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## Ecumenical Institute of the Arts

(A Tentative Outline)

It is proposed that we should establish an ecumenical institute of the arts. The goal of such an institute would be double: A Collaboration. 1. The arts and that general national area which we can call the life of the imagination offer an ideal situation for collaborating action between the ecumenical groups in this country. A Contribution. 2. The religious imagination certainly has a very large contribution to make to the arts. It should begin to reclaim its historical and creative role in the life of the imagination. In this country and at this stage in history this should be done ecumenically.

A few general statements in these two directions are in order:

1. It should be noted, for the sake of the ecumenical movement itself, that it may very well take many generations for it to reach any of its final possibilities of formal or doctrinal unity. We should not wait for such distant moments before we begin to live and act together in many areas of our national culture. To name but a few such areas, we can think together in the academic life, and we can think and create together within the life of the imagination. This prospectus looks to the latter possibility.

2. The religious imagination has always been deeply inserted, and in a creative way, into the life of the arts and the life of the popular imagination. This is tragically not now true. The intervention of religion in our time is usually negative and supervisory. Creatively it is isolated from most areas of the national imagination, as indeed is the artist himself. It is a special national misfortune when, as is now the case, religion finds itself, contrary to all its traditions, outside of any substantial relation to popular culture. It is important to begin to restore the older situation. The task is so large that it

should be ecumenical. As the proposed institute proceeds it should always remain clear that its goals are positive not supervisory, and that they involve a positive collaboration with artists. Other groups can take care of other goals.

### A General Area of Collaboration

There is no reason to pinpoint in advance and in too sharp a way all the positive areas of collaboration within such an Institute. The life of the imagination and the state of the national culture is the kind of world where one thing leads to another and where the important thing is to begin (though a list of suggestions follow below). That being said it is reasonable to think and to expect that the great religious faiths can unite in working steadily at one broad general goal: the creation and the defense of the truly human in our culture. An ecumenical institute can have as its primary and general interest the creation and the defense of a truly human image and a truly human world for man.

The following specific suggestions are not meant to limit inventiveness in a dozen other directions. The advantages behind some of the suggestions is that they are already moving toward the beginnings of a real existence. But elements not mentioned (e.g. music, painting) might very well come into ecumenical existence before those mentioned.

### Specific Areas of Collaboration

#### 1. A Library of Religion and the Arts

A series of paperback books by professional writers, artists, critics on different national situations and art forms that call for the positive contribution of the religious imagination. The goal of such a "Library" should be to establish an instrument and forum for the kind of writer who combines the talents of religious thought and

professional skill. The group of writers involved should be solidly ecumenical. An appendix will give brief summaries of ten possible volumes for the beginning of such a series.

## II. Film Collaboration

An annual film festival which would involve a continuing study, from year to year, of the creative achievement, and of the finest human achievements, of the new art. These festivals should not concentrate on formally religious pictures.

An annual "white paper" which would represent a creative appraisal of the creative and human status of film work in the United States in the previous year. (The study should not be "moral" but should focus on the work of art and on its humanity)

## III. Theatre Collaboration

There should be at least one center where we can do actual theatre work together. What kind of theatre should be done can be discussed. But many agree that the contemporary theatre is narrowly "realistic" and has in substance abandoned the theatre forms of great "style". It may be that we can help restore a larger physical atmosphere for the stage by concentrating on a drama of movement, music, dance and idea. For example, we are now discussing an ecumenical plan which would begin with productions of a new Everyman and The Clouds of Aristophanes. Such productions should always be accompanied by interesting and scholarly exhibitions devoted to the theatre age and the idea involved in each play. They should look particularly to the education in the theatre of high school and college audiences. One long term goal for such work could be a repertory theatre, devoted to building a repertoire of the great styles of the theatre of man.

## IV. The City of Man: architectural collaboration

Nowhere will ecumenism have more work to do than with the archi-

tectural situations in the United States. The threat of technological sameness becomes fairly universal. We must encourage the human everywhere, in the shapes and forms and buildings and communities in which we live. It may be good to edit a small annual publication (of about fifty pages) in which a particular human architectural achievement (whether a building or a community) would be selected for praise and analysis.

### Organization

It will take time and thought to work out a proper idea of organization for such an Institute. But a few healthy first principles might be decided at this stage.

- a) we should begin to do actual things together in one or two areas and only organize as these and other efforts begin to be actualities. A blueprint should not come first.
- b) Each unit of collaboration (e.g. theatre, architecture, film) should be substantially independent of every other unit. This will ensure that each will be able to grow according to its own identity and its own work.
- c) The unity should be a unity of federated elements, each able to take care of itself. There should be a central executive office that will be meant to serve all its units and not command them according to some universal blueprint. Excessive centrality will not serve a purpose where the open and diverse life of the imagination is involved.
- d) The institute should not be equated with any specific institution but should have its own autonomy. If thus constructed it will more readily become a central point of collaboration for a number of groups and institutions.

## Library of Religion and the Arts

In the following pages we sketch the general structure of a series of books that will deal with the positive and creative relationship of religion and the religious mind to the arts and to that total world which we can call by the life of the imagination. It is proposed that the series be called by the title The Library of Religion and the Arts. It should involve an act of ecumenical collaboration.

The series would mean the creation of a serious instrument and forum that would deal with the state of the arts, the new image world, the human or non-human shape of our cities, and any other areas where the life of the soul is deeply affected by the cultural situation.

There has been a serious lapse, for many generations, in the long and important relationship between religious thought on the one hand and the life of the imagination on the other. The Library could become a very solid part of the attempt from a number of directions to restore that creative relationship. It should become a visible and real symbol of the positive interest of the religious mind in the life of the imagination and the problems of the national culture.

The present proposal is that in the next five years we plan and publish ten central studies on the arts and the imagination. At the end of this period the whole idea and reality, as it would then stand, would be appraised for the future by the editors and publishers. It is possible that we would then decide to continue with the Library as a permanent instrument and forum of expression by the religious imagination.

The Library already has solid support, in terms of authorship of some of the individual volumes, from a group of professional writers of the Society of Jesus. The other authors should be distinguished representatives from the writers and artists of other religious groups.

We propose the following three types of studies for individual volumes: 1. general studies of "The Imagination," "The Religious Imagination," "Theology and Creativity;" 2. Studies of particular contemporary arts by the religious imagination; 3. Studies of central human realities and contemporary situations by the religious imagination (e.g. the image of death and the image of God among us).

By way of further elaboration at this early stage we add the following materials:

1. A very brief indication of the possible content of ten volumes.
2. A tentative preface for one volume.
3. A longer but still quite tentative sketch of two other volumes.

## THE VOLUMES: TENTATIVE DESCRIPTIONS

1. Creativity and Autonomy: A Christian Theory: Rather than being the enemy of creativity and autonomy, Christian theology can work out a durable and hardheaded theory of creativity and thus give theological support to the artist. This book will be a collaborating work by Fathers Avery Dulles, Thomas Clarke, William Lynch, Robert Johann, with the probable or possible inclusion of Fathers Paul Harbrecht, Matthew O'Connell, Terrence Toland, It will be a supporting volume, in the order of theology, for the whole series.

2. The Imagination: A general volume on the imagination. The book would pay special attention to the relation between the imagination and reality and would support the position that the imagination and the arts are instruments as important for the study and the building of reality as politics, science, economics, etc. We have been plagued with the opposite notions which equate the life of the imagination with the life of taste, rhistorical competence, and the gifts of a gentleman. This volume would also aim at taking the form of an introduction to Metaphysics. To be written by Father William Lynch.

3. The Art of the Film: Ingmar Bergman as Reflector: Many people believe that the new art is outstripping the theatre in quality and importance. This book should be done by Father Joseph Burvenich, the Belgian Jesuit and close friend of Ingmar Bergman. It could be a general appraisal of the new art, using Bergman's work as a general focus. It should deal with the picture of man dealing with a new form of thought, with images. Supplements can be added on other directors as thinkers.

4. Prospectus for the American Theatre: Our theatre and theatrical imagination is admittedly in a bad way. A man of the competence of Francis Fergusson, author of Idea of a Theatre and of Dante's Drama of the Mind, should be asked to analyze the problem and to envision the conditions of a new and brighter situation. For one thing the creation of new and greater styles in our theatre will help to enlarge the whole image of the human in our culture.

5. The Religious Imagination: We do not like to use the word "anthology" for this volume, but would look forward to a critical and annotated collection of central texts and documents on the history and idea of the religious imagination. For example, there are documents illuminating the gnostic imagination, the manichaeian imagination, the iconoclastic situation, the nature of symbolic exegesis, the theory of real assent in Newman, the insistence on concrete thought in the Exercises, etc. etc. etc. Authorship to be determined.

6. Art and actuality: The Christian Artist Enters the Scene: With the appearance of Christianity in the History of art and the life of the imagination, there is a sharper emergence of actuality and human detail. The materials of this volume can be centrally drawn from painting and especially from portraiture. Author to be determined.

7. The Image of Death: There are a number of great points and phases in human life which require the collaborating work of many arts and artists over many generations before we begin to have such total images of them as will help us to handle their reality. Death is one of these realities and points. The usual American approach is to avoid or disguise the image. The American problem with this image has been treated in several well known books. Our culture

has the right to ask the religious imagination to deal with these difficult situations. Author to be determined.

8. The Imagination: Organized or Organizing: Another title for this possible volume would be The Imagination and American Organization. Many people believe that we are up against a gathering crisis. Shall system and organization rule for its own sake and wipe out our humanity and individuality, or shall imagination intervene to humanize and personalize American organization? Shall there be a fundamental or an accidental difference between a collectivist society and ours? The author should be Father Paul Harbrecht, who has done several related studies for the Twentieth Century Fund.

9. The Freedom of the Imagination: This is one of the most critical concerns of the modern writer and artist, that his imagination be free and truly creative. Father William Richardson would tackle this question of the relation between freedom and creativity. One central focus of his volume would be the work and theory of Jean-Paul Sartre. Since the latter is also a novelist and playwright the book need not go outside of itself to relate itself to the actual life of the imagination. And it certainly is a problem that should be tackled by the religious mind and imagination.

10. The Imagination as a Healer: This would be largely a clinical and psychiatric study, and would be ideally done by Dr. Leslie Farber, recent Faculty Chairman of the Washington School of Psychiatry. He has many absorbing things to say on this question. For example, while we so often think of mental illness as producing or being caused by an overly active imagination, Dr. Farber relates it to an over literalness in the imagination, or inability to imagine, etc. etc., etc.