

to the call to the Kingdom, is the gift of faith.

40. The Church is the holy body of believers who acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus, who celebrate his presence in Word and Sacrament and who, in response to the Word, live the hospitality and compassion of Jesus in daily life. The individual Christian, incorporated by baptism into this community of believers, is called to live in precisely the same manner.

41. The Church supports individuals in their journey of faith. As a community of the faithful, she must model the attitude of God toward her members — an attitude of reverence and care. Her embrace must include all: young, old, rich, poor. And her concern must always be to remind all of their goodness, their lovableness and magnificent eternal destiny. Insofar as we do this, we are worthy of our name. Insofar as we diminish, belittle or erode self-confidence, or deny one another's gifts, we diminish God's Kingdom and undermine his Word.

The words of Vatican Council II remind us that we do this when we are guilty of sexism or any other kind of sinful prejudice:

With respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent.¹¹

This strong moral imperative is most fruitfully appreciated when it is understood as flowing from this statement of faith found elsewhere in the documents of the Council:

There is in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because "there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is neither male nor female. For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).¹²

42. The dignity and human rights of all men and women are promised in their creation by a universally loving God and in their baptism into the generosity of Christ Jesus. Nonetheless, the dignity and rights of poor women and men are of particular concern to the Church as she attempts to be faithful to God's special regard for the *anawim*, the poor of Israel, and to Jesus' preferential love for the poor of his day.

From the earliest days of the Church, the needs of the poor have been a special responsibility of the Church. As Vatican Council II so clearly affirmed, the Church "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."¹³

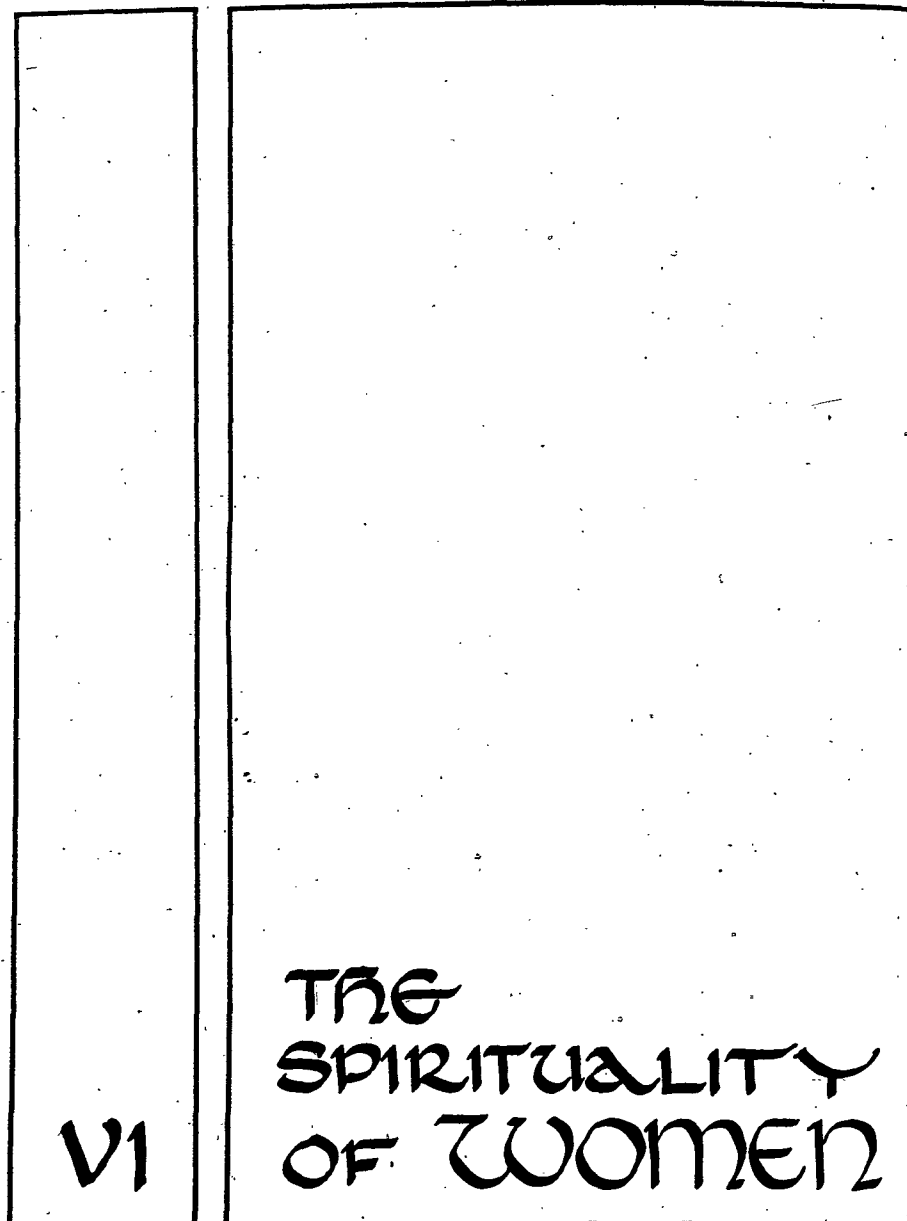
43. The needs of poor women, who make up the greater majority of poor people, are doubly oppressive to them. As the Office of Domestic Social Improvement of the United States Catholic Conference points out in its study, *On the Concerns of Poor Women in the United States*,

Within the context of the Church's traditional concern for the poor, the needs of poor women present a special challenge to dioceses, parishes, and Catholic organizations . . . whether they are black, white, Chicana, or American Indian and whether they come from rural or urban communities, poor women share many common concerns. Lack of economic and educational opportunities, unavailability of health care, nonexistent or inadequate housing, lack of self-worth and the need to provide for their children are problems which poor women confront daily. Although the same types of problems can be faced by women who are not poor, for poor women these concerns are a matter of basic survival.¹⁴

44. Because of the variety of cultures and socio-economic groups represented in the Church of Rochester, there is a danger that the poor women of this diocese will be invisible to the vast majority of our people and ministers. For poor women are often hidden — on the other side of town, in apartments or poor housing, on winding rural roads, and in countless forms of isolation. They are often inaudible — in the privacy of their distress, behind closed doors, in their quiet fear about the future.

These poor women are widows, single parents, elderly women, mothers who cannot make ends meet, poor working women with minimum wages, single women who live alone, and minority women struggling with the additional questions of racism and bigotry. They may be black, Hispanic, Indochinese, white; they may be homeless, friendless, unemployed, hungry, sick, battered, afraid to share their need. "The equal dignity of persons demands that a more humane and just condition of life be brought about" for all such poor women. "For excessive economic and social differences between the members of the one human family or population groups cause scandal, and militate against social justice, equity, the dignity of the human person, as well as social and international peace."¹⁵

45. It is my special obligation as bishop "to attend upon the poor" and it is the special obligation of all of us in the Church to hear and if need be search out the cry of the poor. For "it is as if Christ himself were crying out in these poor to beg the charity of the disciples."¹⁶



46. I wish I could convey adequately in this letter all the hidden and unsung goodness, strength and wisdom women have contributed to the Church through all the years. By this, I do not mean to suggest that the role of women in the Church should be hidden or unsung, but to acknowledge that when all is said and done, the holiness of God's people is not a matter of organization, title, publicity or function. Rather, holiness is ardently and generously belonging to God through every fiber of our heart and soul and strength.

To be holy is to be thoroughly possessed by God, to hand over ourselves in full and free response to his love. This depth of belonging and handing over in individual Christians is not usually commented on in the press or in our annual reports, but it is the essential life of the Church, that without which we are not Christ's Church.

Wherever holiness truly exists — in a woman or in a man — the central meaning and mission of the Church is fulfilled.

47. It is possible for us to forget this and to think that unless one has an explicit function in the Church's visible organization, or unless one has a role with particular duties in the work-a-day life of the Church's operation, somehow he or she is not contributing to the Church or recognized by the Church.

48. Certain ministries and functions are necessary elements in the life of the Church and are constituted for the service of God's people. For those services to be carried on, all of us — men and women — need to step forward to fulfill them according to the norms of the Church at present and in the future. But ministerial roles and functions do not in themselves signify holiness or confer it. It is important to remember the true nature of holiness and its source.

49. It is especially important that Christian women be aware of the centrality of their everyday lives in building up the holiness of the Body of Christ. This holiness is expressed and sought by women who choose to serve the mission of the Church by total dedication to family life. This holiness is also expressed and sought by religious women and by women pursuing careers in the many fields of human endeavor and in positions of responsibility in the Church.

50. The work of the Church is the same at home and in public places. The holiness of each of us is found finally and only in the depth of our faith, hope and love: "In short, there are three things which last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love" (I Corinthians 13:13). Who, but God alone, can assess the immeasurable variety and disposition of this holy love among his people? If it is not given to us to measure it, how can we compile reports about it? And yet, we need to help one another experience it, be ever grateful for it and bear one another up in its strength.

51. Women in their homes, as well as women in the marketplace, need to be confident of their spirituality. They need to be aware, as often they are not, that work, prayer, service, hospitality, sacrifice, suffering and all the countless efforts of so-called humble activity which make up the lives of most of us constitute the spiritual lives to which Christ calls us, and in which he takes great delight. It is our greatest gift to one another and