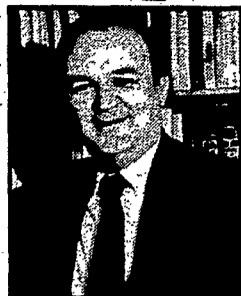


Document expands church's social mission

Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the church's mission was regarded as twofold: the preaching of the Gospel (including forms of official and unofficial teaching, such as catechesis) and the administration of the sacraments. The social apostolate was seen as a form of pre-evangelization, that is, a necessary preparation for the preaching of the Gospel, but not an essential part of evangelization itself.

Thanks to the council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, known as *Gaudium et spes* ("Joy and hope"), the church's missionary horizon was expanded to include the church's activities on behalf of social justice, human rights, and peace as well as the full scope of its social services to the sick, the poor, and the needy. The emergence of liberation theology and the church's renewed emphasis on the social apostolate were a direct outgrowth of the council's teaching.

The impetus for the council's pastoral constitution (a type of document without precedent in the history of the church) came from Pope John XXIII and his close associate, Cardinal Leo-Joseph Suenens of Belgium. With the approval of the pope, Cardinal Suenens rose at the end of the first session (Dec. 4, 1962) and urged the council to do more than examine the mystery of the church in itself, but also to at-



essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

tend to the church's relationship with the world at large.

Gaudium et spes recapitulated the main elements of Catholic social teaching, beginning with Leo XIII's groundbreaking encyclical *Rerum novarum* (1891), through Pius XI's *Quadragesimo anno* (1931), and then John XXIII's *Mater et magistra* (1961) and *Pacem in terris* (1963).

The Pastoral Constitution also took into account various intellectual, scientific, political, economic and cultural developments outside the church. "In every age," it declared, "the church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel" (n. 4).

From its outset, the Pastoral Constitution insisted that the church does not exist alongside the world, but within it. That

is why the document's official title is Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (my emphasis) rather than "and" the Modern World. The latter would have implied the church and the world are separate and opposed entities.

Gaudium et spes also made clear that the church does not wish to dominate the world, but only to serve it. "The church is not motivated by earthly ambition," it continued, "but is interested in one thing only: to carry on the work of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who came into the world to bear witness to the truth, to save and not to judge, to serve and not to be served" (n. 3).

Though the church will not fully achieve its missionary goals until the "age to come," it is called even now "to form the family of the children of God even in this present history of humankind." Indeed, "the church believes that ... it can help to make the human family and its history still more human" (n. 40).

On the other hand, the church is not, and cannot act like, a political party or movement. "Christ did not bequeath to the church a mission in the political, economic, or social order." Nor is the church "committed to any one culture or to any political, economic, or social system" (n. 42).

The Pastoral Constitution nevertheless insisted that there is a connection between Christian faith and temporal activities, and it characterized the dichotomy between the two realms as "one of the gravest errors of our time" (n. 43). Such a split, it acknowledged, occurs within the church as well as outside.

For *Gaudium et spes*, to understand the wider mission of the church in the world, one must understand the church's relation to the Kingdom, or Reign, of God. Indeed, "the church has but one sole purpose — that the Kingdom of God may come and the salvation of the human race may be accomplished" (n. 45). That kingdom, or reign, of God is not only "a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace," but also "of justice, love, and peace" (n. 39).

If liturgical reform has been the primary target of those least happy with the conciliar and post-conciliar renewal of the church, their secondary target has been this renewed emphasis on the church's social mission, which they sometimes dismiss as a "politicization" of the Gospel.

For the council, however, it is of the essence of the Gospel.

Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

How to get to Yankee stadium

Sunday's Readings: (R1) Luke 12:49-53. (51) Jeremiah 38:4-6, 8-10. (R2) Hebrews 12:1-4.

Not everyone is a sports fan. Still, sports are an important phenomenon in our culture. St. Paul was a sports fan. He was fascinated with the Olympics — and especially with the running events. Images drawn from foot racing turn up again and again in his writings (R2).

For example, in his first letter to the Corinthians, he asked: "On you not know that the runners in the stadium all run in the race, but only one wins the prize?" Then he advises his readers, "Run so as to win" (9:24). Paul is straightforward: In the race of life, run to win. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells us that when he first received his life's mission to preach the Gospel among the Gentiles he went in secret to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem "so that I might not be running, or have-run, in vain" (Gal 2:2).

How tragic, he seems to be saying, to run life's race and have nothing to show for it. For Paul, lessons from the locker room have much to say about the Christian life.

First, victories are won not on the playing field but in the training room. Thus Paul says, "Every athlete exercises disci-



a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

pline in every way. They do it to win a perishable crown, but we an imperishable one. Thus I do not run aimlessly; I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. No, I drive my body and train it, for fear that, after having preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (9:25-27). In other words, the final victory demands more than determination. It requires discipline.

If you jump into a taxi cab in New York and ask the driver, "How do I get to Yankee stadium?" don't be too surprised if he replies, "Practice! Practice! Practice!" The key to life is discipline. That is true of any endeavor; but it is especially true in our relationship with Christ. The life of faith, like that of an athlete, is a life of discipline.

The second lesson we can learn from the locker room is the importance of a

clear-cut sense of direction and purpose. It is important to spend those long, grueling hours sharpening your competitive skills.

It is just as important to run a straight course. You can be the fleetest athlete in the world, but if you don't stay on course, it's all in vain. Paul wrote to the Philippians: "Forgetting what lies behind, I strain forward to what lies ahead. I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling" (3:13-14).

After his conversion, St. Paul focused everything he was and hoped to be on one thing: serving Christ. Does our life have a focus? Are we driven by a great purpose? So the author of Hebrews says, "Let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith" (Heb 12:1-2).

We are on the track waiting for the starter's signal. Everyone who has ever walked this life in faith is cheering for us. But we can't start the race until we get rid of the monkeys on our back, until we get rid of our selfishness and arrogance, our sloppiness and pride. You can't run a race looking over your shoulder. And you can't live your life fully if you are bogged down

with unfinished business — regrets, grievances, hurt feelings.

If you are going to compete in the race of life, run to win. And that means committing yourself to a life of discipline. It means seeking to be all God has created us to be. It means knowing where we are going — focussing in on the tasks at hand. It means getting rid of any sin in your life that may serve as a hindrance. And it means running your race to cross God's finish line. Never abandon the struggle.

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, August 17
Ezekiel 24:15-24; Matthew 19:16-22
Tuesday, August 18
Ezekiel 28:1-10; Matthew 19:23-30
Wednesday, August 19
Ezekiel 34:1-11; Matthew 20:1-16
Thursday, August 20
Ezekiel 36:23-28; Matthew 22:1-14
Friday, August 21
Ezekiel 37:1-14; Matthew 22:34-40
Saturday, August 22
Ezekiel 43:1-7; Matthew 23:1-12

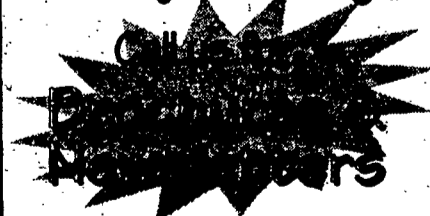
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