

The Ecumenical Institute: Chicago  
Collegium  
April 16, 1971

ORDER POLITY: THE ECCLESIOLA  
An Experiment with Congregational Dynamics

Before I begin I want to make a comment about that song, "The Spirit," that we just sang. You people have got to be on the watch constantly—that's what it means to be a fighter about the spirit deeps. The first line in that song is theologically incorrect, tragically so. It's not "Our eyes MUST see a thousand years." It's "Our eyes HAVE seen a thousand years, therefore we must unceasing stand." Do you see that? Why you could go around and pull your bootstraps forever and you could not force yourself to see a thousand years. It comes as a great indicative—you didn't conjure it up, it was given to you.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, grace and peace be unto you, Amen.

Now, I'd like to read a psalm. We don't have time to do what we have to do this morning, and I suppose that's the time to read a psalm. I'd like to make a speech on the methodology that has to do with learning how to listen to the psalmist, but now I can only say a word or two. If you'll look, in your imagination somewhere down, into the deeps, and pretend that there's a miniature coliseum there. If you could see yourself inside it for a moment it would be like a cyclorama. There are innumerable figures in that cyclorama and right in the center of it, right in the exact center there is a figure, and that figure is you. Now these figures are Lilliputians, they're little people. If you can get up real close in the cyclorama you're going to see that the face on every being there is your face. Now somewhere in there is a huge mass of people who are an audience. You're playing three roles: You are at the center as yourself, then you are in that cyclorama, and then you are the one who is looking down upon that whole goingonness. There is also an audience, but for the life of me I can't get that audience located. They are not standing up there peering over, they are somewhere inside. And that audience is all of humanity. There is another figure there who is the most real presence, who is constantly visible and constantly invisible at the same time, and that's God or the Mystery. Golly, I've tried to get him located, and I can't, but it's not like the problem with locating humanity.

Now, you're looking down upon yourself gazing at the deeps, while what's going on in the deeps is your goingonness. I'm convinced that the difference between secular poetry and devotional poetry or poetry such as the psalms, and they're both dealing with the same thing, is that the so-called secular poetry points to what I am talking about, it points to the depth. Devotional poetry doesn't point to it, it just takes you and throws you into this scene and then starts. Think about this while I read old number 77.

I cried aloud to God, I cried to God, and he heard me. In the day of my distress I sought the Lord, and by night I lifted my outspread hands in prayer. I lay sweating and nothing would cool me. I refused all comfort. When I called God to mind, I groaned; as I lay thinking, darkness spread over my spirit. My eyelids were tightly closed and I was dazed and could not speak. My thoughts went back to times long past. I remembered the years I had forgotten, all night long I was in deep distress, and as I lay thinking my spirit was sunk in despair. "Will the Lord reject us forevermore and

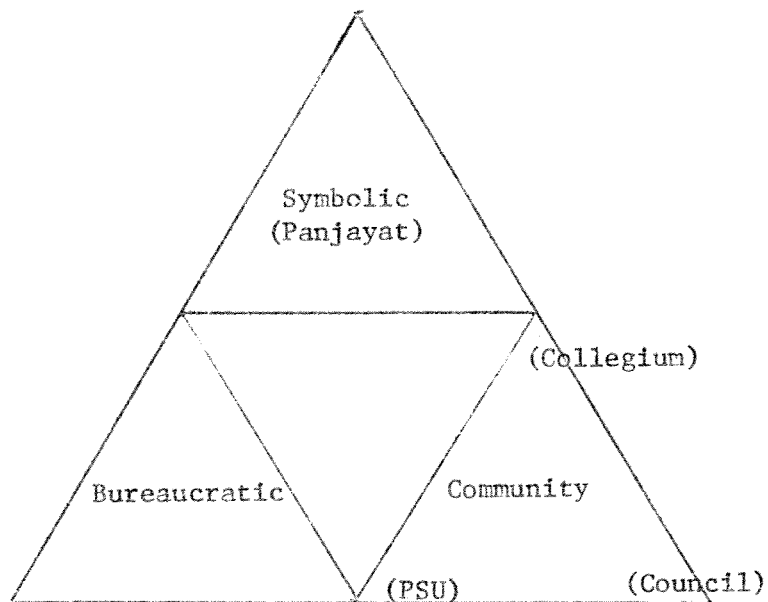
never again show his favor?" I cried. Has his unfailing love now failed us utterly, must his promise time and again be unfulfilled? Has God forgotten how to be gracious? Has He in anger withheld his mercy from us? Has his right hand lost its grasp? Does it now hang powerless, the arm of the Most High? But then O Lord, I call to mind thy deed, I recall thy wonderful acts in times gone by. I meditate upon thy work, and muse on all that thou hast done. O God, thy way is holy; what god is so great as our God? Thou art the God who doest miracles. Thou hast shown the nations Thy power. With thy strong arm Thou didst redeem Thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. The waters saw thee, O God, they saw thee and writhed in anguish, the ocean was troubled to its depths. The clouds poured water, the skies thundered, thy arrows flashed hither and thither. The sound of thy thunder was in the whirlwind. Thy lightnings lit up the world, thy earth shook and quaked. Thy path was through the sea, thy way through mighty waters, and no man didst mark thy footsteps. Thou didst guide thy people like a flock under the hand of Moses and Aaron. I cried aloud to God, I cried to God and he heard me.

Now, I want to talk a little bit about polity. But it's not that, it's something else. You know that as of July 1st we start the last year of this four year plan. The next four year plan will not just happen. In July of 1972, as a whole order, we've got to plan. But we've got to begin to think together before that. Let me rehearse our history a little bit. Think this time in 12 year spans. We think about ourselves, and have for years, as actually beginning in 1940. This was the Awakening, and even those of you who weren't born in 1940, that was your awakening. One of the crucial lectures has the phrase in it, "Our time discovered that the bottom had no bottom." That was your awakening. And then for the next twelve years, from 1952 to 1964, was a period of preparation. During that time we first moved in on the Elite of that time--those were in the universities. That's where we began to get on top of the mind of the elite. Then the next four years we worked to get on top of the situation of the Church.



And then the next four years we tried to get on top of the world of which we are a part. You can see the courses developing through that time. I don't know what to call the present twelve years, but something like the Building. You can see that this building could not have been done if the previous work had not been done. The first four years we were out to forge the concept of the Cadre, the pioneering group, that out-on-the-edge group. The four years we're in now we're dealing with the Movement. That's why last summer was such a joy and such a shock at the same time. We've held the next four years, 1972 to 1976, with the category, the World. You have to hold the categories of the future just as much as you have to hold the past in categories. I suspect that these next 4 years is also going to deal with Historical Order, and you can almost see how that's beginning to fall in place. Now what I have to talk about this morning has to do with looking towards that.

I'm going to start with our polity construct, and you know that it's a dynamic between the symbolic, the aristocratic or bureaucratic, and the community at large. It is not any one of these, but is a dynamic. We are,

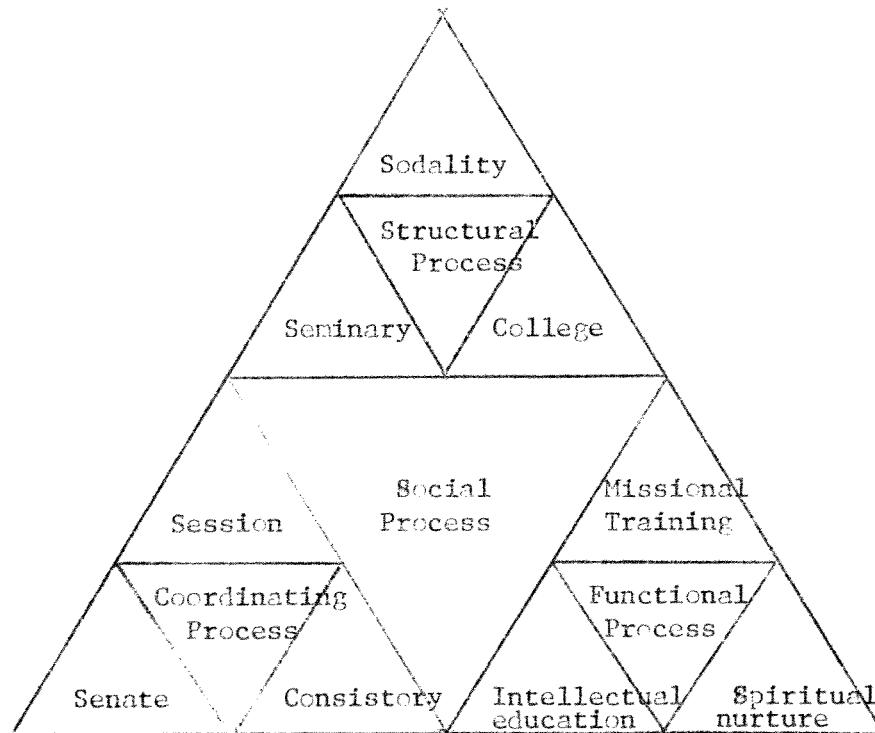


I'm sure, consensed in the point of view that there can never be a hierarchical structure here nor a bureaucratic structure, both of which are gone in our time. We're not ready to work out the dynamic between these yet. The symbolic, with the Panchayat, is coming along, I think, very well. This is not an easy matter. I sometimes think that if we come off with this, where the symbolic power of this place, before I die, gets transferred off of me, we're going to be a wonder. But don't any of you who are still playing Sunday School games think this is an easy matter. It is not an easy matter. And if you don't believe it, one day you take a trip over to Scotland and look at Iona Community and see what happened there. That's extremely difficult and there's going to be a lot more pain before it's done. Now, clarity on the community had better come a little later. We hold this at the moment with Collegium, PSU's and Councils but that is not clear.

The time has come to look at the bureaucratic. No hurry about it. I figure that in August we begin to take this out of mothballs, and anybody knows that the Presbytery (Session, Consistory, and Senate) has been "Mickey Mouse" for three years. I worked hard to keep the Presbytery from having any power whatsoever, until we came along the way with it. Now, the time has come to begin to work on this. If that is in your mind, (and I don't want to go back and rehearse it all) let me point to the kind of thing I have to think about when I start working in that area. What I am doing this morning is nothing except to give us enough of a common batch of mustard seeds that all of us can begin to think in this area. I am frightened in moving here. I was frightened in moving into the symbolic, too. Wouldn't it be terrible if, without knowing it, we would fall back into some kind of a bureaucratic outfit? That is why, though we take the Presbytery out of mothballs, the Presbytery is nothing, and must always remain nothing. The way I have to come at that is to be sure that this is grounded in humanness. I call that first of all the Functional Process. What I am doing now may unblock a certain area in the social vehicle that has blocked us for three or four years, the social triangles. Now, what I mean by this is that the process down underneath the process down underneath the process is the only thing finally which you are concerned about. So I call this the Functional Process. Within any body, particularly an intentional body like ourselves, but within any body, there is the process of intellectual education, spiritual nurture, missional training. That is the going-on-ness in our community that the Presbytery

has to do with, or without which a Presbytery is a joke. You can use other language, but if the community as a whole does not develop radical lucidity, internalized discipline, and tactical prowess, it cannot be a dynamic manifestation of the sociality of humanness. This process is the only important thing.

The second aspect of this dimension of community life I am calling at the moment the Structural Process. This has to do, in principle, with the family, a fraternity, a nation, but my mind is on us at the moment. You are pretty clear that Structural Process refers to the structures that are necessary for the Functional Process to operate. I am beginning to get hold of a relationship between dynamics and structures. They are inseparable. We call the corresponding structures at the moment by the names of Seminary, College, and Sodality, backward names. The Functional Process does not go on if you do not have corresponding social structures. Yet the structure is never the important thing. Relative to the function, it is nothing. Where you get perversion and reductionism is when people get to keeping the structures going, rather than using them that the process may live.



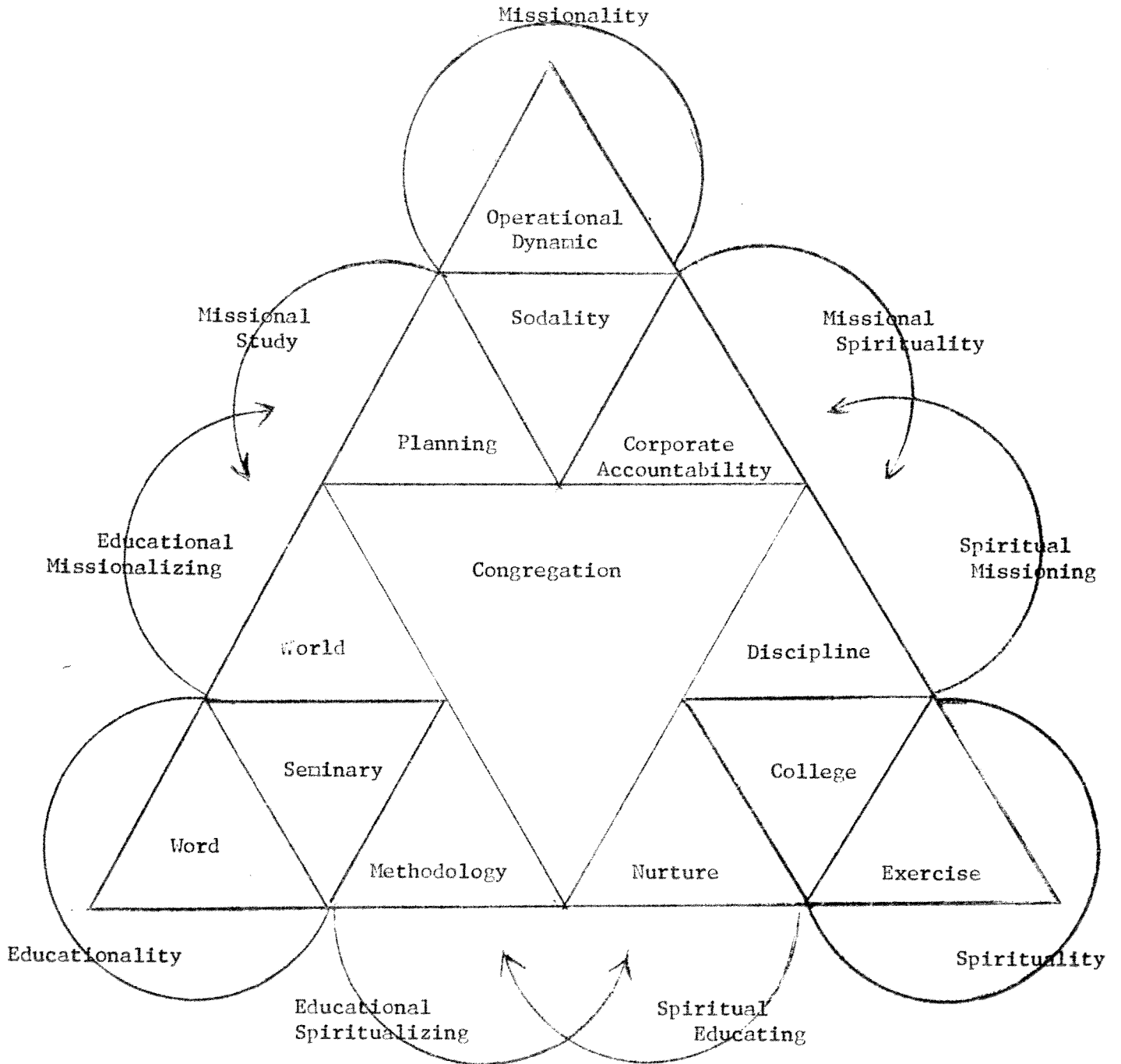
Now, and only now, do you come over to the bureaucracy.

I haven't got a good word. But I am clear that it does not run the Structural Process, and does not run the Functional Process. I am calling it the Coordinating Process. The function is to see to it that the Functional Process (education, training and nurture) breathe through the Structural Process (the seminary, sodality, and college). Call it motivation, call it direction, call it hedging it in, or whatever you want. You can begin to see when we work with the dynamic that the basic set of triangles does not define what any one of these actually does. You only do that when you begin to get dynamical sociology articulated relative to the whole construct. Do you see that? But you have to get this construct built before you can work on that. You have to talk about what the Coordinating Process does only in its dynamical relationship with the structures and their impact upon the Functional Process. At the moment, we call the coordinating bodies by backward terms. We have the Senate, the

Consistory and the Session. This corresponds in each case with the other triangles in the same position, so that you complete your rational construct and are beginning to be ready to work upon the dynamic that will show what each one must do in its relationship with the other two. I want to point out again: I think that maybe we are fooling pretty close to solving a problem that is there in the New Social Vehicle. What I am interested in at the moment is releasing the Structural Process, or strengthening it, bringing more intentionality relative to the whole thing.

Seminary. Sodality. College (one time we called this the society. It was known as the triple S brand). To invent some backward words, you remember in dynamical sociology that a circle drawn at the end of a triangle means . . . the triangle itself, or the triangle in relationship to the whole dynamic. I am going to call the dynamic of the Sodality missionality. By missionality, I mean developing the prowess, whereby effective, not efficient, mission happens. I am going to call the dynamic of the Seminary educationality, the process where depth lucidity occurs that makes possible both experience of the deeps and radical engagement in history. If I were working in the New Social Vehicle at the moment, having to do with education, there is where I would shove in terms of what education is. I am going to call the dynamic of the College spirituality. If these processes do not define what it means to be human at the bottom, they are wrong. I am not interested at the moment whether the words are right or wrong, but that needs to get said.

I scarcely have to remind you that the dynamics within the Seminary have to do with education relative to the Word, education relative to the world, and then methodology. I suppose that you are aware of all of this. These correspond to knowing, doing and being, just as the Seminary, Sodality and College as a whole correspond to knowing, doing, and being. Within the College the functions are nurture (education), discipline, and exercise, the actual participation in the symbolic act that enables you to be what that participation is in the



actual goingness of life. Within the Sodality is your planning, your corporate accounting, and what I am nowadays calling the operational dynamic—what is to be done in the mission, the reporting, that kind of thing.

I have to go back. We are in the fourth year of radical experimentation in this area. What we have accomplished, you wouldn't believe since we first set up our colleges. We moved from the experiment with the college, to the Ecclesiola, and now are moving to the experiment with the Congregation. One thing that a body like us has to do is to be sure that we are planning way beyond the movement. Not that we are trying to direct the course of that movement, though that happens also. But when the movement is ready to move, there has to be somebody who has done the research that gives them some kind of a tool, though that is blunt, to begin to move on. And I say this to those who got so sick of going to College and Ecclesiola and this kind of thing that you wanted to vomit in the middle of the night. We could no more have the Local Congregation Experiment across this world than we could personally fly to the moon, if this experimentation had not been done. We don't need very much people coming and saying that the fruit of our suffering has showed itself, but once in a while it doesn't hurt to do that. That experiment has been so successful, that we are ready to throw this into a larger context.

This means that the pole of the Seminary is now ready to show itself. This has been the weakest part of our experiment because we bracketed it. We knew so much about the Seminary, we couldn't see we didn't know much about the College. For 12 years we were nothing but Seminary. The skill we have there is unbelievable. Order training, which for two years we have worked on to bring together the wisdom of the past, has to be the basic function of the seminary dynamic. Also the Academy, and certainly, in the Corporate Reading Research Project across the Order we have another dimension of this that is going to rock the Church. I say to myself, even if the book reading this quarter fails, the experiment has not failed. Something is there, ready to go. This means that the Seminary is ready now to stand on its own bottom. We will pull that out of anything that has to do with the College and the Ecclesiola.

Now the Sodality. We have a job to do to pull together the work that the Ecclesiolas and certain PSU's and Councils in the last two years have done relative to the Sodality. But what the Sodality is has become extremely clear. It is ready to be pulled out of its immediate relationship to the College.

It has come clear that a Division, that is a Division, is a Sodality. If your Division is not a Division but a construct that keeps you from going to pot like bailing wire on a thresher, then you are not a Sodality. But a Division that is a Division is a Sodality. This leaves the College clean to go about its business of being a College. We are operating out of a time design here that is rather amazing, as I look at it. Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday—Seminary, Sodality, and College. Tuesday, you have Seminary. If it works the way I think it is beginning to work, we are going to have something there. On Wednesday you have your weekly Division meeting (I want to come back to that in a moment), and then on Thursday, your College. It means that the word Ecclesiola is no longer applicable to what is on Thursday night now, but is applicable to all of this. And it is not applicable to some meeting. It is applicable to the functional process here. Therefore, I began to realize that the Local Congregation was not something that was gathered, but that I personally was the Local Congregation wherever I was—sitting on the toilet,

digging ditches—I was the Local Congregation. So when you see it is rooted in humanness, you see that the Seminary is wherever anyone is who is a spirit man. And the Sodality, the same and the College the same. Let's call the overall dynamic the Congregation, for in a highly practical way we are using ourselves as the guinea pigs for what those auxiliary priors are going to need in October. They are going to need a kind of feel after the interior dynamic of a total local Congregation. This is why we have to do something now and not wait till August. That is a fine time design.

If the College or the Sodality is by itself, you do not have any Congregation. Now is the time when you have to begin to get an interrelationship between all three. How is the College nothing save in a dynamical relationship with the Seminary and Sodality. How in practice are these held together? That is the statement of the problem we are researching.

I want to say a word, but I am going to use high abstraction. This means that within the Sodality, the fundamental operating rubric is missionality. It is not mission, it is developing the prowess for corporate effectiveness in accomplishing tasks. But the Sodality is the place where missional study is going on, or it is not a Sodality. That is the education pole. First of all you have to have utter theological clarity about your task, then you have to have utter practical clarity, or worldly clarity about your task. In relationship to the College, you have to have missional spirituality. This is where I am excited. You see, for years around here, I ran the Seminary. For years I ran the College. I don't know that I ever ran a division. When I was running the Collegium, in terms of the dynamic, of course, I was running a division. But, in Experimental Division, bulldozer that I am, I just sort of usurped this in there last year to find out what it would mean to have a division just breathe with spirituality. You have an impossible concrete task to be done. You should see when a new person comes in there. They cannot stand, at first, that you are not frantically running around the table collating papers, or filling in little boxes or something. Our approach is to take it easy with discontinuity until the artistic picture comes clear. Then we are capable of staying up all night and next day too. You don't get what I call creative goof-off just by deciding you are going to goof-off. Here is where the spirituality has to penetrate. My picture is that the Colleges are downstairs in those seminar rooms and the fumes begin to come up into the division meetings upstairs and we sniff and we have our spirituality. Here is where the psalms have been invaluable to us, here is where the scripture reading has been invaluable, here is where the spirit conversation has been invaluable, and without that kind of missional spirituality, the miracles—and we have created miracles in our division—would never have been there.

You do not have a Sodality by a bunch of businessmen coming in and looking over the budget of the local church and then going home. That is not a Sodality. It may be a committee meeting.

The relations between the College and Sodality and the College and Seminary are Spiritual Missioning, and Spiritual Educating. This is where you do devotional study. But that is not the Seminary. That is a nurture job. Sure you study Teresa, or work with Teresa. Then, the relations between the Seminary and College and the Seminary and Sodality are Educational Spiritualizing and Educational Missionalizing. Those are high abstractions. I believe that you also have to have the interrelationship of the knowing dynamics, the



interrelationship of the doing dynamics and the interrelationship of the being dynamics. Until we get these dynamics, we are not going to know about the inner breathing or vitality of the renewed local congregation as a group.

I am interested in the Divisions at the moment, or the Sodality. That is where our emphasis has to be. For a long time we have been relaxed about division and have emphasized sectors and units. Now it has to be the division as a part of the experiment. Those division meetings have to be white-hot. We have to get to the bottom of what the dynamics mean. The meetings have to be living, breathing, they have to have spirituality, they have to have intellectual depth, they have to be rigorous, they have to begin to figure out their formats in terms of the interior dynamic and how these are related in a particular meeting.

Another thing, of course, is happening. Collegium as we used to know it can never be again at Order Base. Now it is not the place where we have knock-down-and-drag-outs, where we intimately and thoroughly pick the mind of each other. Its function is changed. It is more like the temple construct in the model of the Local Church. It is almost like we are moving to multiple collegiums, that is the Sodality. But I would want to insist that though we failed many times, the collegiums we had in the past were alive and shoved the mission. That is what these have to do, not this kind of nonsense in which some jerk who is the head of it sits down at 4:30 in the morning and wonders what he is going to do. No. This means you have to recapture symbolism. I never want to hear this quarter anybody saying that your outfit is going to meet in sectors or units. Every morning we meet as a division after breakfast, if only for three minutes, and I would like for you Permeation people to think out how you might do this, even if you have to get out in the courtyard and "throw a kiss to Jesus." You need to get yourself moving into the day as a Sodality and not as some other thing. Those of you that are consumed with efficiency--you won't understand this; this will burn you up. But if you are interested in effective impactment in history, then you will find a way, even Permeation.

Another little item. I notice people in the kitchen in the morning who are going to work and not coming to breakfast. Breakfast is our symbolic meal. Our basic principle is that nobody takes a job anywhere who has to leave before 7:30. Principles are made to be broken but no individual breaks them. If there is anyone here who has a job where he cannot be at breakfast, you in the Permeation division together ought to make the decision to break that rule and not that individual. I think that you ought to try very seriously to find them another job--before they quit their present one, I might say--a job where they don't have to leave early. Rules are made to be broken, but you break rules; you don't do what any one of us feels like doing at the moment. I don't know how you can work this out but I hope you find a way. Now it is time to quit and this is just my introduction.

We are going to pass out sheets listing the priors, etc. We have to have a name for the symbolic leaders of a division for any given quarter. I suspect in the ancient monasteries we called them Deans. Maybe we ought to recover that. (My title as Dean of The Ecumenical Institute does not have anything to do with this.) Maybe the symbolic leaders of the Divisions ought to be called Deans. It is going to take a quarter before we get around to that. Maybe we ought to call the heads of the Seminary Tutors. I don't like

Rabbi here. Some of you ought to look into some other ancient language. For the College, it is Priors. And in this dynamic at the moment, the colleges are primal, they are first, I mean they are first. And I make no bones about it. I would like to kick some of our priors who don't have guts to be a prior. And I even see that this boy scout business of passing around the opportunity to sit at the front is going on. No to that. There are only two priors, the first and the second. The second's job is to see that the first comes off--period--and to become the first when the first isn't there. The other two priors are not priors; we gave them the title of auxiliary priors. We have to get that clear. Then we have to discover what it means to be a community that is obedient unto God Almighty, and therefore knows how to help make the symbols of that obedience come off, not for their sake but for the sake of us as a whole body. Then, on these Divisions and so on we will talk later. And in August, God have mercy on us all, we have to hone, we have to get further clarity on our experiment for the last year of this four year plan, so that we are ready to move in terms of an historical order for the next four years.

I asked Fred Buss when he called yesterday if he remembered when he was a little boy down in Texas (you know Fred wouldn't have been caught dead in a prayer meeting), when he used to go to prayer meeting every Wednesday night. I asked if he could remember people standing up and saying, "Will you pray for me? Will you pray for me?" He put that silly chuckle on the other end of the line. Then I reminded him that when we were first beginning to teach Bultmann's paper and you have to have other words for care, the anxiety, the dread, that one of the ones we had was the "prayfurs." In certain church communities, people would stand up and say, "I've got the 'prayfurs'." Do you know what that means? Well, I have the "prayfurs," and if any of you are "prayfur" people, I wish you would pray for me. Then, let us see if we can't find out more and more what it means to pray for one another and then to make petitionary prayers for the order itself.

JVM