

Mission — The Heart of the Church

PART I

I thought it might be a timely topic for our mutual reflection during this month which focuses our attention on the missionary activities of the Church, to present in synopsis a theology of mission. Indeed, it would be misleading to allow anyone of us to feel that an annual burst of generous material giving to the Propagation of the Faith Society fulfilled the responsibility of our baptismal vocation to proclaim the good news — the Gospel — the mystery of faith — to all men.



Because we Christians believe that God the Father loved the world enough to send His Son to redeem us and the Lord of History has given His Spirit to the Church for all ages, we recognize our obligation to proclaim to every place and time that Jesus is Lord and that "there is no other name given by which we may be saved." With St. Paul we are forced to say: "Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel."

After 2,000 years of missionary effort, two

billion human beings (more than two-thirds of the world's population) have not had the Gospel effectively preached to them. This unimpressive record forces us to examine our understanding of our vocation. Where have we gone awry? Something must be wrong in our understanding of the message or in our understanding of the ones who are intended to receive it.

The Lord has described His spokesmen as lights set on a mountain, as the salt of the earth, as the leaven that permeates the entire loaf, as genuine prophets who by their fruits can be distinguished from false prophets. Those to whom the Church is sent have a right to scrutinize her, to challenge her witnesses, to test the power of the light, and the salt and the leaven.

The Fathers of Vatican Council II were well aware that the conduct of believers has much to do with the birth of atheism. When a man learned in his professional life and highly respected for his ability conducts his adult Christian life on the level of what he learned in a grammar school religion class, who can blame the educated nonbeliever for rejecting his witness? When someone apparently scrupulous about his life of worship is unscrupulous about his conduct in his busi-

ness world, or his attitude toward his neighbor, how can men expect to find in him a revelation of the authentic face of God?

If the Church can properly be defined as the living presence of Christ in the world, then her mission can be fulfilled only by a contemporary witness to Christ—by bringing forth fruits worthy of acceptance by 20th Century man. Her awareness of this challenge was clearly expressed in the document of Vatican II, THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD: "... the Church has the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the time and of responding to each generation in language intelligible to it concerning the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come and about the relationship of one to the other."

This 'now generation of the 70's' includes 50% of the human race that is under 30 years of age—a generation in a hurry and rapidly polarizing into positions for and against religion which will have long-lasting consequences — a generation forcing all of us to examine the authenticity of our Christian witness. Let's not turn them off. They can be our saving grace.

TO BE CONTINUED

Guest Columnist

By Father Leonard A. Kelly

A Mission Sunday Success Story

It was a perfect evening in fall as I left Chicago aboard the Super Chief, bound for Gallup, N.M. in the company of Bishop Jerome J. Hastrich, of that very poor missionary diocese.



After dinner we sat for hours in the dome car making our way west under the stars and the light of a half moon. We discussed at length the establishment of an orphanage for Indian children.

A very zealous and dedicated young couple who have worked for some years at Our Little Brothers and Sisters Home in Mexico City, have given their lives to the new foundation in New Mexico. How refreshing and inspiring to witness this dedication to the needs of the poor!

Arriving in Gallup in the late evening of the following day, the bishop and I were met by the whole student body of his seminary.

The group consisted of six boys who at-

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tend the local college and live with the bishop in his house. Soon after reaching his very humble home, we concelebrated Mass at which the students assisted both in English and in Spanish. Among other hymns, they sang, "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, that you do unto Me."

New Mexico claims to be "The Land of Enchantment." That it is to those who can see the distant mountains, the rolling landscape and the abundant sunshine.

The daughter of an original homesteader has given her 200 acre bit of land to the bishop for the new orphanage. It is very remote — 75 miles from the nearest grocery store and shopping center. It is considered desirable because of its remoteness because the hoped for success of the new project is based somewhat on bringing Indian children into a new environment.

The few Indian pueblos visited, revealed many people without ambition, without incentive and seemingly without hope. With definite efforts to preserve their culture, the

new foundation will strive to surround them with Christianity, lived and practiced.

Efforts are being made for the establishment of a post office at the new location, which is to be known as Bethlehem. There is a three story adobe house on the property which will be rehabilitated, after a vacancy of 25 years. It will serve as the home for 25 Indian orphans who are expected by Christmas, and as the foundation of what is hoped will grow into a Christian Indian institution.

Reading this success story of missionary zeal just at the time of Mission Sunday in our own diocese, may it fill you with joy and give you a real lift! There are many dedicated people in the world working zealously for the extension of Christ's Kingdom. All of us who assist in the propagation of the Faith are part of it.

Leaving what will become Bethlehem and driving down the beautiful valleys on the way to Sante Fe and Albuquerque, and viewing the snow capped mountains in the background, I left the Land of Enchantment with the hymn ringing in my ears: "Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, that you do unto Me!"

Editorial

A Golden Opportunity for All of Us

We are all missionaries.

Even those of us who enjoy luxurious shelter, rich food, entertainment by the hour and ever-available spiritual services.

True, for one reason or another, we don't go personally into the battlefields where the war against the direst of poverty is fought, nor do we travel to the outposts of the world to bring the message of the Gospel.

Others do. Some 300,000 missionaries run 100,000 schools, 1,000 hospitals and dispensaries, 127 leprosaria, 2,374 orphanages, 867 homes for the aged and parishes and dioceses in 833 mission territories.

To say that the work of the missionaries is laudable is understatement.

But to feel personal blame for staying at home is fallacious.

Both Pope Paul VI and Bishop Joseph L. Hogan praised the generosity of Catholics around the world without whose prayers and cash — yes, cold, hard cash — the missionaries would be unable to continue their work in the love of God and of mankind.

Pope Paul often has evinced a special care for the poor of the world and many times has called for the rich nations to share their wealth with the destitute.

He reiterates such thought in his Mission Sunday letter — "The most affluent regions of the world are fast discovering for themselves that happiness does not consist in possessions; they are learning from a bitter experience of emptiness how true are Our Lord's words: 'Not on bread alone does man live but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"

To be honest, it must be said that there

are a great many demands on our personal funds these days. But while we worry about the economy, there are mothers around the world watching their children die. Hard times have never kept the American people from helping such people.

Mission Sunday is a God-sent opportunity to become part and parcel of efficient and personal care of the needy. It also is a chance to do something to please ourselves — indeed to become a missionary without leaving home.

If, as you hear, we all, as members of society, are responsible for the horrid messes around the world, then we all can share in the credit for the good things being accomplished.

Beside that, helping the poor is probably the closest thing to a Christ-like act that we can do.