy. 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 situation of the church and the possibility of the Gospel in the post-modern world. We created such a course. And then we began to systematically teach that course literally throughout the world. Most of you who know us know that we have divided the world into three spheres, into nine geo-social continents and into 324 regions. And if you block out, for the moment, Russia, China and what I call MANE, North Africa and the Near East, we have literally covered the globe with teaching these courses.

It's like the strategy was to get a thousand people through a course by pressing upon the church, and we've always worked within the church. Then we had to build training courses in which we pressed upon those thousand to belch up, if you please, a hundred, for further training--in which you belched up ten, for further training in which you brought forth one who had guts enough to stand within the church as a symbol of renewal. That's been our strategy.

But then, we discovered that the awakened person, within the task of renewing the church, went back all by himself and tried to take a stand. He found that was next to impossible. So our next strategy was to create nurture centers, almost like wayside inns. We call them religious houses, for lack of a better word, and like my brother said, I think we have 63 of these wayside inns which are nothing. They are just there to offer nurture for those who choose to stand for the renewal of the church.

The third strategy over the 20 years, has to do with this model of the tactical system for the reconstruction of the local church. Those of you, and some of you here who know us and some of you have known us for many years, understand that it took 20 years to build that kind of a construct, 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 that came up with this tactical system. But it wasn't until we had penetrated the globe with the recontextual re-education syndrome--and then built the nurture centers to maintain the awakened people, that you could have done this. And so, as my brother said, a year ago this last summer, some 400-500 people from across this continent and from other nations, came to draw together this tactical system, which had been worked on for 20 years, in such a fashion that you could begin an experiment. And mark you, there is no magic in the so-called renewal of the local church, just hard, hard work, that finally ends up with the death of everyone who is engaged. There is no magic here. Only the sentimentalist thinks there is some kind of a gimmick, some way or another going to transform the church into the post-modern world.

This tactical system enabled us to have an experiment, which, in our mind, is over a six year period. We will pick out 550 local congregations in North America to participate in that experiment. Last year there were 80 of those that got started. This year there are 144. Next year, I would hope it would be about 300. But the interesting thing is it's snow-balling so fast that we think some way or another we've got to get troops trained more quickly, for it very well could be that before the six years are up, not that you wouldn't have 550, you might have several thousands, if you could find a way to actually execute that experiment.

It's interesting. We get letters. We picked out churches we knew about. Now we're getting letters from churches that we never heard of before. An Anglican Bishop out in Montana wrote to see if his churches could not get into the Experiment. Anyway, that tactical system is what we have been all about over the 20 years, minus one. And that one has to do with the New Social Vehicle.

You see, as I grasp church renewal, there are only three things that have to be done. One of them is the interior re-education and reformulation of the local church. I'm leaving out any argument that the church has ever been renewed from the top down, and it never will. It's renewed from the bottom up. It's just a fanatical presupposition of ours that if the church is going to be renewed on the local level (God bless all bishops), no bishop is ever going to. That's not his job, to renew the church. He very likely will get renewed in the process of it, but it's renewed from the bottom up. I'm leaving out that kind of an argument. But re-education of the total church has to take place, and the reconstruction of it. I mean that the church has to forge brand-new forms of its internal life, but this internal dimension of the renewal of the church is only for the sake of the external mission. The third thing is the spirit life, which I'll come to in a moment.

When I say minus one, you do not renew a local congregation for the sake of renewing the local congregation. For 25-30 years, it's been very clear in the mind of the church, I believe, that whatever image of the church finally is forged for our time, the key to it is mission. The church has awakened afresh to the awareness that it is in history in no way whatsoever for herself, but only for the sake of the world. Today, that's what we mean as mission. We're clear, I believe, about that image. The question is, how do you practically concretize that image, and if you do concretize it, once again, it's got to be done on the local level. But if it's to be done on the local level, the local congregation has to have what I call a practical operating vision of the new social carriage that's coming to be in our time.

Therefore, last summer, we gathered some 900 people from around the world, laymen and clerics alike, to begin to work on what I call the practical model of the New Social Vehicle. What I'm trying to say by that is that I think in our time, from many, many sources, there has come an awareness of the fundamental ingredients of the new society that has to be built, but nobody has pulled those together into a practical picture, in such a fashion that a body of people could systematically begin to build tactical models for the realization of that new social vehicle. That's what we were after last summer.

Now, in any form of new social vehicle, it seems to me, and this is the way it's been through history, there has been an ideological insight that has been injected in the social process, something like you would put a certain program into a computer. I happen to believe that the world is pretty clear about that, and that's why I read this Psalm. That from many, many, many arenas in our time, man has become aware, as he has never 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 our society during the middle of the last century from several different sources, as I think you understand. When you break that down, 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 this is not the kind of pseudo-democracy that we slipped into in our country. It's the kind of democracy that's way down underneath that, if you please. Finally, this means that all of the images of humanness, from East, from West and from South belong to all the people. All of the wisdom of mankind belong to all the people.

Well, the question is, how do you take that fundamental vision that I think has emerged from many quarters in our time, and grasp its manifestation in every aspect of social relations in a practical form. That's the first thing. The second thing in forming a new social vehicle, is to take into account the imbalances of the present social dynamics in any society. This summer we worked on society as a dynamical relationship between the cultural, economic and the political dynamic. It's pretty clear that there is imbalance here.

You understand that during the Middle Ages there wasn't such a thing in our imagination as an independent economic quarter in society. The economic basically was carried on still within the family structures. This dynamic emerged into self-consciousness in the modern world and has grown in such a fashion that it puts to shame the growth of any other social dynamic; but in that growth it has tyrannized over the cultural. Do you grasp that? It is as if the economic is twice the size of the cultural. The trouble in education today is the tyranny of economics over the educational processes. The revolt of young people of our time against education is that it is geared toward technological understanding, no matter how subtle that is.

Every society is made up of the dynamic of economics, politics and culture. What has happened is that the economic has rendered into a state of bondage the cultural, and then rendered impotent the political. Do you understand that? Then, if you divide it up, it looks like this: that education has tyrannized over the dimension of style and over the dimension of religion, and within education technological education has rendered impotent the humanities and it has 'squeezed out' religion. Now, if you want a secular word for it, it is the area of final meanings. Do you see why the youth are asking 'why for'? If you are going to cure this problem in society, then you start right here.

Or you take the whole of society. If you are going to bring some kind of balance back in, you've got to awaken this arena, and at the top of it is the church. You see, the church is never the people that carry out a social revolution; they are the ones that forge the practical vision. Now, if the church is sick, like it was a hundred years ago, it fails. I don't want to misuse Marx, but Marx came with a construct of society while the church was sitting around 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 that is radical beyond comparison to 1848, and the chance for the people of God to be God's people is to forge the practical vision of the new social vehicle.

Then, secondly, she embodies it. How do you put it? The church fundamentally is not the people who know what they know, they are not fundamentally the people who do what they do, they are basically the people that BE. What I'm trying to say is that the New Social Vehicle has to do with bringing balance back into this imbalance, and bringing programming into the top of the whole dynamic that all this world belongs to every man. The church takes that and forges it into a practical vision and then, in local congregations all over this globe, the church once again becomes the representational people. There's a little band here that symbolizes this new social vehicle. Do you understand? In other words, we aren't anything. We're sort of a little grain of sand on the ocean, but what power we have is not what we've known, not what we've done, it's what we BE. And that's the power of the church. The awakened congregation is for the sake of becoming the centinal symbol of the new world, and I like to say that if you don't do this, this will not upset God. He'll raise his people up out of stones to be the centinal ones that pioneer in the way on behalf of all mankind. I'm saying that has to be done. Without that, you'd no more get this vision than fly to the moon, but it is for the sake of the church.

I'm sick and tired of this sentimentalism about what it is to love a man; as if I'm nice to the Monsignor, that's to love him. NO! To love him is to lay down your life for the sake of creating a milieu in which another person's authentic creativity can get out into history. The love that's required of the church makes this sentimentalism seem like the drip that it is.

If I got off on this and sensitivity training, you might throw me out. Lord, you'd think the church would not once again walk into that kind of a swamp of ridiculousness. To become the centinal symbol of the new world is what it means for the church to love the world. Now, one last thing, because we want to leave time for you to ask specific questions, if anybody here knows some kind of an answer.

This cannot be done if there isn't an authentic recovery of the spirit deeps of life. My brother said I was an evangelist, but I want to come back to this Catholic substance, or the great awakening, or to BE head on, "Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?" Just because the spiritual substance in Protestantism always has been shallow, there was a substance there you were appealing to. That substance is gone. Therefore, your evangelism has to be highly indirect. It's almost as if you had to recreate the substance before you could declare the Word. Just almost. But what I want to witness to is, in this world, that the realm of the spirit is being seen afresh. You see, I sometimes think we Protestants have, in the last fifty years (and it was necessary), traded too much on the poetry of the temporal--of time. When you are recovering the Word in Jesus Christ, you have to do that. But now, if you're grasping after the substance of spirituality that the Word addresses, you have to use spatial metaphors. I'm not sure of this, but you roll this around in your head: it's as if today we are

becoming aware of what I call the other world, that is right in the midst of this world, but it is totally other world. If this seems strange to you, then let me remind you that maybe, perhaps, this other world is like the lost world. Do you remember that movie, when you were much younger than you are now, "The Lost World", was that the name of it? Down in Amazon country? Well, that's what is sort of in my mind now. This world has been lost, I think it's been lost for a hundred years. Actually, it wouldn't surprise me if one day the scholars won't say it's been lost for 500 years. The people have smelled that it was there, but knew very little about it.

You know, I saw that movie not long ago, "The Gospel According to Matthew", and you know, if you haven't seen it, you just ought to get it and show it in your churches. It's as if Jesus just sort of strode into temporality, just strode in, and he went in a straight line, never missing a step, and just walked out of it at the end. And as he was in a straight line, never turning to the left or the right; it was as if in the midst of this only world you and I know anything about, he walked in the other world, and he just swung over his shoulders his words, his comments.

It's like he didn't care for individual people, like we sentimentalize it; he was trying to say to all of mankind what that other world was like right in the midst of this world. And I say, in our day, and oh, I feel like an old man, but what I'm talking about now I think is the most exciting thing that I have experienced in my whole life. Oh, yes, and if you ever have a slight chance to slip through the narrow gate, the narrow door into the other world, you find it sort of a labyrinth. (You want to have that spool of thread with you to be sure you don't get lost in it on account of you haven't known it for such a long time.) What I hear from those who have some little understanding of that, coming across the gap into this world, it's something like this:

First of all, it is the world of mystery. In this other world, there are people, there are trees, there are mountains and there are roads and there are goingonnesses, and yet it is not people and sticks and stones and goingonnesses, its the transparency of sticks and stones and goingonnesses. That is, I don't meet you, I meet your transparency, which is you. It's like all is wonder. I mean wonder in terms of dread. It's a fearful world and I mean wonder in terms of fascination. You don't mind my saying this--it seems to me for such a long long time down inside of me, there's been a dance going on. I've never quite known how to talk about it to people. It's got nothing to do with whether I feel up or down, or whether things about me are filled with joy or sorrow. It's just that life is alive. The Mystery is there. I don't mean the mystery of tomorrow, that tomorrow will go away. I mean the Divine. There is nothing that is superimposed. I mean it is just there! Look how feebly I speak of this.

Then from the other side they scream back that it not only is the realm of awful Mystery, it is the realm of burdensome freedom. It is the realm of freedom. Oh, if you're like I am, you've wanted to be free. In the other world you are free. But you're not sure you

you want that freedom. It's got nothing to do with free will; it's the experience that you are freedom. To put it in the language of the philosophers today, it's like man has actually grasped, not simply with his intellect, but with his being that man's essence is that he has to create his own essence. That is, you're not dealing in this realm with the moral any more, you're dealing with the ontological-- that I have to be my being. That I have to create, so to speak (this is bordering on impertinency), I have to create my one and only life. Oh, I tell you, it took my wife (for this is the way I say it to myself, "I have to create my own conscience"), it took my wife a long time to understand that she could not keep my conscience for me. I alone must keep my own conscience. That is, if I may speak mythologically, when I get to heaven, they're not going to ask me about this petty morality, or that petty morality. They're going to ask me how I be'ed my being! This is the realm, I'm trying to say, of no excuses. You don't say, well, I had a neurotic father; I was born on the wrong side of the tracks; if I had married a different woman. Oh, this is the realm where there is no justification. The realm of no excuses. It's not that I have freedom. You grasp yourself in the other realm as freedom. And then there is a strange twist that takes place here. And I hear this being screamed from the other world. It's like when you grasp this freedom, then you're aware that in God's domain you are not responsible to any thing, only to God. That you are not finally responsible to your wife, to your children, to your community, to your nation, to your church. NO! You are responsible only to God.

But the moment (and I'm not talking about any imperatives here, I'm dealing with indicatives, the way it is in the other world) once you grasp that you are only responsible TO God, then you become aware you are responsible FOR the whole world. This is radical responsibility FOR the whole world. Oh, don't grab onto this too quickly. We've lived in a bourgeois morality that says that you've got to look after your kids first. You've got to start a home. This utterly flips that.

You are as much responsible for every hunk of suffering in Africa as you are in Boston. There is suffering here. You say no, no, that's all right. Because in this realm about us, that's the morality. In the other world, it's different. You don't even have to live in that world, but if you do, this is the way it is. You are responsible for the world. Oh, the church has known this. It's like back in the early days, the world was just around the Mediterranean. And dear Paul, maybe it's true went to Spain. He couldn't go much further could he?

Now, nothing less than the globe, and I don't suppose that really defines our universe any more. But you not only use spatial images here, you use temporal. Maybe you won't grasp this in the other world. You are responsible for every thing that has ever happened in history up to this point. The burdens of all the past are yours. You say, it's too much; it's too much. All right, all right, then you stay in this world. In the other world you're responsible for everything that's ever happened. None of this stuff now about "if I had a different kind of Pope, or Bishop, or if this had happened, or that way back there." NO! You are responsible for it all, and then you are responsible for all of the future. You don't talk in the other world about "I'm just

one widdle old person in one widdle old boat. I can't do nothin'." In the other world, to be in that world is to be responsible, whatever comes to be. Period. They don't care what you can accomplish, in fact, they aren't much interested in that. You remember when a couple of the boys came up to Jesus and said, "Can we sit on your right and left?" And Jesus, speaking from the other world played with them a little bit and said, "Can you drink my cup?" After he roasted them a little, he said, "In the other world, it's not up to me about right hand and left. It's not up to me. I don't even evaluate your life. It's Being itself that will decide."

And the final thing that I hear from the other world these days is...you know, the guy who invented the metaphor of Satan must have been a genius. Do you see what Satan is? In the other world you have not got any problems. Now, I think what I'm going to say now is an honest statement. I can not remember the last time I had a personal problem. I just don't have personal problems. In the other world, personal problems do not exist. Only in this world. You only have personal problems when you are attached to your children, to your money, to your office and to your nation. Do you understand your status in the other world? There aren't any attachments. You are attached to God. And that means that you've really got one power and that's slaying Satan. It's like you experience Satan as guarding the door back into this temporal world. He's not guarding it, he's trying to lure you into it. He's backing up. So that Satan represents the fact that there is but one issue that you struggle with: always to love God. And Satan is trying to get you to stand someplace else. You've got all the problems of life focused. It's the problem of maintaining yourself until the last hour as a citizen of the world. What I'm talking about, is the awareness, though you could use other poetic language than I am using, that's happening to man in the post-modern world.

That's the church's job, as I grasp it, and I feel extremely inadequate in my trying to describe it, to build the road map, of the topography of the other world. This is contemplation, meditation and prayer once again; poverty, obedience, chastity. It's like the church's role in every age in history is to create the new piety. At the time when the religious are no longer reading their offices, then the church must forge the new piety. And like the Bishop said, in principle, the church is renewed. There's going to be a lot of soldiers die in the next four years as that task is actualized, but you're not going to stand in the forefront of obeying God unless the church today, you and I, become spirit men in ways we scarcely dreamed of up to now. The heartbeat of the renewal of the church is the recovery of spirituality.

We must always remember that the church has not been naughty. It has not been dead, it has not been sick. Of course this is true: the problem is that God gave us a brand new world to be the church in, and glory, hallelujah, for 50 years the church has been struggling to find the way to be the renewed people in this new world that God has given to us.

You and I have been laughed at by the educational community, by the political community, etc., for 20 years, but now they are in the same position. And the glory of the church, if she is ever to be the pioneering people, is that it came to her first.

Now, let's pick ourselves up first, and show the way to the other human beings that are just now beginning to experience the radical tug of new times. God help us not to fall into inertia before the magnitude of the task. Then Hans Kung's prophesy that the established church just might disappear, just crumble to pieces inside will not be. That won't be the end of the church, because there are new branches that have budded off of the old roots. But it is not necessary for any great Ivan or any shocking trauma to take place. We trust in God and march. And the Lord willing, that's what we intend to do.

My report is finished.