

QUARTER CENTURY OF SERVICE CELEBRATION  
THE INSTITUTE OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

July 25, 1979

Bishop James K. Mathews, The United Methodist Church, Washington D.C.

Mr. Chairman and friends, I have been asked to say a brief word. First of all, Grace is yours and peace, from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ. You expect me to greet you in those words, perhaps, but I might also greet you with the words, *Namaste*, or perhaps *Shalom*. I might even use that wonderful greeting from Southern Africa, *I see you*. What a marvelous insight into the human situation when multitudes of people experience themselves as never having been seen by their fellows in this world. To be seen is to be called into being, and that is an experience to which this Institute is devoted.

Now all of my life I have been confessing that I believe in the Communion of Saints. If that means anything then it means that there are far more persons present here tonight than those who are visible to us. I number among them, of course my brother, Joe, and a host of others.

I want to say "Happy Birthday" to you. I know that many other people would like to have been here. Some have already been mentioned, but I have received communications from Senator McGovern and Senator Hatfield. (I did manage to get both a Republican and a Democrat into that list). They have long been acquainted with the activities of The Institute of Cultural Affairs and The Ecumenical Institute.

I congratulate you upon these 25 years. It might seem that 25 years is not much of an expanse of time, and yet it is longevity, indeed, when it relates to the renewal of the Church, the recovery of primal community and the resurgence of local man. There are many competitors in this field and the wreckage of abortive efforts is strewn along the road. Twenty-five years, I repeat, is longevity.

I have followed this history. Twenty-five years ago this day The Ecumenical Institute came into being by action of the World Council of Churches in assembly in Evanston. It was modeled after the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland. I narrowly missed being present at the birth of this institution, but today I did converse with the person who was very much present when this institution was established. I talked on the telephone this afternoon with Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft who was then the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. He is an octogenarian and is still living in Geneva. I suppose that he stands out as number one among the ecumenists of our time. I reminded him of the distance travelled by The Ecumenical Institute and he asked me to bring you greetings. I wrote down these words as he spoke them to me: "Best wishes to a great ecumenical venture at a time when authentic ecumenical spirit and engagement are so greatly needed throughout the whole world." That greeting is from the Dean of Ecumenism.

The Order: Ecumenical consists now of 2000 men and women, and many more in the extended sense of the word in all the demonstration projects around the world and all those in Maharashtra. Forty-one years ago I went to live in Maharashtra. I was in Maliwada long before your enterprise was thought of, and I have been able to see the change over these decades, particularly in the recent years since you have been there. And so, this Order is global. I was present also when the first vision of your globality was established. In the year 1964 Joe and I took a trip around the world. I saw him dance on the brink of Victoria Falls. He is one of the many thousands of people who have danced in the ecstasy which our kind of world makes possible for people.

I have seen the history of the Institute through the first International Training Institute and all the rest that has happened down to this moment. I have told the story many times, in many settings, from the Archbishop of Canterbury to the Ecumenical Patriarch and to Cardinal Willebrandts. As people around here know, I sometimes say that if I tell that story one more time I am going to believe it myself. Yet here tonight I am telling it one more time, and I do believe it.

I think a "thank you" ought to be given to all of those who have been involved in this enterprise. I do not know who else is going to thank you so I will. Representing the institutional Church I want to say "thank you." And representing organized religion I will say "thank you." I am local man too, and on behalf of the billions of local men and women everywhere, since they are not here to say so themselves, may I be their surrogate and say, "Thank you, thanks be unto God for you."

For the key to it all is care, absolute commitment to care for all, everywhere. The task of this enterprise is where the time and place of our lives intersect. There the job is to be done. It is where the needs of humankind are met by those who care about those needs.

I was asked to say just a word about the visit to President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. About 18 months ago I was a part of a team from Chicago which went to Lusaka. We were most graciously received by President Kaunda, who is a great Christian humanist in the very best sense of the word. We wanted to launch a Human Development Project in his country. We have a flip book of pictures of the Human Development Projects that convinces me all over again every time I use it.

After I had leafed through only half of the pages he asked, "Well, what's stopping you? What's holding you back?"

We said, "Mr. President, we need your blessing, and if we get into trouble we need to know how to get to you. Then we need your help in finding the exact place."

He said, "You have them all." He pointed out his aides who were to do those things.

We concluded by my saying somewhat piously, "Mr. President, would you mind if we prayed?" I want to confess to you as a United Methodist Bishop I would have been willing to settle for standing there in his office with heads reverently bowed. He did not answer the question, but simply dropped to his knees. So we all dropped to our knees and prayed.

But we, too, must not spend too much time here tonight. As President Kaunda said to me, I repeat to you again, "What are you waiting for?"

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**Msgr. John Egan, Assistant to the President, University of Notre Dame.**

Almighty God, whom we dare to call our Father, we come this night to celebrate what You have done in and through us as members and friends of the Institute over a quarter of this century. We come with humble hearts to plead for Your blessing on our work, on our food and on all who made this night possible. In particular, we ask You to bless and give eternal repose to the noble soul of our brother Joseph Mathews, and to all the deceased members of our Order. Bless us as we rededicate ourselves to the world as signs of what human life can be because of Jesus' life, death, resurrection and the gift of the spirit.

When we stretch ourselves always to be people for others, we are reminded tonight that the times and circumstances in which we work are frightening. But for us, they must be exciting and challenging, for if You are with us, who can be against us? It is that confidence that gives meaning and hope to our lives.

As we beseech Your blessing, we must also thank You, our Father, for Your loving trust in us. In creation, You first clothed us with dignity and called us not things, but sons and daughters, and You saw that we were very good. You did not hesitate even then to offer what was most intimate to Yourself, a share in Your creative power. Thus, from the beginning, it has ever been our vocation to fashion this world and ourselves with our brothers and sisters everywhere in the image of Your love. And since today, as never before, Your work is in our hands, we members of this Institute join the whole of creation in all of our frailty and mystery, with all our races and peoples, and link hands and hearts around this bountiful table in doubt, in love, in risk, and in hope. We offer You thanks in a new way, not by being lifted out of what is being human, but by daring to be what we truly are — the work of Your loving hands, God-touched and frail, yet possessing a dignity beautiful beyond belief. Tonight, we humbly ask You to give us courage to continue Your work in our lives in the Institute and always to Your glory. To the glory of God, Amen.