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REFLECTIONS ON THE FRANKFURT ITI

This year the second ITI was held on the continent of Europe at Frankfurt. This ITI was much easier than the first one held last year at Manchester. Grads from the first ITI went back with a good story, now from the grass roots. So this second time we had people coming with a different kind of expectancy and fascination. Also they tended to be more established, more in the center of things and more willing to participate. That doesn't mean the second ITI was any better or worse, it just means that we had a different ball game or a different field position on our hands.

Now let me give you a feel after the people who came. I want to read this very rapidly, so it will seem like a verbal montage. They came as spirit men who had been scarred by the local. They made it through the first phase of church renewal and were asking "Now what?" They had a wealth of spirit experience accumulated. They saw the need for the new sociological form of the church. They were extremely bright people without a screen by which to trust or focus their intuitions. They were willing to start with the deeps. They had pride in deciding to stay in the local church. They were willing and bewildered regardless of age. They were hungry for collegiality. They came knowing the Dark Night and the Long March but without the tools to "know" the Dark Night and the Long March.

Now the blocks! They came believing that they had seen everything before. They came for a picnic. They came believing that eight hours a night is crucial for humanness. They were impotent in view of innocent suffering. They saw freedom as "liberty from" and to be grasped as a spontaneous, emotional expression. Although they came with a wealth of spirit experience, they already had many methods that were circumventing it. Psychological harmony was at the center of humanness. They were trapped in the old religious mood and were paralyzed: one either resigns or rebels. They were armchair critics of what the church needs. They thought it was impossible for the church to move into anything better. They were hungry for collegiality but were not willing to pay the price. They were people without hope, wanting to hope but unable to. Well, that gives you a quick feel of who they were, and the kind of response that they were making.

The large majority came from Britain. The area house put them on a train and they rode together in a couple of cars. The 24 hour ride welded them into a kind of group with an image of going to a picnic. Many had never been out of the British Isles, and for them it was like going to a brand new culture. They came with that kind of comradeship and expectancy. Added to this was the elation of hearing Bishop Wickham, an Anglican bishop, who gave the key note speech. His speech was good; vibrantly given and had fine comments about the work and role of the Ecumenical Institute. It was a great evening. We had a tremendous opening night. Then the double reflection--with the mood this high how could you go anywhere but down? What could we do to sustain it?

However, the next day they grabbed hold and participated as a whole in the academic curriculum and tutorials. This was also especially true with the ecclesiola. They were willing to push into the spirit deeps. The first course, as you know, is the Cultural Revolution which is a 20th Century articulation of a form of natural law--the way things are. And, as mentioned, they grabbed hold in the ecclesiola and pushed into the deeps in the religious dimension. This was like giving them a double push into self-consciousness. Yet they willingly participated in shoving into the deeps and it shoved them into the Dark Night in a brand new way.

Wednesday, which is only the third day, we had an urban trip. This took us to the Opel factory (a GM product) in the town of Rüsselsheim, outside of Frankfurt where we held the ITI. The town has 36 thousand people in it with 35 thousand working in the Opel factory, to exaggerate a bit. They produce two thousand cars a day. We went into a building that housed acres and acres of assembly line. I have been to see assembly lines before, but the buildings were like a long barn, with the assembly line starting at one end and ending at the other. But not this building. It was a huge building with space disappearing in every direction. It had sky lights that let in a little of the light from an overcast winter day, and dim artificial lighting from within. You got a sort of eerie cast. Then as you began to look around, you saw all sorts of conveyor lines going this way and that and in and out from every direction. Then you looked above you in the darkness and semidarkness. There too were all sorts of conveyors moving in tiers and in different directions. It was all in slow motion, and you felt like you saw Frankenstein's monster walking. Watching where the car bodies were assembled to final form was eerie. Out of the darkness slowly descended the body and out of the dimly lit corridor a frame turned a corner. They finally met. The new car disappeared into the dimly lit beyond. After we got out one guy looked back on the building and remarked, "God, I hope they keep that thing locked up in there." Then someone remarked, "I'll tell you a secret. It has already gotten out into the world!" Transparency was breaking loose everywhere. They were willing to grasp it.

Then the group went into Frankfurt. They were overwhelmed. Their first statement was--it looked like any other city, but then they began to look into the eyes of people. They started to talk about something being wrong. The people looked stunned, or fear-filled or turned in. It was as if they were bearing the weight of the city--the world. Immediately, there was a kind of breaking through of transparency. They went on talking about themselves being afraid of loneliness, and being disoriented; they couldn't relate to the future or to the past. They were in a vacuum but fascinated. They represent a shift in attitude of our times toward the urban revolution. They had shifted from bitterness toward, but not yet to affirmation. You can imagine this kind of intensification. In the midst of this they pulled everything into the deeps of their lives.

But then when they discovered what they had done they screamed. Their screams took a usual form, but it had an entirely new swirl or

focus, because of their rapid push into the religious dimension. With the help of a few dissidents articulating things for them, they screamed there was too much tension, they were tired, "I can't", they were overwhelmed. You can't expect people to get up at 4:30 in the morning. You can't expect them to sit three hours in a row, you can't expect them to go all day long. "I just can't take it." "It is too much." The pressure was so great some would get up and leave and then fascinated, would return when the pressure was released. The second step came Thursday with RS-1, and as one staff member remarked, "RS-1 overpowered religion." They had developed tools, including religious tools, before they came to protect themselves against life and the spirit deeps. And now RS-1 overpowered religion. I think that is a good way of putting it. Actually they used phrases like this: "We were blasted," "we were overwhelmed, wiped out, overpowered." RS-1 undercut the religious defense they were standing on. It undercut every form of raising religion as an escape from God. Third, after RS-1, religion, so to speak, was given back as a vehicle for grasping and intensifying self-consciousness or the God relationship. Finally there needed to be given to them the imaginal tools to allow them to handle such escape images as "too much tension," "too tired," "confused," etc. We developed a battery of short courses about the 20th Century world demanding that we live in a world of pressure, change, confusion, developing new forms and methods of creative participation, where we are constantly overwhelmed and having to act without time to think through everything that comes to our minds as a question. And this is the only kind of world we have to live in.

Another way of talking about their journey is first they had to decide for the gospel, and second they had to decide for the structures, which was primarily to decide for the Dark Night. Third they had to decide to return. This took place as early as the beginning of the second week. They began to say, "I have to go home. I have to leave this place. I have to return home with all I know." Primarily this was to grasp the Long March. Fourth was the decision of total participation. This, I think, was an underlying decision to be people of hope.

This ITI had an entirely different kind of group on its hands. It was not just because we had a dramatic turn for that happens in every ITI. It was that this group plunged into the religious deeps immediately. A whole new kind of swirl came about. In other words, resurgence has taken place, and is producing a new kind of participant which requires a new kind of response on our part.

Now to share a few things in general. Kazantzakis' book was a poetic resource which exposed them to their own spirit journey throughout the ITI. In other words, as they read Kazantzakis, and began to understand the spirit journey he described, they began to see it as their spirit journey through the ITI. Another item was the tremendous orchestration of the ITI and its parts. It seemed at every point to match their spirit journey; especially in the area of the religious. Another item was the address of the two local church visits. The first was to a Lutheran church in a fancy building with ten little old ladies worshipping. Imagine what the ITI did to that, both in quadrupling the number and participation in the singing and all. The ten little old ladies were a horrible affront to the participants. Next we went to the huge Roman

Catholic cathedral in Mainz. It originated in the ninth century. You had around the sides in stained glass the coat of arms of the pastors going from the present back to its origin. This huge cathedral had not been destroyed in World War Two. It was great in grandeur and stateliness and elicited awe immediately. They had seventy-five choir boys, all dressed in red. The cardinal sat at the end of the basilica and his cloak looked like it was painted with red, luminous paint. They had six clergy dressed in beautiful robes and over a thousand people sitting in pews. At the transept were two soldiers, with their big slanting Napoleon style hats each with two staffs: one with the cross and the other a spear. Everything was done in high drama. The Religious in our group were very offended by that service. They kept saying "We haven't seen anything like that in 25 years; certainly not since Vatican II." After we got back to the bus and they got over all their criticism and settled into quietness, one of them spoke up and said, "Well, it was better than a lot of guitars."

Another item was the power of a team coming off and how one or certainly two people can bring it off, if they so make the decision. The groups responsible for making the 0430 coffee all had a hard time. The coffee either didn't get made or wasn't hot. So the last week the assigned team decided that they were going to bring it off. They not only had the coffee ready at 0430, but how they had it ready was really something. From the bedrooms on the second floor was a large stairway descending into the center of a large reception room. So from 0430 to 0500 they stood at the bottom of the stairs singing, "I don't know why, I love you like I do," as they served coffee to the people descending. Because some people didn't make it to worship they took coffee the next morning around to the rooms and served people coffee in bed while they sang to them. This team was just as tired as the people the first two weeks but had become iron men. In fact I was amazed at how the whole group came together like they did, as iron men.

The participants as usual were fascinated as well as feared by the style of the staff and its corporateness. Their reflection on the staff was that the staff members were giving up their lives for the participants. That kind of self-consciousness is just overwhelming. After the ITI going back in the car, one of the house priors took a bishop and a nun home. The bishop was short-coursing the nun. He said, "They (the staff) can ask you to do all sorts of things, like get up at 0430 in the morning or work hard and long because their being is in what they are asking of you. They are expending themselves for you. That is why they can make such demands on you." He was corroborating the others.

Other responses of participants were along the line: "Europe is willing to join the world of the future." "Europe can become a colleague with the spirit movement." Also I think you can say England is ready to explode. They have that kind of possibility with the number and type of grads they have. One last interesting item: The Britishers when they arrived back in London together on the train were still hugging and kissing each other good-bye all over the place. They would call up the religious house and report on the ITI. A week later produced two

(RELIGIOUS HOUSE: BOMBAY)

Methodist Bishop Dodge and wife for House Church.

Contradiction: Maintaining structures of internal communication in midst of whirlwind of external possibilities. (Wk. 13)

DELHI**RELIGIOUS HOUSE: DELHI**

External: Area Council with 17 around table, harvests regular metro cadre and regional treks, and promises strong network of spirit colleagues.

Internal: Delhi Metro colleagues Rev. Pillai and Rev. Stieeven Jacob are celebrants at House Church. Charles Innes begins his internship year -- third new intern family this quarter.

Contradiction: Using momentum created through planning at Area Council over next four weeks to enable ITI recruitment. (Wk. 11)

MADRAS**RELIGIOUS HOUSE: HYDERABAD**

External: House and movement participates 20 strong in Church of South India Parish Church Choir Festival. Colleague from Madras Region, from Brothers of Holy Cross, sojourns for two days after Area Council.

Internal: Spirit explosion occurs as ecclesiola breaks open prayer; visitors stay for Parish Choir Festival rehearsal. Recovers past area history and grads as old files are reorganized and oriented to future.

Contradiction: Imaging futurically coming weeks as anticipate discontinuity, Maliwada Human Development Consult, and assignment of House to Consult. (Wk. 12)

CALCUTTA**RELIGIOUS HOUSE: CALCUTTA**

External: Three circuit rides out at same time with one reporting that community group decides they are Panchayat of village.

Internal: House self-support moves forward as Ravi George begins work with export firm.

Contradiction: Operating out of battleplan yet to be formed on other side of Maliwada Consult. (Wk. 13)

SINGAPORE**GLOBAL CENTRUM: SINGAPORE**

External: Launches authorization task force. Sends Donnelly to Area Meeting in Sydney, McCleskey to HRM in Kuala Lumpur. Zervigon returns from six-week trek in Area Sydney and reports on PCE consults in all six regions.

Internal: Emerging Generation produces Christmas musical play. Reading "Watership Down" at meals becomes our discontinuous event for this month.

Contradiction: Creating a missional vision that involves everyone. (Wk. 12)

RELIGIOUS HOUSE: SINGAPORE

External: Serious PSU with Centrum Week II gives us a corporate picture of where we are and where we've been.

Internal: Reports on Kawangware Consult and upcoming plans for Global Social Demonstration in India catalyze care in all. Collegium study of "This Singapore" shows us fantastic expenditure and effort that have built the great nation of Singapore.

Contradiction: Looking for tactics that enable the corporateness and commonality of the body in the midst of active waiting. (Wk. 9)

RELIGIOUS HOUSE: KUALA LUMPUR

External: first HRM in Malaysia is awesome event with 90 adults and 12 children at Wesley Methodist Church, Klang. Knutsens preside with McCleskey and Eunice Mclat on staff. Two PCE groups complete Geo-social Analysis documents.

Interesting calls. One offered the religious house in Manchester a residence. Another was from a returning ITI grad who is in the political structures of London. He called and said he had a sixty thousand pound grant to establish a community reformulation project in North London, and did the movement want to pick it up now. I hope this gives you a feel after the new type of participant in the times of resurgence, his religious sensitivity, his spirit journey, and on the other side of that journey his willingness to grab hold. The Spirit Movement in Europe and especially Area London is in a great new field position.

--Joseph A. Slicker