

The Mission of the Church: Five Guiding Principles

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Through the Council, the Church has better understood its missionary nature. But how, according to the demands of our time, will it accomplish the mission which is its *raison d'être*.

The structural reform proposed in the Council and carefully discussed in the first two sessions should profoundly affect the churches of the Third World, as Father Chenu so admirably pointed out in the first issue of this magazine,

But such a reform must ultimately influence the entire Church. In particular, it ought to have consequences of great importance for the mission of the Church. Vatican II has succeeded in creating a more vital consciousness among the assembled bishops, as well as among all Christians, of the necessity of a missionary renewal. As discussion continued, it became increasingly more apparent that the fundamental question today is the relationship of the Church with the world. This awareness caused the Council to plan a schema on the problem to be added to the sixteen projected texts.

At present, we might say that the crucial issue of Vatican II is found in schema XVII.

In the light of the basic tendencies manifested during the first two sessions and according to the first information available on schema XVII, we would like to offer a few reflections concerning what we might call the necessary conditions for a missionary Church. We believe that the efficacy of the solemn declarations of the Council depends on the openness and preparation of Christians. No text, even the best, will result in action if Christians are not prepared to understand it. Therefore, each one of us, from our different vantage points, must try to discover what are the demands of the Church's mission today.

That the Church may live in ~~the~~ a state of reform

We might begin by saying, in the ecumenical language common today, that it is necessary and sufficient that the Church be the Church. However, this point needs to be clarified so that it may be employed in a Catholic sense without risk of error.

That the Church not be identified with a political society

The principle "that the Church be the Church" must also be understood in ^{another} ~~a second~~ sense, which brings us to the second condition for an authentically missionary church. We wish to speak here of the fidelity of today's Catholics and ~~the~~ ~~fidelity~~ of the concrete institutions ^{through} ~~by means of~~ which the Church is ^{expressed,} ~~fulfilled today,~~ to the original and unique nature of ~~the~~ ^{the} community, which is the Body of Christ

Historically, the Church has ~~not~~ ~~the~~ ~~side~~ been affected ^{by} ~~its~~ ^{its} experience in the Middle Ages, when ~~it~~ ^{it} found ~~for~~ itself at the head of Christian civilization. The political, earthly role of the social institution, "the Church," ~~belongs,~~ ~~without a doubt,~~ ~~to the~~ is, without a doubt, a thing of the past. But it is ~~more than~~ clear that we have still not completely left behind this period, at least in the sense that many of us look back nostalgically on ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~past~~ ^{past} ~~when~~ ^{when} the distinction (always maintained legally) between the temporal city and the ecclesiastical city had, ~~been~~ for all practical purposes, been ^{eliminated} ~~eliminated~~ in favor of the latter. The Church has been an important factor in civilization and culture; it was able to bring its original message to a world which was familiar to it and in which its language was perfectly comprehensible.

If the consequences of this situation were, on one hand, fortunate, they did not prevent the church from ~~being~~ ^{facing} certain ~~and~~ ^{dangers} which, to some extent, it still faces. ~~To~~ To those who are outside it (and perhaps to some of its members), the church ~~is like~~ appears to be a cultural organization like many others, which contains implicitly a certain civilization, unlike the others. A civilization, but without transcendence. It is true that in Asia and Africa the ~~church~~ preaching of the Gospel has often been accompanied by civilizing contributions. Doubtless this is why secular states, such as France, have so openly favored missionary activity; in the eyes of the ~~the~~ government, it was a matter of the projection of French culture. No matter what importance we wish to give to this fact, it cannot be denied ~~and it is just as~~ ^{and} the importance of its consequences must be recognized.

What we are here saying about the past seems to us to be ^{equally} ~~also~~ valid ~~for~~ in the present. Everyone agrees that the church today is not directing ~~the~~ culture and civilization. But many of us feel that the church, and only the church, can contribute essential and effective elements for the construction of the temporal city. ~~In the face of~~ ^{In the face of} ~~such~~ ~~and~~ the problems of the modern world (social justice, international understanding and cooperation, etc.), we frequently give the impression that we are the only ones who know the answers, even ~~if~~ when, in many cases, we haven't even bothered to carefully ~~study~~ study the exact nature of the problems.

In doing this, we risk identifying the Church with something other than what it is or what it ought to be. It is ^{very} evident to everyone today that the Church is not a ~~sup~~ physics or Chemistry laboratory of superior quality. It is less frequently remembered and emphasized that neither is it a kind of "society of nations", nor a ^{welfare} ~~organization~~, nor a super-syndicate. ~~This is especially evident~~ ~~that we must not forget~~ ~~the purpose for which~~ Our Lord Jesus Christ instituted His Church. The Church is essentially constituted by Faith, Hope and Charity, which express the ^{relationship} ~~support~~ of humanity with God in Jesus Christ. It is established in history by the ^{workings} ~~fact~~ of the sacramental structure in which its entire raison d'être is found in the original relationship between humanity and God and God with humanity. It is, therefore, of a completely different nature from the institutions of this world; its mission is of a different order. The more the community of Catholics manifests ^{their transcendence} ~~itself~~, today in signs as expressive as possible, ~~the transcendence~~, the more it will be the Church, the more it will be really missionary.

That the Church be the Humble Conscience of the World.

But, will the Church then be pure transcendence? Some might be tempted to think so. ^{commonly accepted} In the distinction, ~~frequently~~ ^{between} ~~that~~, of the spiritual and of the temporal, we seem to introduce a ^{distinct clear} ~~fundamental~~ separation between the domain of the Church, the spiritual, and the ~~realm~~ of the profane, [&] the temporal.

Thus, we could easily arrive at the Conclusion that the Church completely avoids the terrestrial, the profane, the political - that it ~~has~~ ^{plays} no part in it. Now, it seems to us that the third condition for a missionary Church is, ^{precisely} that it be present, ~~and~~ really present in the world of men. The Church is not yet the Kingdom; it is not yet paradise realized, but in a partial and incomplete form. It exists ~~and lives~~ on this earth, and its members all belong to this world of human beings, who cannot, even if they ~~would~~ ^{wish}, ~~to~~ escape their human condition. Even the most mystical of hermits remained tied to the temporal conditions of human existence. All bishops are equally committed to the human adventure; their function, of another order, does not remove them from the world. Nor is it possible to explain the distinction between the Clergy and the lay^{man} by the sole distinction ^{between} of the Church and the world.

Both Clergy and lay^{man} ~~are~~, although not in an absolutely identical manner, are members of the ecclesiastical city and of the ^{temporal} ~~terrestrial~~ city. This presence of the Church in the world ^{is} best expressed by the idea of service. Its mission is that of serving ^{man}, ~~man~~, not only in an abstract and distant manner, but indicating ~~in a more or less~~ theoretically ~~what~~ what man ought to believe and do to be saved ^{in the} ~~at some future~~ ~~time~~ but in ^{making} ~~participating~~ in its own ^{contribution} ~~service~~ toward man's fulfillment.

It does this ^{negatively} ~~to a~~ ~~negative sense~~, to the extent that it opposes, through ~~its~~ ~~official~~ statements and through the daily conduct of its members, ~~the~~ everything in our modern world which is a force of dehumanization. It does this positively through its members' participation in the progressive humanization of the world. In this way, ~~it~~ without imposing its own convictions, the Church undertakes to demonstrate the ultimate meaning of the ~~the~~ effort ~~to~~ for greater humanization. This meaning is ~~is~~ none other than mankind ^{in its fullness,} ~~fulfilled~~ Jesus Christ Himself. The Church ~~is~~ thus appears ~~in~~ ~~as~~ as the "conscience" of the world, provided that we eliminate from that term everything which would ~~to~~ imply pride or self-satisfaction. But this meaning can ~~be~~ be achieved only insofar ^{as it carries on} the struggle for humanization ~~is~~ impartially, without seeking the ~~the~~ triumph of its own cause.

It is essential to emphasize the change of perspective from ~~the~~ the concept of the mission of the Church as conquest to a more pure concept, ~~as~~ ~~stated~~ ^{has recently pointed out} Monsignor Blomjous in an article in "Informations Catholiques Internationales." The mission of the Church, a little ~~the~~ flock lost among the nations (and obviously, increasingly a minority in the world), is to express in its fulfillment the ultimate ^{meaning} ~~significance~~ of that world.

That the presence of the layman in the Church means that
Christ saves real men

That function cannot be carried out (and this is the fourth condition for the existence of a missionary Church) if the layman does not ^{occupy} ~~fill~~ his rightful ^{place} ~~place~~ in the life of the ~~the~~ ecclesiastical community. It is necessary ^{for} ~~that~~ the church to ~~include~~ include Christians whose essential function is to manifest its transcendence, that is, to remind and to make visible through ^{their} ~~the~~ very mission that grace comes from Jesus Christ, from what we ~~might call~~ ~~it~~ sometimes call "on high." Responsible, ~~for showing~~ in other words, for showing that salvation is due to the free initiative of God who, calling men, invites them to ^{participate in} ~~share~~ His own life. These Christians are the bishops and priests, the group of ministers who are at the service of the revealing and sanctifying authority of Christ. But there are also Christians whose mission within the church is to ~~manifest~~ ~~the divine initiative~~ ~~is directed~~ at manifest the object of this divine initiative: ^{men} ~~and~~ ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ ^{their} very humanity (and not outside their humanity, through some ~~no~~ kind of negation of man) are called to live the divine life, just as Christ lived ^{it} ~~in~~ this humanity.

The universality and humanity of salvation (that is, of its ultimate ~~realization~~ ^{fulfilment}) reveals itself ~~and is manifested~~ in the Church through the layman. This is indispensable; ~~because~~ otherwise, the reality of salvation remains foreign to men.

It can never be sufficiently repeated that ^{the} ~~the~~ Church that is, by vocation, missionary. This could not be reserved merely for a few specialists, ~~more or less~~ ^{pre-disposed to} ~~has~~ ^{been} ~~endowed~~ for a ~~difficult life~~ ^{of} dangerous adventures, nor even for bishops. The distinction between the priesthood and the laity is not anterior to the mission of the Church. All ~~the members~~ of the people of God, by the very fact of participating in the priesthood of Jesus Christ, ~~are sent~~ ^{are} sent into the world ~~in order~~ to make real His priestly presence and action. ~~Within the limits~~ ^{of} that common mission, ~~that~~ it is necessary to distinguish two essential functions: that of the priest ~~and~~ (or bishop) ^{who} ~~that~~ reminds us that Jesus Christ descended from heaven, sent by His Father from above; and that of the layman ^{who} ~~which~~ recalls that this descent of the Son had for its goal humanity itself, which one day ought to enter into the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In other words, the Church is missionary in being the Conscience of the world. ~~Through it~~ The Clergy manifests that the ultimate ~~signification~~ ^{meaning} of humanity comes from ~~the Lord~~ ^{God} Himself in a transcending manner. But the laity, ~~on~~ ^{for} its part, demonstrates that men themselves are called ~~by~~ that it is certainly humanity itself that receives from God that transcendent destiny and value.

That the liberty of the Spirit be respected

The real presence of the Church in the world thus implies the Complementary ^{natures} of the priesthood and ^{the} laity (or rather the episcopate and the laity) in the accomplishment of the mission of the Church. This exigency is evidently not the only one. It would be necessary to indicate many others. Let us limit ourselves ~~to~~ ^{by} ~~briefly~~ ^{printing out} two of them which today ~~appear~~ ^{seem} particularly urgent. Today's world, in which the Church ought to be present by its missionary vocation, is on its way toward unification. There is no necessity to insist upon so evident a fact. This unification, based on the development of science and technology, is expressed ~~in~~ in the creation of ~~that~~ a certain type of culture or civilization. However, so powerful a process of unification is ^{paradoxically} accompanied by a greater emphasis on its diversities.

Our world is ^{also} characterized by a ^{recognition} ~~and~~ of the value of these differences. Access to ~~political~~ political and economic independence by numerous peoples ^{also means recognition} ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~necessity~~ of cultural independence, at times affirmed by violence and hostility toward those who have destroyed their local traditions in order to ~~impose~~ ^{impose} their own civilization.

← The Church is in a position to understand these points of view, since it ~~off~~ calls itself catholic, ~~and~~ considering itself ~~to~~ as ~~the~~ conveyer ^{of a} message which encompasses all human values, ~~far from destroying or diminishing them.~~ ~~This~~ This respect for diversity seems to us to be another essential condition for a missionary Church.

The more difficult its fulfillment, the more important it becomes to insist on this condition. Throughout ~~the~~ its history, the Church has ~~adapted itself~~ progressively adapted itself to the civilizations which have followed one another since the time of the Apostles. The Church achieved perfect integration with the Greek world and later with the Latin world, to such a degree that its dogmatic, cultural, and disciplinary expression was ~~formed~~ formed from the elements of the Greco-Latin civilization. ~~Thus~~ ^{Thus} Greek concepts were used by the Church to express the dogmas of the Trinity and of Christology. The same thing happened in the field of liturgy and in the concrete organization of the institution, to the point that Peter's successors, for example, took the titles formerly used by the Roman emperors (Pontifex Maximus, etc.). It is impossible to erase historical fact; nor is it possible today, without ~~raising questions~~ casting doubt on the action of the Spirit ~~in the church~~ ⁱⁿ the history of the Church to return to some sort of original departure point by means of scientific ~~or other~~ ^{or other} methods. ~~Therefore~~ Therefore, it is absolutely ~~essential~~ ^{essential to} for the mission of the Church that the mystery of Christ be expressed in terms which are comprehensible to Hindus, Chinese, and Africans, ~~to the point~~ to those who are farthest from the Greco-Latin mentality. Likewise it is ~~of~~ ^{the} utmost

importance that the message of Jesus be expressed in cultural terms and according to forms which are accessible to modern man, whose ~~new~~ technical mentality is ever more alienated from the classical cultures and ~~from~~ the ancient Western tradition. ~~So~~ If the solution proposed by Protestant theologians such as Bultmann (in the form of demythologizing) — seems ultimately ~~irreconcilable~~ irreconcilable with the Catholic faith, ~~partly~~ because of the undeniable contribution of ~~the~~ historical development, it is ~~nevertheless~~ ^{nevertheless} true that this is a real problem, a recent expression of which is the Anglican bishop's book, Honest to God.

~~To~~ To ^{solve} ~~solve~~ this problem, as difficult as it may seem, by reason of its missionary importance, it is necessary to recall that the Holy Spirit is always present among us, ~~and~~ ~~is~~ carrying out His work in the hearts of men. Thus we arrive at the final condition for a missionary Church.

The presence of the Church in the diversity of the present-day world cannot be realized ~~by~~ ~~through~~ through decisions which come from ~~o~~ ~~high~~ high up or from the center of the Church, ~~It is~~ ~~far~~ ^{distant} ~~from~~ from the reality of this diversity. Let us speak clearly: it is not the "Roman" or European theologians who can express the mystery of Jesus in a truly Hindu or Chinese theology, but rather the Hindu and Chinese Christians themselves who will ^{gradually} ~~gradually~~ be able to express ^{it} in their own language and through their own cultural materials.

In the same way, it is the African and Japanese Christians who will have to find ~~the liturgical~~ forms ^{for} ~~of the~~ liturgical celebration of the mystery of Christ which correspond to their religious sensibility. This presupposes, ~~on the~~ ~~one~~ ~~hand~~, that we are determined not to be content ~~with~~ today with hasty and superficial reforms in the field of liturgy, as in discipline or dogma (each of these fields presents different problems). ~~It~~ ^{It} also presupposes ~~that we have~~ infinite respect for the action of the Spirit throughout the Church, supporting the liberty of Christians in the realization of their ^{commitment} ~~to~~ Christ.

In other words, it is necessary to ^{bring into plain} ~~plain~~ ^{full} ~~full~~ ^{view} ~~of the~~ ~~being~~ ~~out~~ one of the characteristics of the Church of Jesus Christ, ~~liberty~~ freedom. Freedom is not caprice or chaos, but rather the action of the Spirit who uses these attempts and searchings to show the infinite richness ^{of the mystery of Christ,} never totally expressed in our Christian behavior, ~~of the~~ ~~search~~ ~~even~~ ~~in~~ or dogma. The Church ^{today can} ~~be~~ only be missionary in a real and not merely theoretical sense, if it accepts as a gift of the Lord the free search for a human and diversified response to divine ~~&~~ Revelation.

Having ~~been~~ ^{be} reviewed all that ~~is to be~~ ~~done~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~future~~ seems to demand of us twentieth-century Christians ~~to~~ ^{and} knowing our limitations and deficiencies, we might be tempted to be pessimistic. It is more important to appeal to God's grace. Recognition of

the demands of the Gospel is always accompanied by a gift of the Lord, who gives to His own the very thing He asks of them. It is better, therefore, to be ~~grateful~~ glad that we have been called to such a task ^{under} ~~these~~ ~~new~~ ~~terms~~ ^{conditions}. We are privileged to be witnesses of ^{an} unusual wave of renewal in the Church, ~~both in~~ ^{both in} the Catholic Church and ⁱⁿ the non-Catholic Christian churches. And we are privileged to have been called to work in that renewal.