

Mission — the Heart of the Church

Part II

The Fathers of the II Vatican Council reflected on the impact that changes in the social order would have on religion. They admitted that the young people of today are much more willing and able to distinguish true religion from superstition and a magical view of the world. Our youth show no interest in a "Jesus and me" spirituality that blinds itself to the Christ suffering in this world; they remain unmoved by a debit-credit approach to morality which loses sight of the full implication of the Gospel's concern and challenge that we be our brother's keeper.



I believe that this open and challenging attitude of the young can broaden our vision of the Church's mission and purify our faith of the many false gods of our own making.

There are inequities in our society today which cry to heaven for vengeance and our vocation as children of God and members of His Church calls us to the mission of raising our voices in protest at this long-standing tyranny and oppression of the poor and disadvantaged. The young are so often right in their accusation of many professed Christians whose religion seems to match Marx's contention that it is an opiate making us insensitive to the crying needs of our fellowman. How unjustly this indictment falls upon all of us for whom religion is only an insurance policy against eternal damnation—and where daily Christian witness manifests no evidence of an authentic encounter with the heart of Christianity, the mission to restore all things in Christ.

An incarnate Christianity made visible by the concrete actions of individual men and women will never be a comfortable or static mission. There will always be pain, tension and risks when men respond personally and completely to a Gospel of concern. We have more than enough of beautiful documents issued by the Church to remind us forcefully

of our common mission of penetrating and perfecting the secular order with the spirit of the Gospel. The pain comes when we begin to live the challenge and become deeply involved with the needs of the underdeveloped segments of humanity.

If we find ourselves professing a Christianity that we consider cozy and comfortable, we can be sure that we are not fulfilling our missionary vocation. I want to be a courageous shepherd who will lead you out of the security of the sheepfold and into the pasturelands, even if this involves the risk that some sheep may go astray. We have restrained our creative witness for too long a time. Venturing forth will always involve some danger but there is no other way to Christian maturity. This was the challenge offered by Him who pitched His tent among us and mandated our venturing forth if we would deserve to bear His name. "Go into the whole world and preach the good news to every creature."

Yes — Mission is at the heart of the Church!

Guest Columnist

Are We Christians or Not?

By Father Richard O'Connell

By this time I suppose just about everyone is tired of hearing such things as "I don't like the changes in Church", "I don't like the new Liturgy, or the sign of peace", or "I think guitar music at Mass is sacrilegious". The litany is long and monotonous, but it is so much easier to wax eloquent for or against what are called "the changes" than it is to get at the heart of the matter. Really, do you think the Lord is excited or disturbed whether we sing in Latin or English, or whether we carry the gospels in procession etc., etc., etc.? But we don't ask what the Lord might think or like — it's what we think and like that seems to preoccupy us.



Father O'Connell is pastor of St. Catherine's in Addison.

We'd rather talk, or if you wish, argue about the incidentals because then we don't have to face the fundamentals. Holy Scripture says, "the Kingdom of God is within you" — "If you wish to be my disciple, pick up your cross and come follow me" — "Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all else will be given to you" — "This is the will of God, your sanctification" — "I would that you were hot or cold . . ." The list is almost endless, but Scripture puts us on the spot, and that's really what we don't like — that's the heart of the matter. Let's stop kidding ourselves — are we Christians or not?

If we are, I think we'll not be very disturbed about "the changes". If we are, we will be so busy in our prayer life and apostolic

life we won't have the time to worry about "the changes".

No Catholic or, if you prefer, Christian can afford the luxury of an identity crisis. There is too much to do — there are pressing needs all around us. We don't have to go to Pakistan or India or Vietnam or Africa or South America or the poor of our country. There are needs right in our own communities — to mention just one, the sick and the shut-ins. How many visit the sick in hospitals or nursing homes? In my community I could keep busy just visiting the sick.

Those who are so worried about "the changes" and the Church ought to look over the spiritual and corporal works of mercy, or meditate on the Beatitudes, and their worries would dissolve. There is always the danger of over-simplification but Christ was simple and always to the point — may we imitate His simplicity.

Editorial

Society's Burden: the Starvation of a Baby

"That was a very primitive way of handling the problem," said the Rev. John Fletcher, an Episcopal clergyman who is director of a theological institute in Washington, D.C.

He was referring to a case discussed at the recent International Scientific Symposium on Mental Retardation, sponsored by the Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. Foundation.

The case involved a new-born baby, a Mongoloid, who was allowed to die of starvation because his parents wouldn't give permission for a relatively simple operation to remove an intestinal block to allow the child to be fed.

Johns Hopkins Hospital officials took the case to a judge who indicated that the court was not likely to overturn the parents' decision under the circumstances.

Thus, Religious News Service reports, the child was put in a side room and after a 15-day period finally starved to death.

The parents said their decision was not

to "burden society with a Mongoloid child" and added, in reference to allowing the child to die, "Why not let God's will be done?"

Two of the panelists, a University of Pennsylvania sociology professor and a psychologist, said the parents should not have been allowed to make the final life-or-death decision. Another member of the panel, Michael Harrington, an author and social critic, said:

"We have no choice but to play God. If we refuse to exercise the power we have given ourselves then we are playing Godlessness. . . if the parents didn't want the child, the state should have taken it."

The symposium discussed other topics — test tube babies, sterilization of retarded persons, the rights of the retarded, and the "Use and Misuse of Labeling Human Beings", referring to retarded persons.

The symposium was well-intentioned and made many valid points; its members

were, from all reports, respected members of sociological and medical communities. There were no decisions to be made; just airing of problems concerning retarded persons and how our society regards them.

But despite all that, there seems something coldly bizarre about highly educated, highly concerned and highly sensitive people politely discussing the plight of a Mongoloid baby allowed to die of starvation in one of the foremost hospitals in the world.

True, there is theological matter involved in the death but again that seems tangential.

The terrible question is what kind of society is unable to act as a baby is shunted off to a sideroom to die of hunger in the midst of technological and nutritional plenty.

As the Rev. Fletcher said, the whole handling of the situation was "very primitive."