

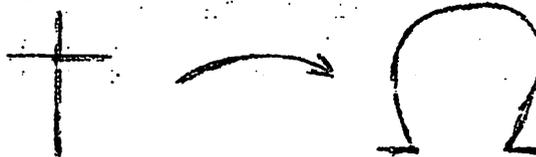
Continental Presidium, March 12, 1971
 Ecumenical Institute, Chicago, Illinois

	X
Context dated	X
Lang	
Print	X

I was told last night that about two-thirds of us have never been to a Presidium before, but don't feel badly about that. I want to bring us all up to date on about a thousand years that started March 5, 1971. I don't know how many contextual statements you've heard, but I notice very quickly that people are always talking about shifts. Every time there is a contextual statement, somebody is saying there's been a new shift in the movement. That has always bothered me, "When are they going to get things settled down, so we know where we're going?" but I have come to at least struggle with the fact that every contextual statement is going to be talking about shifts. As a matter of fact, we are not alive unless there is shifting going on.

I ran that story of Jonah through my mind when I was thinking about this lecture. If he had been giving contextual statements about his journey—he would have said after he was called to Ninevah, there's been a shift in my life. And when he got on board the ship there was another shift. When he got swallowed by the whale, there was a shift. When he got spit out on the shore, there was a shift. So that's what we're going to hear about every time we get together, shifts.

The way I would talk about the shift today is from cruciformity to resurrection. If I had to put an image up on the board on what I am going to be talking about today it would look like this:



I never understood, and probably don't really understand now, those people who stand up and say that what we are about is changing matter into spirit. But I am about to get a glimpse of that. That is the shift—changing matter into spirit. It is a new kind of madness.

I don't know whether you have been reading this book or not, Saint Francis by Kazantzakis, but if you haven't, you need to get it. Let me read you a little from St. Francis. St. Francis and Brother Leo are walking along and a couple of guys jump them and try to rob them, but they didn't have anything to steal. So the conversation goes like this. "Let's give them a good beating and toss them in the ditch. By doing that at least we won't have wasted our time completely." They lifted the ox tails they were holding and began to thrash us pitilessly. I howled with pain, but Francis, everytime he received a blow from the lash crossed himself and murmured, "Glory be to God." The bandits laughed. "Good God, this fellow isn't a lunatic. He is a saint," said one of them. "Well, it's the same thing," replied another who appeared to be their leader. "We've settled their hash nicely. Let's now toss them in the ditch." They seized us by the feet and the shoulders and threw us into the ditch and after laughing and hurling insults at us. Francis held out his hand and stroked my back. "Does it hurt, Brother Leo?" he asked. "And I suppose yours doesn't, Brother Francis," I replied arrogantly. "My back is made of flesh, you know, and there comes a time." "Do not blaspheme against the flesh, Brother Leo. Remember what I said one day, sooner or later it too can become spirit. And indeed it has already. I don't feel the slightest pain. I swear to you." "

And then on the next page. "We would enter the village and Francis, as though he were the town crier would shout out, 'Hail, villagers, come and see. I bring you new wares, which I am going to distribute to you free of cost. Free. Free. First come first served. Free. Free.'" That has to do with a shift.

✓ It's a shift from Iron Man to a kind of broken but dancing image. The story that holds that for me is of Lowell Sims, one of our colleagues in Columbus, Ohio. He was at the Academy in 1968. He participated in writing that song, March Into the Future, March. We sang the new song to the same tune at the last Regional Council and he was deeply offended. The new words were Run into the Future, Run, written with a group of aborigines at that ITI in Hong Kong. He was offended because the image when he wrote that song was that we were about lining up shoulder to shoulder and marching into the future. We had armourplate on. But this new image was of a couple of guys with spears and slingshots.

It's like the shift in the story of Lazarus. We were telling ourselves that what it meant to be the spirit movement was to die. We were sober about that, so sober. We walked into the tomb and pulled the rock up to close the door. Then along came Jesus and said "Hey, Lazarus, get out of there." The stone has been rolled away and we are nothing but spirit. We dance through walls.

✓ It's the shift from stoicism to those-who-are-not-afraid, I remember people used to say, "you people never smile." That was right. How do you smile when you are trying to get used to getting up at 4:30. But have you noticed us smile recently? It's like there has been a shift to those people who are not afraid.

One of the stories that has most addressed my life in the last 500 years, since last spring, is the story of my father. You should have known my father. He found he had a congestive heart failure. He had a great deal of pain in his legs and he wasn't able to do much til he was exhausted. Late in the spring my mother called and said, "Mark, please come up and have a talk with Dad. He is doing ridiculous things and making impossible demands on me." I went up and talked with him by himself. A great conversation. Mother had told me he would go to the garden, work til he was half dead and then she would have to wait on him hand and foot for five days to get him strong enough to get up again. I asked him how long he was going to live. That stunned him but he said, "about six months." I said, "All right, what do you want to do with those six months?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "I know you don't know. It's obvious. You have to decide." He said, "What I want to do is see the Berkshires again in the Fall." "Fine, then we need to talk about what it is going to take to get there." We made a list. One thing he had to do was to stay out of that garden. I went back a month later and he had moved from cruciformity to resurrection. He danced. He still had pain. He still knew he had no more than six months. But he was not afraid. He could form the six months he had left. He danced. It turned out he only had three months, he never saw the Berkshires but that is all right. Those-who-are-not-afraid. There has been a shift.

✓ We have shifted from being the infiltrators. You remember, how we would recruit. I figured out all the key people in my church that I had to recruit for RS-I and I just about got them there. It was the image of Moses sending out those spies to the promised land and they came back and said, "there are

giants out there." The cadre kept arguing, "Can we decide for the whole congregation? Can we make those decisions? We have infiltrated and can we do that.?" We are not infiltrators anymore; we are spiritizers. Everyone is clear that you can make decisions now. All you need to do is come up with a model and put your life behind it. We have shifted from Moses sending out the spies to Elijah standing around and saying, "Well, now, prophets of Baal, let's have a contest." Be very clear that the prophets of Baal are not the members of your congregation. No, the prophets of Baal are the demons. There are great priests in your congregation and all they need to do is see that, as a matter of fact, the fire does come down.

There has been a shift from "Maybe it will all collapse and I can go home." You know in our local church there was a key family. They were great. They ran the youth department, had been to RS-I and RS-III, but they decided they couldn't go any further and dropped out. I was in despair. I remember driving down the street and realizing why I was in despair. I wanted out. This was a great story. I could go around saying this family sure copped out on me. But we are the point of no turning back. The Local Church Experiment has begun and there is no turning back.

It's like Moses and the Red Sea. Moses came up there to the end and the Egyptians were coming. The Red Sea opened. It's like an illustration that Don Cramer gave at the Odyssey. In the 20th century there is an 8-foot steel wall out in front. We have been pounding on that wall and getting nowhere. Somebody decided to take a hell of a run at that wall. He stepped back and ran at it and then the wall opened and he went flying through. He turned around and saw the opening close, "Clank." There is no turning back. How must those people have felt when they went across that Red Sea and saw the sea close with them on the other side. There has been a shift.

Let's talk about some of the arenas in which those shifts are taking place. I don't know how many of you went to celebrations on New Years Eve but two years ago our whole family went up to the Cleveland Religious House for a celebration and that was the greatest celebration I had ever participated in. The youngest ones went to bed and we got them up at twelve o'clock and we all played music and danced around. It was the first time our kids had ever participated with us on New Year's Eve. That was a great celebration. Then there was New Years' eve 1971 and we all went up again. But it was a different type of celebration this year. We celebrated the Local Church Experiment every hour on the hour, because there were churches that were in different time zones. The liturgy was so long that you only had about ten minutes between liturgies. But it was a great celebration. Eighty churches decided to be experimental on behalf of the globe, on behalf of every fat lady. That's one arena - the Local Church Experiment. And that just demands back-up systems after back-up systems. Did it ever amaze you about those people who go to the moon, that they could have an oxygen system blow up in the side of that thing and still they all came back alive? Back-up systems after back-up systems.

We had better be clear that the Local Church Experiment is where we are all going. The demon is that we say "My church isn't in the eighty. We aren't in phase 2." Everyone here is in Phase 2.

I used to go to pedagogy weekends to learn to teach RS-I. The arena now is priorship training. The need is not that we raise up a bunch of guys who can go around and all tell the long-necked girl story well, the need is priorship training. We need to know all the short courses that were ever written. It is like these fellows who learn how to play checkers so that when a certain move

is made they know what move to make. I never decided to play checkers that well, but that is what it's all about. We need to learn every short course that has to do with every question, every glance. We have priorship training in our metro. We started out with eight on Thursday mornings. Last Thursday, 21 people showed up. One said, this is the first time I've ever gone to a meeting at 5:00 in the morning where you had to get there early to get a seat.

Clergy guilds are back-ups to the experiment. In the Cleveland metro, we asked 20 clergymen who had been to a PLC two years ago and hadn't been seen since, "What are you struggling with? Well, would you like to get together to talk about the kind of things that we are struggling with in the local church?" Sixteen showed up and worked out a construct where we talked about such things as how to use the art form methodology as part of a pastoral call. What kind of transformation can take place in the lives of people when you have a method for a call. Maybe you still chit-chat about the weather to start, but it is part of a model.

No one is left out. We have to be clear that the victim image in any form is garbage. Another shift has to do with intensification of regional recruitment and formulation. We had been recruiting shot gun fashion. Just rear back and pull the trigger and hit anybody you can hit. We still do that but we have to do focused recruiting, too. It is just intensification. Gene Marshall said one night in the Academy that we don't want to start another thing until we can drop something already started. That's not the way it is. It's intensification of recruitment. This is not just to get us busier, but this intensification gets us from cruciformity to resurrection. Eight people from our region went to Columbus on recruitment. At least seven of them went out of a sense of duty. They came back dancing. Thirty-two people had called in Columbus on people they had never heard of before. The key was the clergyman, the name of the clergyman. You knock on the door and say, "Rev. Smith sent me." That's all you need. They recruited 55 people to RS-I in one day with paid deposits. Or maybe we also need to say at the end of each course, or maybe at the follow-up, "You see the seriousness of this course in your life. Now who are the six people that you need to get here next weekend?" That is a way of enabling them to witness, also a way for you to hold them accountable. It works.

In terms of formulation, today we are pasttelling ourselves that we have to have 12 RS-I grads turned on before we can ever move to start a cadre. In my own local situation, I sent three laymen before I had been through the course. They came back and said you have to go. Then we got about 15 people and they started saying, "It's time to form a cadre." Oh, yes, but I wanted to wait for 20 more people. But you only need one person who has turned from flesh to spirit to catalyze the kind of power that is already there in every congregation. Every congregation has people that love the church. And it only takes one. That got said to me in the story of Abraham. When he took that first step into the desert, the Israelite nation was formed. It took a few years before anybody else knew that, but it was formed. We are no longer at the time of building the movement. We are at the time of building the local church. Formulation.

Support for the globe - the ITI's hold that arena best for me. My attitude toward the Ladies Aid society has taken a radical shift. I used to hate them. If I could have figured out a way, I would have blown them out of the water. The Lord demanded that that not happen. That Ladies Aid Society saw that, without a global context, the local church goes down the tube. You can't sustain yourself just by telling yourself stories: I have to care for the people on my block. Those ladies sent missionaries all over the place and to get money, they had chicken supper after chicken supper. A perversion sneaked in and they began

to think that their function was the suppers. But they started with a global context. If you don't have that you go down the tube.

Did it blow your mind when you heard about Joe Mathews and a few others going over to Addis Ababa. I had never heard of Addis Ababa. The Coptic Church said we want to have an International Training Institute and we will pay for it and do the recruiting. Or when I was at Academy I ran into Bishop Joshi of the United Methodist Church who was saying we have to have an ITI in India. They couldn't foot the bill so we went around and raised a few shekels. There was one man that I used to play golf with. We went to see him and he wrote out a check for \$1,000. Never heard of the Institute before. We just told him about the necessity for an ITI that was being demanded by a Bishop in India. He gave that money out of his relationship and friendship to me the first time but not the second time. We went back after the ITI with a report, to tell him how his money had been spent. We told him about the Local Church Experiment. He said, "We have to keep this going." He's not an RS-I grad, not a turned-on clergyman, but he said, "We have to keep this going." He was excited to have a place to give his money that he knew that what was going on was what needed to be going on. We gave him the opportunity to move from cruciformity to resurrection—only we didn't give him the opportunity, The Lord did.

Let me tell you another story. This man is a John Bircher and we have prayer every time we go there. He only writes checks for \$200 but he is clear that it is \$200 a year for the rest of his life. We called in March last time and February this time. He said you will probably be around in January next time won't you?

The global is one of the arenas. We not only need money but we need personnel. How do you come up with the teachers for five International Training Institutes this year? Where do you find the leadership? Do you ever get the feeling that you can look into your own future? Where will they come from?

We need to envision the future. That's an arena. Where the brooding is going on now is in terms of the New Social Vehicle. I don't know how to talk about that. It's like our cadre is called Research and Development in our church. That was the name given us by our Congregation. We are on the Council of Ministries and represented on the Administrative Board. We are given assignments. One of them was to do a long range plan to bring before the Board at their next planning session. So we had workshops at 5:00 in the morning. One family drives 15 miles to church, so to let the rest of the cadre people know how far they drive we went to their house for one five o'clock session. We worked all morning. It is exciting. We sent the ones out that had to go to work. The word for the day is, be the first on your block to get the New Social Vehicle. I'm not sure how it runs but it runs early in the morning and late at night. We need problem solving units to see what the new Social Vehicle looks like and we need to be at Summer '71.

Let's look for a moment at the stance of the man who is becoming spirit. Utterly religious. The Religious House in Washington, D.C. is in a rented Carmelite monastery. There are still some brothers in the house behind it. They can't understand that the renters are up before they are, doing the Canonical Hours. Utterly religious. There is a story of the Odyssey in Atlanta. The neighbors called the police, saying strange things are going on. The police came. The prior opened the door and here were all these people sitting on the floor reading scripture. How do you arrest people sitting on the floor reading scripture? The problem was the noise of the singing.

Let me read you something from Francis. "Where are you coming from, Francis? From the next world. Where are you going? To the next world. Why do you sing? To keep from losing my way." Utterly religious.

The scripture conversations- haven't they opened you up to find out that that book is the story of your life, that all we are about is expanding the vision of our own experiences, pulling them through the stories.

The stance is utterly intentional. How can you fire a minister who has decided to get together with his pastor-relations committee and work out his timeline, beginning at 5:00 in the morning and going until the middle of the night. How do you fire a guy like that? So, he spends some time in the region, and the metro, but look how much time he spends in the local church. Add up the hours. How do you fire a minister who schedules his own solitary time? Intentional. Intentional family. That retreat New Year's Eve with missional families getting together. That wasn't my old image of family on New Year's eve. But we find that the only glue there is for the family is the mission. What a fantastic breakopen when you find your wife is, first of all, a colleague. A minister goes to a Woman's Society meeting, doesn't stay for the whole thing but when he leaves he gets sent out. Utterly Intentional.

And utterly nonchalant. We better be clear that on the other side of what we do we haven't done anything. The story that blew my mind was that after Summer '70 when they made that massive telephone directory, Joe Mathews said what we ought to do now is burn it. The story out of my own life that says that is: I came home having preached a sermon where I was not prepared. I have a habit of writing sermons on Sunday morning. I brood all week but I write on Sunday morning. I had been unprepared but members of the congregation came out and shook my hand and said, "Your sermons get better all the time." After lunch I was watching the Cleveland Browns play football, my wife said, "You weren't prepared this morning." I waited half an hour and then I said, "I notice the house isn't as clean recently." My wife said, "Yeah, and you weren't prepared this morning." Then I said, "If you would play the role of minister's wife the way it needs to be played, I wouldn't have to smooth the waters over those women that get up tight about you and would have time to spend on my sermons." "Yes, and you weren't prepared this morning."

Joe Mathews doesn't run into anybody without addressing their lives. I have been trying that. Like conversations with people in elevators. Where can they go? Or taxis on the way from the airport. You ask the driver, "What would the church be doing if it was doing what it was supposed to be doing?" And then, "If you ever ran into one like that would you become a part of it?" That's a different kind of relationship than I ever had with a taxi driver before. That's sheer madness.

There is a layman in our church that arranged with Proctor and Gamble Company to take his three week vacation and five weeks leave without pay to go to the Academy. That has P & G mumbling to themselves. A new kind of madness that came out of the image that if we don't have the tools that we need, we get them. The Academy may not be efficient but it has the tools.

There are signs that spirit is being created out of matter. At this point I would just like to have you all tell your own stories. Everyone of you has one. I would have to turn to Lowell Sims in Columbus as a clergyman who just

stood in the desert for several years. Like the fig tree that had shriveled, he was ready to die. Maybe the Lord had died too. At Regional Council when we talked about what was going on in the region his reply was, "All I see is death." Then there was massive penetration in Columbus and 55 were recruited. The next time I heard him, he was giving the contextual lecture at Regional Council. His image was that around the movement, we are always saying the same phrase at the same time. When he got into the movement the phrase was, "They sure are refusing to live their lives." Now the phrase is, "They are in deep despair." Of course, the reason we are running into that is that people are beginning to live their lives." That's a radical shift from saying, "All I see is death."

There are signs in the recovery of the laity. There is a fellow in a church not too far from where I am that is just incredibly gifted. He was supposed to be at Presidium and decided at the last minute not to be here, and got a phone call from Cramer that lasted about an hour. After that encounter with the Mystery, he recovered and began to pick up what it meant to be a prior and found that what he had been doing was: His clergyman wouldn't pick up the task, so he was going to be the first prior of the congregation. At the priorship training session where it got said that save that clergyman comes off as first prior the church goes down the tube. You may have 30 times more skill but if you don't come off as the transparent prior, that church doesn't come off. He struggled deeply with that. But he was able to say yes. Signs are all over the place.

Two great stories. One church in Cleveland. I have fond memories of this congregation. But the new minister there did not like the movement - too pushy. He ran into a Ten church program, something about church renewal. He said this is what we have to do and the cadre said, Yeah. They just got behind him and pushed him and made it more comprehensive than it had meant to be, but they didn't say we can't move until that clergy decides the name of the movement. We know the name of the movement and he may or may not know the name of the movement. That local church has been renewed.

Or another church. I met a colleague at the Academy. Both of us were clear that we didn't want to meet one another. This church has a cadre that struggled with the question, what is the deep underlying spirit problem of this congregation and came up with that the congregation had no way of saying yes. All they could say was no. How about a school of Missions? No. So the cadre decided their task was to come up with something that that church had no way of saying no to. It was in financial difficulties, had a janitor they couldn't pay, and who wanted to retire, anyway. So they said, we have decided to be the janitor for a year. The congregation was so used to saying no, the first thing they said was what will we do at the end of the year? But they couldn't say no. Since then that church has said yes to being part of the Local Church Experiment. It was the first church to say yes through the Administrative Board. There are signs.

Jesus stands by that rolled-away stone and is saying, Lazarus, Lazarus, Come out. Come out. It's a new day. It's the third day, Lazarus, and you've got 40 more.