

Joseph Mathews -- opening address of
the research assembly. July 5, 1970

We who are gathered here are those who love the church and if there is anyone in this assembly who does not love the church. Well now, loving the church is always a present thereness, always a concrete thereness. There are those who love the church as it used to be. They live in illusion. And there are those who love the church as they want it to be. They live in illusion. The only church you can love is the established historical church with all of its crumminess. If you don't believe that then I would never let you be one of my boys and you couldn't be my wife. They can't love me the way I used to be because I'm not that and they damn well can't love me the way they want me to be because I refuse to be it. Its just this crummy old fat man that they've go to love with all of my warpedness, all my perversions. When you love the church, you love it as it is or you don't love it. If there is anyone in this assembly who doesn't love the church, then by sad, fateful, unfortunate circumstances you showed up in the wrong place. Now that's not too distressing for you don't really have to face up to it nor need you confess it publically for you have a hell of a lot of other reasons for leaving. I think of the way you're stacked up in sleeping. I think of the food you're going to eat for the next four weeks. I think of the fact, and don't you dare laugh, that you are assembled in the most dangerous neighborhood in the United States of America. And by golly if you don't think that's a good reason for leaving, well then you ought to have a look at my subjectivity. If I had a hidden reason to leave like I hated the church I mean I could use that one immediately. Don't you laugh.

We who are assembled here are those who love the historical church as it is. And there are those who hate the church while they pretend to love the church both inside and outside the church who cannot understand this. But one day, shall it be 40 years from now, shall it be 100 years from now, shall it be a millenium from this moment, they'll understand that those who are assembled here loved the church. They'll not know who we are, They'll not remember our names but they'll recall that those who were assembled here loved the historical church as it is.

Now before I begin to speak, I want to read a bit that you can certainly read later. "The world is in a state of deepening crisis. The whole globe is in a revolution heretofore unknown in the history of man. Nothing remains untouched,.. The practical phase of any revolution takes place primarily in the local units of society. So the second phase of the renewal of the church must necessarily center on the church in its localform. It is because the local congregation is the very essence of the church, to renew it is to renew the church at large. What has to be done at the local level is a highly practical and concrete task. It means literally transfiguring every structure of the local congregation for the sake of the church being what it is: mission to the world... If the church is to be relevant effective mission to the post modern world, this serious reconstruction of the local church is essential. Herein is the imperative at hand for those who love the established church." (The first four paragraphs from the master document June, 1970.)

I suppose most of us in this room, whether you be 60 or 20, are pretty well hardened old veterans in the arena of the renewal of the church. We show our wear but we're disciplined. Its as if today that God has been preparing us quietly, secretly, step by step for the task that's now at hand. And this task cannot be performed save that there are hardened well disciplined old veterans of twenty years or seventy. Now we are met on a new battlefield of this war. Our goals are clear. When some of more scrubbed colleagues want to raise the question of arranging some sort of a priority scale of our goals, I both die and shudder inside. For the goals are clear. First of all because the battle is clear. I like to think that any man of the spirit has only one enemy. His name is saten. I'd like to have met the man who invented that poetic image of "saten." Or I'd like to have been the man who had such depth insight into what humanness is all about that the poetry of "the devil" broke loose out of the intensity of that kind of awareness. You see, most people go around and they blame there and there and there and most spend the God given energy they have hating here and hating there and hating there. And most

of them - allow themselves to be shoved down the drain of history in locating an enemy lo here and lo there. No, the man of faith understands that he is never finally guilty before any other man or creaturely object and therefore always takes his guilt which is misplaced when it is placed before temporality and places it before God alone and is forgiven which does not get rid of the guilt but enables him to embrace it as a part of his being. So, flipping that over on the negative side, a man of the spirit always takes his enemies and pulls them together into one reality, and that's the principle of unfaith in the universe, or saten. Our enemy is not two, it is not ten, it is not a thousand-fold. Our enemy is one, saten. And you and I can articulate this in many ways. Is saten the one who denys man their freedom? Is saten the one who blocks the creativity of the last soul in the civilizing process? Saten is our enemy. And what we are about is clear. We are about to build a new society among men in which ontological freedom becomes a possibility for not some but all, where creativity or a sense of significant engaging in the discourse that defines man is open to every human being. I'm an idealist. I believe in the impossible. I like to think I'm a mean hard headed realist but my realism is about my idealism. That's what I mean when I say that love the church. I love the church that is.

I say that our goals are clear for in the primordial colloquy before the foundation of the world, you and I received our orders and we got within those orders the objectives of the war. And that is to serve until our death mankind and to do battle against saten for the sake of mankind. The second aspect of that goal, if you can call it anything besides the flip side of the coin, is to serve the church. That is to say that we are out to build a new manifestation of the people of God in our time because the people of God are the ones that finally accomplish, catalyze if you please, the more adequate structures of humanness for mankind. Do you understand that those of you who are still romantics. You're not going to change the world but there's a chance that you can change a force that makes this group (the research assembly) and the many that they represent look like nothing more than a mosquito speck on a window pane. Save you renew the church, you're not going to renew the world. I say our objectives in the way are clear. We are out to renew the world through renewing the church of Jesus Christ. And also our strategies are clear. It's been a remarkable experience that I've had to have attended council 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 and I'm looking foreward to 5. And in those councils the most important thing that happened is that hundreds of man from across this nation yes and from the globe forged out those strategies! Let me recollect you on to them.

The first strategy in the war is contextual reeducation. And this has to take place in every last congregation across the world so that it maight take place in every structure of society across the world. By contextual reeducation what I mean is we haven't anything to tell the church. For the head of the church, even in her deepest sickness, is the contentless word. What has the church to learn? Nothing. What contextual reeducation is is to understand that the world in which the church has forged its understanding and its action is now gone. We have a new world in which the church has to forge afresh and for the first time since the beginning in Jesus Christ. A new understanding of her understanding and a new construct for action in the world are needed. Contextual reeducation is to spell out that new context in which and through which the church can accomplish its divine election in our time. } That is the first strategy. When you begin to think of the job that's on your sholders, maybe some of you would like to hand in your badges now. For until the last fat lady in this world is touched you're under the sign and there's no escape.

The second strategy is structural reformulation. The same is true here as in the intellectual constructs. The church has to forge all over again social constructs in and through which she can effectively engage the world in the service of mankind. Sometimes you know you think that the present form of the church, let's call it the ecclesia, that was a tremendous invention and it's changed through the years. Today the most radical change that the Christian church has ever been required to make it now being required. What's going to be that new form of the local congregation? I don't know. But I want to warn you to be revolutionary within the church, to be a structural revolutionary does not mean that you tear down what is, and begin all over again. What it means, you remember what Harry Truman did to the White House? As I understand it he moved across the street and where while he kept the four walls in tact, he literally gutted the inside and built it all over again. Now that's another statement of what I call metamorphosis. What's got to happen is radical metamorphosis--almost as if you keep those four walls in tact so that nobody can even see what's going on inside and at the end there's the same old lay out but all things are new. This is to say that a new invention, a social structure has to come forth while nobody who does not have eyes to see may behold it. And that has to be done not in your two bit congregation and not in my two bit congregation but in every two bit congregation across the face of the globe. If you are not as much interested in this topic in Africa as you are in your own congregation or here in North America, I want to suggest that you don't even hear what I'm talking about. For no man can expend himself in this kind of a revolution if he does not do it in the sweep of history long and world wide.

The third tactic that you forge for the whole movement is spiritual remotivation. Sometime ago I was talking to the head of the Asian foundation with one of my colleagues in San Francisco. And this man said that when you look out across the problems of the world and the possibilities of finding solutions to some of the crucial ones, he saw that the real problem was finding the dedicated people to make the models good. I thought that was pretty good, pretty good. It's pretty easy for a fat old character, or even a slim one to sit behind a desk and draw a few lines that he calls a model. The problem is how do you get that transformed into spiritual reality. Now from the beginning of time and so shall it ever be that operation never has been and never will be accomplished except by those who are consumed within by a kind of a holy fire. And in our day, the fires burn small indeed in the soul of men. You're not going to be able to stand the overwhelming intellectual complexity that this job takes, the overwhelming insecurity, the overwhelming physical burden if you and I do not find deeper depths within ourselves than any other has ever found. Now this is true of us, what about those within the congregations that we go to serve? The third tactic is spiritual remotivation. You and I have got to press the bottom out of our spirituality. We've got to discover afresh, not what it means for God to love us, about that in our moment we're clear in the the word of Christ once more; but, what does it mean for us to love God? What does it mean for us to serve God with a passion, with every ounce of energy? If the world is going to be renewed, it's mighty odd how depth spirit men must see to it that that battle is fought. The frightening fact, the overwhelming fact--the location of that battlefield is the local church. Let none, let none ever think that the local church is a part of some universal church--no. Let none think of the local congregation as a manifestation of a denomination--no! This battlefield is at the raw edge of humanness itself. I wonder if we understand that the inclusive aspect of any faith or any religion always came second and not first, where the fires of the holy spirit or the fires of humanness in any religion broke loose was always on the local level. I want to say that again and you think real hard. No religion came in to this way--it came into being out of the raw guts of the local dimension of humanness. And then then you see the comprehensive aspect of it came into being. This battlefield touches I think the raw nerve edge of humanness itself. I like to talk about this in terms of the local church itself being an overlay of humanness. On the local level you always begin with human settlement. Human settle is the invention of people of structured relationships in such a fashion that an individual may become an individual. That's what human settlement is. And there has never been humanness save there's been human settlement in that sense. When you use the word parish you simply put an overlay on top of that

so that the parish becomes the place where loving care of humanness and of men takes place. And so it has always been, is now, and always shall be. But then that local level has had another dynamic. And I like to think of that as the shamen, or better put; the school of the shamen. (Witchdoctors if you please) Those who --- let's call them warped, shall we? Let's call them the odd ones, the ones that were consumed with the fire in such a fashion that they grasped their vocation as no vocation at all. They grasped themselves as that which could not be seen and was utterly useless. I remember walking down the street with a Jesuit priest in Rome and some Italian character whizzed by and he went yak yak and I didn't understand him and so I asked him what was said. He said " He just said 'cockroach.'" A priest goes by-- cockroach. Now granted Italy is a little over priested. As the years have rolled on, why, I have come to appreciate that. The shamen is a cockroach. I mean he's useless. All he does is keep the fire burning while everyone else is out making money, and you have to have money, and building families, and you have to have families, and doing the doings that have to be if you're going to have civilization. But you gotta have the cockroaches. What I'm trying to say is ya have 'em whether you like 'em or not. I've never called so many people a cockroach at one time before as I have here tonight. These are the shamen, the overlay from the vantage point of the local church. That is the disciplined cadre, the primal cadre. And there's never been and there cannot be humanness without them. Then the third dynamic within the local church is the congregation but it is an overlay in the human reality w/o which there is no such thing as humanness. Let's call that the primal cultus. And the primal cult are the ones who are ground through a factory whose power comes from the shamen in order to become the leaven in the parish that makes loving care a possibility. Or if you want loving care in more radical language, keeps the revolution in society perpetual. That's the function of the congregation. I like to call it the factory which changes matter into spirit. Kazantzakis put it that way. I also like to say it's the factory that produces spiritual substance, if I may use a medieval term. The factory where spiritual substance is manufactured which is the leaven that enables all men to be human. And you can begin to talk about parts of that factory. You remember the abstract diagram of the local congregation of council IV In one corner of the triangle you have the seminary. In the local congregation that's the part that's responsible for the intellectual aspect of transforming matter into spirit. And then at the upper corner in the local congregation is the sodality. That is responsible for transforming the actional aspect of life from matter into spirit. And then down in the right hand corner of that triangle is the college and that is where you turn spiritual matter into spiritual spirit. Now let me rehearse this: The local congregation is the factory that transposes matter into spirit. And you can talk about that more concretely. First of all let's look at the intellectual plan in the factory complex. And here Jean Paul Satre through the years has been the most help to me and you're aware of what he was talking about so I'll not take long. The intellectual aspect-- what I'm trying to tell you now is how you go about you go about transposing matter into spirit. Jean Paul Satre used the categories "en soi" and "pour soi". My en soi is the given, let's call that the matter, the given situation in which I find myself. I like to use the illustration of my wife. Everytime I stumble upon my selfhood these days I am the husband of a gray haired lady called Lyn. Not every other time but every time I stumble upon myself I am a temporal relation that people call husband. And yet I am not that relation. I am the capacity to jump outside that relationship and to look at it and to make a decision about it. Which is to say within the relationship the substance to define it. Let me go over that again. I am the husband of Lyn but I'm not the husband of Lyn, I'm the capacity to stand outside of being the husband of Lyn and in every situation decide what on earth it means to be the husband of Lyn. And when that happens you have transposed temporality into spirituality. Have you got that. Now the Church, the local church (mark you that the Vatican never had anything to do with this and neither did

the hierarchical structures of methodism, it has happened on the local level) To the degree that Pope Paul could become the member of a local congregation, then it could happen with him. There's no other way in the world for him to become involved in turning spirit into matter. That's the intellectual side of it and oh what a burden it is. No wonder they called it dreadful freedom. When you see it, you see that a marriage, as I've defined it, cannot have a problem. There's no problem in marriage because marriage is the capacity to decide in the midst of every situation what marriage is. Now, for these people who go around like slobs with all kinds of marriage problems, why hrumph. That above is turning matter into spirit. Isn't it interesting about the burden of this. You don't have anyone to blame yourself on ever again.

m Now the second aspect of this dynamic of turning matter into spirit has to be the college. How do you talk about it. I have a hard time because I'm not very skilled at it. It is really prowess in the use of symbols. A few months ago a cadre from the north shore area of Chicago took a missional trip around the world. It was fantastic. When they got back and I began to probe the area of how they transposed the matter of that trip into spirit, I discovered that they were suffering from a deep and subtle spiritual malaise. That is that they did not know how to, they did not have the prowess, relative to symbols, to take a situation and bleed it of its meaning. Now don't you get the wrong idea. They're not to blame. For the local congregation is the only entity in society who can perform the function of teaching people how to transpose spirit into matter and in their whole lifetime there has not been in history a local congregation. Do you hear what I say. In terms of this functional dynamic it does not exist. That's what we mean by the sickness of the church. That's what we mean when we say the church has to be reconstructed, renewed. It is no longer that factory that gives people the prowess whereby they can take any life situation and pull out of it the spiritual meaning hidden in the depths of it, that was there before the foundation of the world. I happen to be a guru within that group and I was faced in a shattering way with the realization that I had not been able to communicate this kind of skill to these people, well how do you talk about that skill. I think you have to talk about it in terms of first inwardness and then objectivity and then a kind of transparency that happens when the inwardness and the objectivity aspect of it become as one. Let me start with the objective aspect. Every life is an episode and if you approach it in terms of turning that episodic snatch into spiritual reality, you've got to start to make it bleed its own meaning. I mean by that: People go through life looking here and here and there for meaning. No No No Meaning is the life germ in an acorn. It is always incarnate, always within every situation. To speak mythologically, God planted meaning, any meaning, all meaning, within concrete situations. And you'll wait until the fires of hades are covered with ice before you find meaning in this . . . abstraction or that abstraction or the etherial realm. The meaning is in the midst of the actual situation in which you find yourself. The man of spirit finds a way to make that situation begin to drip the hidden meaning within that situation. The second step in this objectivity has to do with what I call context. You see you never go to a situation nude. You go there with a context. I've got a boy who's in jail in Mexico City for certain things. When we talk about news I get irritated with our group in the morning when they talk about news as if news is something that's printed in the newspaper. That's not news. News is that which rips the guts of your being. The rest is some kind of information. Well, in breakfast one morning people were giving these mighty happenings that were going on in the world as news. They weren't news to me. What was news to me was a little blurb in the paper that said that Tony Curtis was picked up in London for possessing marijuana and was fined just \$100 and let go. I tell you that was news. I had a context. And you never entered any life situation without a context. The trouble is, and the trouble with those cadre people on the north shore is that they had context but they didn't know what it was. What I'm trying to say is when meaning begins to drip out of an episode it illuminates your context that you bring to it and you begin to vibrate. And to make a long story short, in the midst of that your universe gets redone. I mean, you live from that moment on in a new universe. Some people seem to think that the universe was created once. No, no, no, why I've participated in (shall I make the number conservative) the creation of several million new universes in which the universe was transposed before my

of several million new universes in which the universe was transposed before my eyes and became new. That's the objective side of this. Have you got any wonder anymore? And when I say within my being a dance goes on, it doesn't make any difference whether I'm happy or sad, or burdened down, or just getting ready to livitate, a dance goes on inside. And it's not of my creation it's because matter is constantly in the process of being transmuted into spirit. Now you take the subjective side of this. That in the midst of engagement with that which is unsynonymous with myself my images of who I am get disturbed, shook up. And with that there are accompanying affections. Now these affections are usually subtle and I can't get my mind around them oft times. One of the reasons why is because of the intellectualisms of Western civilization. The English language is poverty stricken in identifying emotions, and feelings, are you aware of that? And secondly you and I have been trained by stupid educators, and I tell you I'd like to participate now a days with the youth dramatically calling into question our educational structures. We have been taught that we had to abstract ourselves from our emotions, whereas they are the vital life clues of meaning. With the disturbance of the self image, there are accompanying affections which then issue in radical existential questions. And by existential questions I always mean not those questions you ask life, but the questions that life asks you, and about which you have to make a decision.

Now the third part of this process of dealing with the symbolic aspect of life in turning matter into spirit I call transparency. I never quite got the figure for that, but the one that excites me nowadays is if you light a match under a sheet of white paper, the first thing you see is a few brown spots. And then the brown begins to enlarge, and then it turns to dark brown and then smoke appears. And then a flame, and finally the whole. That's transparency. When you dare to allow the inwardness of this to merge with the objective, the transparency occurs, and lo, you stand before the living mystery that discloses itself as undisclosedness, and in and through which all things become new. All of creation becomes other than what it was and there is illumination for the self.. And by illumination I do not mean you have some damn understanding of yourself. You become aware that you be and I mean BE. You don't become aware of what you know, or what you do or have got to do. You become aware that you BE. That's turning matter into spirit.

And the Third which has to do with the Sodality, I call fellowship. I'd like to call it fellowship, but being a Methodist that word is so sickening to me. I wish I were a Roman Catholic, I don't think you had the kind of fellowship that we had, I hope not. If I use fellowship I've got to go at it kind of slowly, fellow...SHIP. So I call it fellowship.

Withing the local congregation not only do you learn how to intellectually transpose matter into spirit or spiritually to do so, but you do it in terms of mission. Or corporateness if you please. I tell you sometimes I feel down right guilty at the fellowship afforded me 24 hours a day. Do you not understand that the group that's on the campus here in Chicago is a local congregation? And the fellowship that goes on, I don't know how to talk about it, but its intellectual and you can

understand that. Thinking you have those which you can bounce ideas off. You know, some guy who is baldheaded came down here the other day and he sat at the far end of the table from me, and I said to him "Why don't you .. (I like that man).. I wish you lived closer." He got up quickly and ran down here and he said "Enlarge on that." The lonliest human being in the world is the male, not the damn female. And the lonliest man in the world is the bourgeois male. Hell, he could go to a bar, but it's not that he's missing. It's spiritual fellowship. And you know something, oft times those males seem as stupid in that area as all get out. And then you get out with them and there is some kind of a setting set and the spiritual substance that they've got down inside of them bubbles out. I like when I go out with some of them the next night to catch their wives the next morning and sort of beat the hell out of them. Do you get what fellowship is. Its not that nonsense that some of my colleagues do in RSI in priesting conversation. They sit up there and you feel like they've got a club. No, no, no! This kind of priesting I call invisible priesting. Today one of my colleagues took his foot and kicked me in the gut, and I didn't know he did it for a little while, but it hurt just as much. Invisible priesting, thats what a local congregation is. Never in your lifetime have you had this kind of an opportunity.

And then its missional fellowship. I like to talk about when you enter into a common cause with another person, not caring whether he agrees with you or likes you, or whether he agrees with you or likes you, something happens between you, the two or you. You know the difference between the smell of good honest sweat, like when you are chopping wood or really laboring at something. That always smells good whether its on you or the guy next to you. But the neurotic sweat, like when you're anxious about giving a lecture, that kind of sweat smells like the devil. They did not invent deodorants for that first kind of sweat, Oh no, its that second kind. There's something about a common cause that just smells good. If you try to establish relations you never do. Relations come as a great gift when you couldn't care less about whether you cared more about somebody else. But you got a common cause and you're willing to ride together. I got a colleague his name's Slicker. But I won't mention his name. He's one of the meanest guys that I have ever known. He'd be hard to like, but one thing is clear to David Scott and I. If we had to move into a machine gun's nest can you guess who'd be there with us? Old Slicker. Do you understand that? Not the slightest idea in Davids mind that it'd be other than that. I mean when there is a mission there you are. And when that happens transfiguration takes place in Slicker. Now when you get hold of him don't you ask him the other way around. Well when I give a family course I have fun, but then people tell me when my wife, teaches that course ther's something different. That's what I mean by fellowship. The local congregation shs got to make it possible for a man to be his freedom.