

TRAINING

The INTERNATIONAL/SEMINAR, JULY 1967, AT THE ECUMENICAL INSTITUTE: CHICAGO
THE NURTURE OF THE LABORATORY CULTURE HOMINUS ECCLESIASTICUS

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Introduction

SIX

On July 1, 1967, nearly ~~five~~ ^{SIX} hundred men, women and children from around the nation and the world assembled for the International Training Seminar sponsored by the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago. They were hosted by the citizens of 5th City, a community of responsible citizens in the heart of Chicago's West Side Negro ghetto. Together, participants and 5th City residents literally ~~X~~ "took their lives in their hands" in order to give themselves over to the possibility of a new style of life for urban humanity around the globe. They were not merely visionary dreamers, although of course, they had to be that, too! Instead they were primarily middle class people who had become aware that they, and all those like them, would determine the shape of the future, either intentionally or by default, and they had chosen the former alternative.

They came knowing that the process of history had something akin to its own objective dynamic. And they came not to watch but to participate, knowing that this was the only ~~way to~~ ^{really} learn. Most had already moved beyond the conventional attitudes of "do-good-ism." Unlike the do-gooders, these were people who understood that the ~~the~~ urban ghetto situation would change them in a measure fully equal to their ability to change it.

From beginning to end, everything about the month was taut. Schedules were packed tight, and facilities, sleeping quarters, seminar rooms, were packed even tighter. Participants found their minds becoming ~~packed~~ ^{nearly overloaded} with new data, new insights, and they struggled to pack in even more, knowing that they would soon be called upon to share their knowledge with others. Nor did the threat of riots in Chicago, hovering somewhere in the back of everyone's mind, do much to relax already tense nerves. But it was a superb thing to see that almost everyone was able to receive the fact that this was just the way things had to be if the Mission, both immediate and long-range, were to be accomplished.

In short, the month of July was incredible and absurd.

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~~SUMMER 1967~~~~THE NURTURE OF A LABORATORY CULTURE; HOMINUS ECCLESIASTICUS~~*Nature of the Event;
The Source of the Deed.*

~~But~~ the decision to alter the course of history is always, in the first instance, an absurd decision. For to modify historical trends means to modify the very social structures and cultural authorities which define what is absurd and what is reasonable. To modify the historical trend is always an absurd decision made by absurd people—absurd in that they sense themselves to be somehow at odds with the existing social and cultural order. No one else could make such a decision. ~~because~~ Absurdly, the sense of absurdity is the only significant motivating drive for progress, improvement, evolution or for any form of sustained, directed human change.

The decision to alter the direction of history is also absurd in the sense that it is impossible. Those who have the political, economic or social power to change history are usually reasonable people who are concerned to see that absurd people do not share their power.

But the absurdity of the absurdity arises when absurd people make the absurd decision together, to alter the direction of history on behalf of all the reasonable people in the reasonable world. ~~For it necessarily requires~~ ^{only} absurd people ^{can see} ~~to perceive that~~ beyond every reasonable thought and deed ^{to the} ~~is~~ the final absurdity of ~~the~~ Mystery, ~~which is~~ the substance of history itself, the Absurdity which is both Author and Terminus of every act. Only ^{are} ~~the absurd man~~ is capable of living before that final reality and living creatively in relation to it. In the movement of history, the scales of reason and absurdity frequently cross.

International Training Seminary

Summer '67, ^{the} July training program of the Ecumenical Institute; Chicago, was born of absurdity. Conscious of the impossibility of the task, the Institute faculty set about the training of very ordinary men and women in the theory and methodology of social change. Aware of the apparent necessity of political and economic power, it sought participants from the most ignored and undervalued institution in 20th Century cultural life, the Church. Sensitive to the absurdity of every historical deed before the Final Mystery, ^{of life} they sought to give freedom to all who came by calling for total dedication to the utter absurdity of

the deed itself. Summer '67 was designed to create a social movement to bring on the new life of Universal Man.

Sensitized to a fine edge by the increasing number and mounting power of the tensions of 20th Century life, participants came from across the nation and around the globe. They came as lucid cynics and naive dreamers, as dedicated Churchmen and battle scarred social actionists, as enlightened conservatives and tired liberals. There were few who came out of very clear motives, but at some level of thought, everyone was seeking for some meaningful way of relating himself to the critical events of 20th Century life. They shared in corporate living, ⁱⁿ common symbols of their relation to each other and the world, common study and planning, and common work and action. And slowly, sometimes almost imperceptibly, they moved toward a unity of understanding and mission.

These were the absurd people, assuming responsibility for the absurd deed of our time. There were no cheap miracles, but only the miracles of hard planning and work. But a spirit, The Spirit, if you like, was emerging. And finally, it is the Spirit which changes history. Nearly every moment of the month was intentionally planned, of course. ^{All} ~~we~~ ^{do} understand the burden of freedom which makes us responsible for everything that occurs. But everyone also ^{do} understand perfectly that the reality which one plans and the actualized reality are seldom, if ever, the same. It can ^{hardly} ~~never~~ be otherwise, for the form and content of reality are known to men only as they struggle to bring their own plans and intentions into being. The reality of Summer '67 will be known only as those who took part in it return to pick up their own burdens in their own situations.

There are two general areas which roughly delineate the activity of ^{the} Summer '67 ^{Training Seminar}. We can speak of them as 'Missional Task Training,' and as 'Training in the Mission-Enabling Life.' The one deals with the practices of action model construction and execution, the other with the style of life which understands that life itself is mission. Such a distinction, of course, has no real meaning. Its only value is to give a way of grasping the total scope of the activity with our minds. For if one understands that the Church is mission, and if he understands that he is the Church, the task and the life are a single continuity. ~~Let us therefore realize that~~ ^{Even} as we talk of one, we are ^{of} ~~talking about~~ both.

The Mission-Task Training

There are not many left today, in the Church or out of it, who are not aware that the time for theorizing has past and that the time for action is upon us. The theological revolution has come—and gone. The escape from practice into theory, it is now clear to all, is only an escape. Every individual who participated in Summer '67 knew that, yet those who bore the teaching responsibility unanimously agreed that the decision to appropriate it was the most difficult and painful of the month. ^{But} ~~Yet~~ all agreed ~~that~~ it was the inescapable decision. It lay at the root of every issue raised. Riots sweeping across the nation only served to make the direct nature of the address even more pointed.

Nor was it much easier to appropriate the fact that it was the local congregation which necessarily had to provide the troops and the resources to carry out the local mission. Some struggled long and hard to overcome their tendency to use the local Church congregation as a whipping boy for their personal difficulties, and to move beyond this to an appreciation of the gift to history that it is.

The formation of local cadres, to operate in and through the local congregation, was the most pressing demand in every situation. Teachers, college students and parish trainees were equally clear ^{that this} ~~that~~ would be their first major task. Individual self-sacrifice in the tasks of changing educational structures, building colleges and universities capable of comprehensive education, and the enabling of justice on the local community level had been tried, and it had not proven adequate.

Models had to be built, models of all kinds: models of the cadres, models of local congregations, models of communities described as urban, sub-urban and ex-urban, models of school districts and school boards, models of higher education and models of curriculum of every sort. Clergymen from Seattle struggle with teachers from Pennsylvania and students from Wisconsin to learn through first hand encounter what it meant to build a grid of area problems, resources, forces and potential structures of change. Models were built and models were torn apart and rebuilt again. Sometimes sections of the model would emerge as self-evident, while at another point the right construct would spring into place only after hours of seemingly fruitless grubbing. But the task continued, literally night and day, for four whole weeks.

Providing the necessary counter-balance to the painful intellectual grind was the encounter between international seminar participants and the flesh and concrete, the sound and smell of Chicago's Fifth City. Mere observation^{*} of the community was not permitted. Participants met the community face to face by dealing with its problems, even if only in ^{symbolic} ~~token~~ fashion. Many learned, apparently for the first time, that real hospitality was not restricted to white suburbia, that education was not all that determined the greatness of a man, that slum ghetto dwellers could take real pride in their community and assume significant responsibility for its welfare. They painted houses, they repaired porches and stairs, and they made price comparisons between the inner-city and suburban communities to lay the foundation for a program of consumer protection. They began exploratory investigations to determine the feasibility and the approach to a possible expansion of Fifth City services. Everywhere in the sixteen block area their numbers and their efforts were highly visible.

Interaction between International Seminar participants and 5th City residents was frequent and high-powered. They were entertained in numbers in homes throughout the area. They worked and planned together area residents, and when the working day was over they shared in recreation. Perhaps the most outstandingly dramatic encounter came through participation in the 5th City Festivals. All day long, seminar participants worked on decor, sound, lighting, and when the work was completed, the Negro community residents poured in, literally by the hundreds to feast^{entertain} and be entertained. Sometimes personal relationships developed, and sometimes not, but White and Black cultures, each unmistakably proud of its own, met in complementary contrast. They celebrated the primordial heritage of each of the great racial groups of the world. When the festivities were over, the teams went to work to tear down all that they had built during the day. In a flash, there was nothing left. The symbols combining unity and contrast appeared almost from nowhere, and when they had done their job, they vanished.

Fifth City became a sign. As a living demonstration of the power of decision harnessed to a model, it spoke of the strange reality of life that no situation is without its own unique possibilities. It left upon every seminar participant the clear demand to forgo every excuse and to pick up his own model of society and to live before it without reservation.

Not surprisingly, participants in the International Seminar found it somewhat easier to deal with the issues of regional development. All but two of the twenty-four regions around the nation were well represented. Again there was the dreadful struggle to build models, grid the problems and resources of each region and area, and develop a feasible time line for action. Here, however, the decisions were less reluctant, the commitment to build, more firm. Discussions dealt with the question of how structures could be established for the training of 10,000 persons each year in each of the twenty-four regional training centers

Out of the endeavor to develop pedagogical clarity and skill, there came the awareness that there was no longer a question of developing individually capable teachers to support the work of the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago. Instead, the discussion began to move in terms of the emergence of regional faculties, each with its own center of operations, its own competent leadership and its own sustaining and enabling resources.

In addition to the bare necessity for training sheer numbers of people in the theological foundations and the cultural vision, the teachers experienced a sense of urgency in the sessions in pedagogy that had never been present before. Many individuals had returned from their own encounter with Religious Studies I and Cultural Studies I to participate in local cadres or regional meetings, and found themselves rapidly deflated by the inability of the group to move ^{firmly} in any ^{positive} ~~effective~~ direction. They had learned that the "yes but. . ." response to R.S. I was not adequate. Meetings would desolve into debates over prior questions of theology or method, and effective action was impossible. They learned that pedagogy was not reducable to 44 hours of intensive training, and that instead, the demand was to be a pedagogue in any situation every hour of every week. And they came to experience the fact that the pedagogical stance is not a showman's gimmick, but the necessary stance toward life in a world where action demanded ³ that someone assume the role of authority in order to enable creative action. Intellectual clarity was critical, but equally critical was the stance of the free man of faith.

~~Many individuals discovered the advantages of corporate effort in a new way.~~ Through the necessity of preparation for the pedagogy sessions under condtions of pressure and strain, many discovered the advantages of corporate effort in a new way. Together, participants often struggled with one another long into the night to gain common

wisdom on particularly troublesome issues. And out of that kind of corporate struggling there emerged a commonness of mission which could never have come in any other way.

The mission-task training was a thing of many dimensions. Faculty and participants alike found it exciting to witness the growth of comprehensive intentionality as free men of faith struggled to become the living image of their own decisions. For the social vision and pedagogical clarity had finally to be united in the understanding that life as the Church would be about the frequently laborous, monotonous job^{of} actualizing that vision and clarity in practical, workable social structures. There was no one who took part in summer '67 who was not aware, as the Apostle Paul was aware, that many would die before he saw the coming of the Kingdom of God.

Training In The Mission-Enabling Life

It is only within the context significant mission demanding bitter sacrifice is it possible to treat corporate living and the corporate life style as anything but a romantic visionary's folly. Advantages and benefits of the common life need almost to be underplayed lest they serve as a foundation for perverted pious sentiment. Yet having said just that much, one must turn around and say that without a recovery of the power of the common life, the church cannot conceivably be the Church. The month of training in the International Seminary provided an intensive experience of communal life centered on the mission obtainable no where else and in no other way. But always the consciousness was maintained that the common life was for the sake of the mission--and not the other way around. Through the common symbolic life of worship and reflective meditation, awareness of this was continuously dramatized and re-inforced. And through the common life of discipline, the symbolic life was fulfilled in reality. Neither has meaning or purpose without the other, yet they are distinct.

All summer seminar participants came with a basic understanding of the dramaturgical nature of worship. This month, however, they took part in experiments moving in the direction of cultic worship. In part, these experiments stemmed from the sensed need to recover the consciousness of "Mystery" in religious worship. The Liturgical movement of the church

helped to move us a long way in this direction, but finally it ran out of steam precisely because it did not occur ^{within a} ~~outside of the~~ clear context of missional thrust. Yet even within this context, the struggle has been to maintain the humanity of worship in a polar relationship to the mystery of worship. That is to say, there must be not only dramatic participation in human life in order to hold ourselves in the missional identity, but there must also be dramatic participation in the dimension of Divine Life. Knowing this, however, no one can say exactly what it means. To speak of mystery at all means almost by definition we are speaking of something that ~~ion that/XXX~~eludes rational grasp.

And so, more than seven hundred people gathered each morning at 6:30 under the clear-story windows of a rented warehouse in order to experiment, searching after an experiential encounter with the non-rational dimension of human existence. Always the liturgy of the corporate morning office remained a liturgy. ² But into it and around it were woven the cultic forms of the chant, the dance, non-thought-communicating verbal symbols, several patterns of rhythmic beat and even occasional spontaneous instrumentation. Physical participation through bodily sway, keeping of the rhythm with hands and feet, and even through uninhibited free dancing, was sought and encouraged. Yet everything that happened was contained within the rational discipline of the liturgical rite. The life tension of freedom and obedience in responsibility, everyone knew, was just as critical in dramaturgical worship as it is in the actual form and process of life itself.

Most found it painfully difficult, at first, to yield to the non-rationality of cultic worship. Toward the end of the seminar, however, one began to hear comments like; "I'm finding worship the high point of the day," or "How|ever will it be possible to live at home again without the power of corporate worship!" People began to find that the kind of freedom required of the best pedagogues in their ability to assume any necessary social role could, and in fact, had to be dramatized in the worship. They found that the sense of awe and dread conveyed through the mystery of worship operated continuously through the days and weeks to heighten sensitivity to all of the manifold levels and myriad details filling every moment. Through the worship, many began to learn what it could mean for one to make decisions about one's feelings toward this or that situational experience, rather than being victim to the psychologistic elevation of personal feelings to the status of demon-gods. In one sense, corporate worship was the International Seminar of Summer '67.

Working out the concretions of the common life, seminar participants found another area of rewarding struggle, developing the models for corporate and personal discipline. Here, in one way at least, practice proved easier than the model building. Teams of eight persons each were assigned to daily "obediencies", consisting primarily of janitorial responsibilities and meal set-up. The system worked extremely well, although members sometimes found it easier to work late at night, rather than take up valuable moments in the midst of hurried daily activities. The same task team assignments held for structures for Festival preparation and 5th City clean-up and maintenance. Those who came to the Ecumenical Institute for the month of July with any understanding of what was involved were thoroughly prepared for hard work and long hours.

What proved difficult and fearful was the task of working out the models for the discipline that would have to be assumed upon the return to "home" situations. For effective corporate discipline in the Church means the careful allocation of every moment of time in daily, weekly, monthly and yearly schedules. Dying intentionally could have no other meaning than the planned, as opposed to the random, expenditure of one's time. Participants were compelled to consider the claim of the mission on every aspect of life excluding none. They came to understand that the mission determined recreation as well as occupation, sleeping habits as well as working habits, structures of family justice as well as those of community justice, and it covered financial expenditures for the so-called "necessities" of life as well as philanthropic giving. They found that no magic made the family immune from the necessity of building models any more than effective cadres could grow and mature without carefully drawn models. Perhaps it was here that seminar participants really encountered for the first time the utterly offensive burden of the common life of the Church, in the amazing fact that it was precisely one's freedom that imposed the most rigid form of self-imposed bondage.

As the month of July wore on, it became evident to all, participants, faculty and even to those visiting from outside the community, that totally new images of what human life and style were all about were coming into being. A new and striking sense of seriousness began to come over the members of the group as they came to realize in practice the power of corporate life and thought and action. The transition from the Ecumenical Institute's

hot-house setting was going to prove hard not merely because it meant the lose of personal relationships, but because it meant the lose of the wealth of the corporate mind. Seminar members were not slow to appreciate the power which could come from the combined concentration of eight, thirty-two or ninty-six minds, or from the combined power of up to a thousand determined, bent backs. Those who saw what could come out of this kind of corporate venture, who saw what could come out of the combined free decisions of hundreds of people committed to a common model of the future, will never again be able to think or operate in quite the same way.

House Church meetings celebrating the Eucharist, and common meals with corporate conversation provided the supporting pillars and girders underlying the community life. In House Church seminar members learned what it meant to receive the Word of Grace from a colleague in the ritual accountability. They received both the threat and the promise implied in the liturgical acknowledgement that all is received, approved, accepted and open. And for a brief while, the attantion of the group was allowed to turn inward in order to regain strength for the outward surge. Corporate conversation at each meal focused group attention on strategic issues, and most found this necessary by way of keeping in touch with happenings in the larger community. Despite the fact that many may have forgotten its power, the insights of the Church Fathers are no lessvvalid today than they were over nineteen centuries ago on the importance of sharing food at the common table. Bonds between men seem most often to be forged on the basis of their utter contingency, and nowhere else is this symbolized quite so well as in the trice dajly ritual of eating food.

Some word needs to be said about the involvement of children in the Summer '67 seminar program. Nothing is harder for parents, and particularly those with samll children, to appropriate than the necessity of placing the lives of children, as well as those of adults, within the perspective of the Mission of the Church. Now that children are no longer the economic asset that they once were in the rural community life style, the tendency among middle and upper-middle class whites has been to elevate the children on illusory pedestals. It requires real insight to see that this is finally destructive of the lives of the children, as well as those of the parents. The missional community handles this by incorporating the needs of activity of children directly into the missional task. Programs of education

which, "God willing," lead to adulthood which is fully human, utterly intentional, comprehensive and future oriented, must begin immediately in the first weeks of a child's life. Parents in the International Seminar of Summer '67 had a taste of just what this would mean in the context of the local congregation. Beyond simply weathering the situation, most parents learned that their children were capable of bearing considerably more responsibility than they had ever dared to suspect, and in this sense, each family will be the better for the experience. As for the children, they will never forget the dedication of the skilled and talented teachers and leaders of youth activity, from the smallest babies in the I.E. Kwan to the older youngsters involved in the Jets program. Most of the children encountered for the first time in their lives that in many ways, it was they, and not the Negro youth of the ghetto community, who were suffering from cultural deprivation, despite any number of social and economic opportunities. And through the experience, they came to understand that they had a place and purpose in the Universe that they would otherwise have been long in perceiving.

The Future of the Movement

Faculty of the Ecumenical Institute frequently remarked on the new sense of collegiality with seminar participants around the nation which had never before been present. Gone forever was the sense of being a lonely bastion of awakened Churchmen restricted to the environs of Chicago, Illinois. Now that the initial breakthrough has occurred, everyone is looking forward to a year in which this newly awakened sense of collegiality can be expanded and built upon. Across the nation there will now be a substantial number of trained and competent pedagogues capable of assuming broad teaching responsibility. There is little question but that we can anticipate a significant increase in the strength and reliability of local cadres, and that regional organizations will begin to mature toward a relationship of parity with the Chicago Institute.

What is even more striking, however, is the emergence of the clear necessity to make what has been predominantly a nationally oriented program into a genuinely international thrust. We have always known, since the inception of the Spirit Movement, that in the world of our time, national problems and international problems can no longer be separated, in either theory or practice. The humanizing process does not take place within the confines

of national or even continental boundries. The leaders of the Spirit Movement have become aware that each local congregation needs to aprehend itself as an integral unity in a totally cosmopolitan process of historical development. The Fathers of the Church were never blind to this of course. Aquinas, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wesley all built ~~their movements~~ ^{toward the Church} ~~Univers~~ on the presupposition of ^a unified world under the rule of God. Even those responsible for the growth of the economic revolutions of the 19th Century operated out of this consciousness. The coming years will see the concretization of this awakened awareness in many surprising and exciting ways.

Several members of the Ecumenical Institute: Chicago address participants at the closing meal of an R.S.1 weekend in this way; "If one of us should happen to drop in on you, wherever you are, we will expect you to expect us to expect you to be the Church in whatever situation." That's an absurdity, of course. But every participant leaving Chicago from the Summer 1967 International Training Seminar of the Spirit Movement goes with the awareness that in his willingness to decide to execute the absurd deed resides the only hope for sanity in the post-modern world.