

Mission of the Church to the Diocese

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ion with the one Lord which explains the deepest reality of our human existence. This does not rule out laws necessary for common order, or structures helpful in spreading the kingdom.¹² Just as the Kingdom was made known initially through the Incarnation, so now it is carried on sacramentally in the Church and the Christian people. Even though we may discuss and clarify the relationship between His Kingdom and our human approximations of it, the essential meaning of praying "Thy Kingdom come" is accepting the present, radical "dominion" of Christ, so that our life, our world have no meaning without Him. Even those not blessed with a knowledge of or faith in Christ are in some way included in His Lordship.¹³

8. Apart from the Father's Kingdom, apart from the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection, apart from the presence of the Holy Spirit, the Church is unintelligible.¹⁴ It is her role to continue Christ's mission of suffering, of healing and of liberating. She should be the dynamic witness to the presence of God among men, the "light to the Gentiles."¹⁵ In the midst of a welter of autonomous men, she proclaims her fidelity to the one Lord, and this Faithfulness is the measure of her effectiveness and the source of her joy. She proclaims anew Jesus' message that "The Kingdom of God is close at hand" (Mark 1: 15).

9. On the one hand, the Church is not synonymous with the Kingdom.¹⁶ Vatican II attests to the presence of other ecclesial bodies,¹⁷ as well as the existence of grace outside the juridical structure of the Church.¹⁸ Our daily experience ratifies this at times, when we are put to shame by the goodness and kindness of others who know far less than we do of Christ. Church history too, gives us illustrations of occasions when the pilgrim Church has not been faithful to her Lord, but has substituted human forms of domination and oppression for trust in Jesus Christ. On the other hand, we find a renewed vision and a dynamism in the Church today. The process of renewal proclaimed by Vatican II is already bearing fruit. We are part of a Church that is attempting to read the "signs of the times,"¹⁹ to rediscover her true nature as "in pilgrimage", to follow the lead of the Spirit in reflecting the Dominion of God in Christ. We are part of an exciting era, struggling with problems of technology, of justice and peace, of interior prayer, of the meaning of human dignity, all in the light of the reality which is Jesus Christ.

The Church, "like a pilgrim in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God", announcing the cross and death of the Lord until He comes (Cf. 1 Cor. 11:25). By the power of the risen Lord, she is given strength to overcome patiently and lovingly the afflictions and hardships which assail her from within and from without, and to show forth in the world the mystery of the Lord in a faithful though shadowed way, until at the last it will be revealed in total splendor.

(Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, N. 8).

II. General Affirmations:

10. The relationships between the Church and the Kingdom, between the Church and the world, give rise to many questions. Concrete applications within the Diocese of Rochester will be taken up in the third chapter of this paper. The present chapter seeks only to highlight general affirmations and provide a transition from the theological basis of the Church's mission to specific applications in our diocese.

A) THE BELIEVING CHURCH:

11. Should our renewal not be first of all a renewal of faith? To proclaim ourselves a believing community is not a manifestation of pride if we stress the gratuitousness of faith from God. It is not a self-generating reality or something we ourselves create, but a gift from a merciful Father for which

we ought to be humbly grateful. Should we not begin with the recollection of our total dependence upon the one Lord and the "fragile" character of faith — a gift which we can lose through our sin?

12. Each one of us may express that faith in a variety of ways. Models of faith abound in biblical history. Abraham believed in the promise in spite of the paradox (Gn. 12 ff.). Moses meditated between God and the people (Ex. 3 ff.). The prophets were the conscience of the covenant. Isaiah wrote vividly of the suffering servant who would sacrifice himself for the sake of others (Is. 42 ff.). Simeon prayed that the Messiah would bring peace to an oppressed people (Lk. 2:22). Stephen believed even as he was being entombed by a barrage of stones (Ac. 7). Paul did not believe until he was struck to the ground before the gates of Damascus (Ac. 9 ff.).

13. Faith has many aspects. But the common characteristic of our faith is a living commitment to the person of Jesus Christ. 'I believe' is as dynamic an expression as 'I love'. Both have different nuances at different times depending upon our understanding of the needs of the Father's Kingdom, and our role within it, both as individuals and as a community.

14. Faith is a dependence. Faith implies private prayer and public worship. Faith implies the willingness to be, as Christ was, totally for others, even unto death. Faith is multi-dimensional and therefore hopes for the return of Christ. This confidence is most radically expressed in the affirmation that God will ultimately grant what we strive always to attain. Even now while we battle for a just society, we men of faith know that all men are at one in Christ (Col. 1: 15 ff.), that the poor and the oppressed are the chosen friends of Christ (Mt. 25-31 ff.), and that the calf and the lion really will graze together (Is. 11:6). We men of faith know all this, but we often fear the consequences of daring to live such a faith.

15. Faith demands loving God with all our might and loving all our neighbors as much as we love ourselves (Mt. 22: 36 ff.). Faith is choosing to be, in imitation of Christ, for others and knowing that only thus can we ever realize our own potential. Our belief is that Christ redeemed all by emptying himself even to the point of accepting death (Ph. 2: 5-11). This belief binds believing men to change the world by yielding rather than by wielding power.

16. Faith in Christ leads to faith in man as well as in God. We believe that the Lord who will return already lives with His people. Truly believing people are sensitive to the needs of others and generous in their response to these needs. They see Christ where other men see only misery. They share with others what other men keep for themselves. Truly believing people are ready to give even life itself for the sake of others. For they believe with Christ that the ultimate sacrifice is the greatest love. (Jn. 15: 13).

17. As we grow in faith and in love, we manifest more perfectly what we believe we really are. Tension exists and will remain until Christ returns to restructure creation in peace and harmony. Until then, absolute peace is Utopia, but the Church strives always to be a more perfect sign of the great new world that is coming.

18. We are not idle dreamers. Jesus said, "The time has come at last, the Kingdom of God has arrived. You must change your hearts and minds and believe the good news (Mk. 1:15). Our testimony to Christ can only be vital if we continually strive to exchange our hearts of stone for hearts of flesh and compassion (Ez. 36: 26). We Christians must struggle to share more perfectly in the life of Him we call Lord (Jn. 10: 10).

19. In the waters of Baptism we died with Christ and were raised up by the Spirit to new life in Him (Jn. 3: 1-21). At the Eucharist we momentarily bridge the gap between what already is and what is yet to come (1 Cor. 11: 26; Jn. 6: 44 ff.). We become one family, united around the table of the Lord to be nourished with His word and

with His flesh. At that table, no one distinguishes between white and black, rich and poor. We are all brothers and sisters in our Father's house.

20. That same unity must find living expression outside the warm womb of the Church building. That same feeling for others must envelope all creation and not simply those of us who are marked with the cross. Our love of others must be as all-embracing as God's love for us (Ep. 1: 9-10). We must strive to be now what we hope to be forever: one people united in love with each other in the living God.

We believe that together with God we can do all things. We believe that all men live in God and that human life makes no sense apart from God. So we believe and so we live.

B) THE SERVING CHURCH:

21. Should our renewal not be involved with mankind? The Word made flesh came to give us a vision of reality. He wants us to see our role in the Father's Kingdom, not in a "spiritualized" sense separate from our own world, but incarnated within our contemporary, scientific, future-oriented world. We do not fear Kodak, Xerox, the U. of R. Medical School, IBM, Corning Glass, Cornell, etc. — their achievements are a mark of His trust in mankind. At the same time, guided by the light of the Gospel, we must face more explicitly the value judgments implicit in modern technology.²¹ Inspired by her Lord, the Church as teacher must speak out against abuses, against that which is inhuman or non-human. Should the Church's involvement not be a part of that "relative future" of which we spoke earlier? Should she not use her varied resources to build up the city of man, to fight against poverty, injustice and war?

22. While we work for this "relative future" and become involved with mankind, do we not have a special role in witnessing to His final coming (the "absolute future")? Here the apparently powerless have a special role. The prayers of the aged, the infirmity of the sick, the frustrations of those who lead seemingly "ordinary" lives, the freeing testimony of celibacy lived by our priests and religious, the bondage of those trapped in a circle of poverty and injustice — all bear special witness to the "folly of the cross" and the deepest meaning of His Dominion. Should the Church not show them a special love and care, even as her Lord did?

Christ was sent by the Father 'to bring good news to the poor, to heal the contrite of heart' (Lk. 4: 18), to seek and to save what was lost' (Lk. 19: 10). Similarly, the Church encompasses with love all those who are afflicted with human weakness. Indeed, she recognizes in the poor and suffering the likeness of her poor and suffering Founder. She does all she can to relieve their need and in them she strives to serve Christ.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, N. 8.

The power of the Spirit, who raised Christ from the dead, is continuously at work in the world. Through the generous sons and daughters of the Church likewise, the People of God is present in the midst of the poor and of those who suffer oppression and persecution; it lives in its own flesh and its own heart the Passion of Christ and bears witness to his resurrection.

The entire creation has been groaning till now in an act of giving birth, as it waits for the glory of the children of God to be revealed (cf. Rom. 8: 22). Let Christians therefore be convinced that they will yet find the fruits of their own nature and effort cleansed of all impurities in the new earth which God is now preparing for them, and in which there will be the kingdom of justice and love, a kingdom which will be fully perfected when the Lord will come himself.

Hope in the coming kingdom is already

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