

A PROGRAM FOR THE TRAINING  
OF "LAYMEN OVERSEAS" TO BE  
THE CHURCH

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## I. The "Laymen Overseas" as the Church

Awakened churchmen, particularly in the West, for decades have been interested in and bewildered by "laymen overseas". A year ago in San Salvador I was overcome with a sense of the possibility of these laymen to be a new manifestation of the church in the post-modern world. The occasion was a conference of Union Churches covering a large area of Latin America. These union congregations are the church at work among the English-speaking people "overseas". They are smaller bodies of self-conscious western churchmen, surrounded by far larger groups of peripheral and latent churchmen, set in the midst of a still larger mass of non-churchmen all aliens in the land of their residence. The conference dramatized their potential corporate power, not only because of their numbers but especially because of their unique situation in the modern world. There is no longer any excuse for anything else than a destinal role for these churchmen. Both the worldwide cultural revolution and the radical revolution within the church, provide the climate in which the overseas laymen can well become a dynamic sign of the missional thrust required of the people of God in the post-modern world. And the whole church across the world is in desperate need of just such signs.

The great missionary movement of the 19th century, as all such human enterprises, has passed from the scene of history. The external occasion of this is our radically changed world, through the worldwide scientific, urban and secular revolutions. The broad social manifestation of this is the awakening of the peoples in the southern and eastern hemispheres who are determined that their unique gifts of humanness shall participate in creating the future of mankind. No longer will just one part of the globe be permitted to define the destinal existence of the rest. Here is the ground for the refusal of the rising peoples to allow missionaries to work in the open manner of the past. Increasingly and also rightly so, only the Christian non-professional directly engaged in creative social activity is permitted in their midst.

The internal contributing factor to the decay of the great missionary movement is the now fifty-year old movement for renewal in the church, present in the 20th century theological resurgence, in the ecumenical awakening, and in the worldwide lay movement that emerged after World War II. In all of this, the church has been forging a brand new functional image of itself as mission to the world. This is the image of the people of God as the perpetual revolutionaries in the human drama of civilization, those who give their lives wherever human need is present to forge new structures for human existence on behalf of all mankind. Here is the recovery of the Christ-deed which is the Christian Word. Such an image of operation has made it dramatically clear that there are no longer such things as established missionary fields. Everywhere is the arena of the mission. It has also clarified the fact that the layman executes the primary and front-line ministry that defines the church.

Both the cultural revolution and the revolution in the church have come together in focussing on the layman and his role. The layman overseas

and colloquies conducted on its campus in Chicago and throughout the urban centers of the United States. Through these years of practical experimentation, it has developed a body of condensed curricula and forged special teaching methodologies that enable the accomplishment, in the very brief span of a few days, what would normally require something like a year to do. The Institute is convinced that this approach of rigorous short-term study seminars is a fundamental strategy for the renewal of the church as mission to civilization. And of course this has implications for the church abroad.

Continuing efforts must be made to train "overseas laymen" before they go abroad. But the Institute is convinced that the major task must be carried out on-the-field, preferably after the person has been there long enough to experience the "cultural shock" and yet before he has lost the "cultural glow". First of all, the church cannot wait for a new generation of churchmen to go abroad even if it could train them beforehand. Secondly, save in rare exceptions, the layman before he goes is not capable of seeing the utter necessity of such training. Thirdly, until the layman has encountered the alien culture, he is not deeply prepared, psychologically or spiritually, to learn in the area of our concern. Fourthly, since the church is a social phenomenon, significant training must issue in the formulation of missional cadres in concrete missional situations. This can most effectively be accomplished in a specific geographical, socio-cultural area where persons will be associated with one another for a period of time.

The inclusive purpose of such international seminars then, would be to enable missional cadres among the laymen overseas. This broad intent requires preparing the participants to grasp and articulate their faith as 20th century men; sensitizing them to the underlying human images, concerns and questions of the peoples about them; enabling them to forge inclusive models of the post-modern world; equipping them to be the pioneer force in civilization as the people of God, all for the sake of building a world of humanness in radical obedience to the divine activity. This would represent the renewal of the church.

The practical consequences of such seminars and the impact of the issuing cadres can be multitude. As the disciplined church, they would be sacrificially concerned with the practical humanness of all men. They would assist their host nation to realize their unique gifts, well-being, and destiny in civilization. They would encourage, nurture, and support the mission of the national churches about them. They would be a sign of new relevant possibility to the enlightened missionaries in their area. They would importantly serve our own nation by overcoming the image of the ugly American. They would be a powerful example and force for renewal to the churches and congregations in North America and Europe as well as to the younger churches in every other land.

the need for and give themselves to the cause of training overseas laymen to be the church.

Each seminar is a single study construct dealing with the People of God in the Modern World, or what it means to be an authentic individual in the drama of history. Four areas will be covered: theology, culture, churchmanship with special concern given to understanding the socio-cultural climate and problems of the region in which the seminar is held. One segment deals with the limits, possibilities, and styles of human existence raising the issues of identity and vocation through the 20th century understanding of God, Christ, Spirit, and the Church. Another segment deals with the scientific, urban, and secular revolutions which define the post-modern world and provide our actual environment in terms of common sense, style, and symbols. In this broad context, the question of responsible citizenship and churchmanship at home and abroad are raised and discussed in depth. The following chart gives a general view of the areas covered.

THE THEOLOGICAL REVOLUTION	STUDIES IN CHURCH RENEWAL	THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION	STUDIES IN LATIN AMERICA
The Contemporary Meaning of The God-Relation	The New Image of the Church: People of God	The Scientific Revolution in Common Sense	The Primordial Images in Latin America
The Contemporary Meaning of The Christ-Event	The Inner Life of the Church: Worship & Study	The Urban Revolution in Human Settlement	The Existential Questions of Latin America
The Contemporary Meaning of The Spirit-Life	The External Task of the Church: Witness & Justice	The Secular Revolution in Depth Encounter	The Futuric Models for Latin America

The overall intent of the project has already been indicated. The intention in the seminars is to deliver the participant to be a free, decisive, critically intelligent, creative individual, significantly engaged in civilization as a determiner of the future. In the language of faith, the design is to enable him to do his own reflecting from the stance of faith upon the everyday events that constitute our personal and social existence for the sake of ministering unto all mankind. To this end, the study materials used are selected essays from the key theologians and secular minds of our times who have raised the issues and set the questions for the contemporary church and the post-modern world. The courses are not

### III. Latin America and the Church

The Ecumenical Institute believes that a most fertile soil for these international seminars is Latin America. This is not only because it is quite adjacent to the United States. Nor is it simply due to the large number of English speaking Churches there. These are important factors, but there is a deeper reason. The post modern cultural revolution has touched every aspect of human existence and every clime of the globe. The next dramatic outbreak of world wide import in this upheaval is most likely to be Latin America. More than a whole continent is already beginning to explode into the future. The destiny of mankind and the whole of civilization shall be radically effected by what happens in the south western hemisphere in the next few years.

Latin America has been a sleeping giant. The giant is now awakening. Other parts of the world, however steeped in stereotyped images of the Latin, must understand this. The stirring is political and economic, but most of all it is what must be termed cultural. For centuries the economic resources of Latin America have been siphoned off by other peoples in Western civilization for the sake of their well being and to the detriment of the Latin. Control of the industrial and natural resources enabled external powers to exert the kind of political influence within and without that maintained the social status quo over centuries. While other people grew and developed Latin America was strangled into inertia by both the great outside powers and by the favored few inside the nation. A gifted and potentially great people have been deprived of their birthright, to say nothing of the suffering and deprivation of countless individuals living and dead. However unperceptable to the greedy and blind, however fragmentedly and brokenly present, a leaven is working and no human force shall finally stifle this move toward the future of the Latin peoples. Subservient neither to the east or the west, they are a part of the emerging third political and economic force in the world of the future.

Even more significant than the economic and political rousement is the cultural stirring of the Southern American. He is distinctly participating with the rest of the world in the revolution in common sense of science. He is with all peoples responding to the urban revolution. He also is struggling with new practical images of the individual, family, country, and all other human relations. Most important is his growing awareness of his unique, unrepeatable gifts of humanness which are the product of the fateful merging of the Iberian and ancient American cultures. Enough here to say that it has to do most with a distinctive sense after and understanding of time, with its variety of fascinating faces and dimensions. Other peoples may feel after humanness in many ways; the Latins have a feeling of humanness in time. The increasing body of post modern literature has been emerging among the Latins for several decades which evidences a growing self consciousness as a distinct people, plus a determination to contribute that uniqueness to the future of civilization.