

Mission of the Church to the Diocese

INTRODUCTION

The mystery of the holy Church is manifest in her very foundation, for the Lord Jesus inaugurated her by preaching the good news, that is, the coming of God's Kingdom, which, for centuries, had been promised in the Scriptures: 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand' (Mk. 1:15; Mt. 4:17). Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, N. 5.

To explain the mission or task of the Church presumes an agreed understanding of the Church in this twentieth century. After four years of prayer and work by the Council Fathers, Pope Paul VI brought the Second Vatican Council to a solemn close in St. Peter's Square on December 8, 1965. The finest minds in the Church, aided in a special way by the Holy Spirit, came to a humble, hopeful statement describing the Church as a mystery, a light to the Gentiles, a tract of land to be cultivated, a sheepfold, a pilgrim journeying to a distant land. The Second Vatican Council also gave prominence to the Church's role in relation to the Kingdom of God.

The Church equipped with the gifts of her Founder and faithfully guarding His precepts of charity, humility, and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to establish among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God. SHE BECOMES ON EARTH THE INITIAL BUDDING FORTH OF THAT KINGDOM. While she slowly grows, the Church strains toward the consummation of the Kingdom

and, with all her strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with her King.

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, No. 5
(Emphasis added.)

This paper makes no claim to present a definitive delineation of the nature of the Church. The Council Fathers themselves made no such attempt. Following the lead of the Second Vatican Council, we have tried to describe the Church in terms of the Kingdom of God. Other descriptions are fruitful and their study is encouraged. We have chosen the biblical concept of kingdom because it is all-embracing (God's Kingdom is personal and social, interior and exterior, spiritual as well as technological), and seems to us a common denominator to foster constructive self-reflection. Our local mission of the Church depends upon our understanding of the various aspects of the Father's Kingdom, and our role therein.

Renewal is an endless process for a "pilgrim people." The aim of this study paper is to help all of us as Church, as diocese, as parish, as Christian, to take another step. The pages that follow are not filled with ready answers. Instead, they seek out your comments, your suggestions, your ideas, your hopes for the future. The growth of the whole People of God in our diocese is the work of all of us. Chapter I outlines a basic concept of Church. Chapter II looks to our diocese as "believing Church", "serving Church", "worshipping Church", "listening Church". Chapter III offers some questions to help us to evaluate ourselves.

THY KINGDOM COME

I. Theological Basis:

1. We know of the Father through Jesus of Nazareth. With His coming the Father's Kingdom (dominion) was made known to man in a definitive way.¹ The use of this work "kingdom" is difficult within our American experience, because it suggests a political or a juridical reality that impinges upon one's personal freedom.² It was precisely to escape various forms of "domination" that our forefathers came to our shores.

2. Yet the Dominion of God is of a different nature. Scripture explains it is as an all-pervasive presence (reign or dominion) in which we share, yet by which we are limited.³ We share in His dominion because we are created in His image, enjoying gifts of intelligence and free choice. Consequently, our world is not simply a prison, to whose natural forces we must conform.⁴ It is rather a reality which we must mold, exercising our co-responsibility with Him who made us free. The vast power at our fingertips in this computer age shows how much trust has been placed in our hands.

3. This very trust has at times been misused. Often twentieth-century man has interpreted this gift of freedom as complete autonomy, and at times attempted to erect a totally humanistic kingdom, where only the power of man holds sway.⁵ Relying too much upon ourselves, we have compiled an unenviable record of selfishness, war, racial hatred and pursuit of pleasure rarely equalled by our human predecessors. But whether we attribute this record to original sin, to the social aspects of sin (sin of the world, sinful structures), or to sin which we ratify personally,⁶ we retain the conviction of human freedom and therefore of human responsibility.⁷ We can still describe history from the Christian viewpoint as the interaction of the freedom of God and the freedom of man. In spite of the complexity of our contemporary world, we adhere to a basic or core freedom,⁸ which must respond to the Father's invitation: "The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News." (Mark 1:15).

4. This seeming paradox, between a freedom capable of enormous good (witness the advances of modern medicine) and of frightening destruction (nuclear war, pollution) is explained not through abstract, complicated patterns of logic, but through a person — Jesus of Nazareth. The Son, whom we call Jesus Christ our Lord (a divine title), introduces the Kingdom of the Father in His very person.⁹ His word (preaching) and work (His deeds), testify to the Father's love and explain the mystery of human freedom. Christ's Lordship consists in a complete fidelity to the Father, culminating in His death on the cross. This fidelity took Christ into the world, to mix with sinners and to proclaim the Good News to all.¹⁰ Quoting Isaiah, Jesus applied these words to Himself:

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me, He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.
(Luke 4:18-19)

Our human ideas of freedom and lordship, connote an ability to achieve and to get ahead, to have authority over others. Jesus, on the other hand, preached a selfless freedom of giving to others and a "domination" accomplished through apparent powerlessness. Thus what Roman authorities intended to be His greatest humiliation, the cross, has become a symbol of unending freedom and unquenchable hope.¹¹

5. Because of Jesus' free cooperation with the Father's will, He is raised up, be-

coming the source of our own freedom and the pledge of our everlasting life.

My brothers, you were called, as you know, to liberty; but be careful, or this liberty will provide an opening for self-indulgence. Serve one another, rather, in works of love, since the whole of the Law is summarized in a single command: Love your neighbor as yourself.
(Gal. 5: 13-15)

Yes, it is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life, and that I shall raise him up on the last day.

(John 6: 40)

6. Through Jesus we understand what it means to be truly human; we come to learn our role in the Father's Kingdom, we see our freedom as a mystery of selfless love, rooted in faith and possessing a dynamic orientation towards the future. For the present, we work in hope for a better world in our own day; ultimately, we look for the fullness of the Kingdom which will come from Him and in His own time and way. Father Karl Rahner explains this reality in a more technical manner by distinguishing between the absolute future and the relative future. The former comes only from God; the latter is built up by man in creative responsibility under grace. This relative future is important for our day, but cannot bring the salvation of God which we must await from His hand.

7. The Father's "Kingdom", then, is not primarily a juridical reality, nor an alien structure imposed from without. It is a un-

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