

(728.7)

15218

25

Khalou ✓

282.8
1924

To the Priests of Panama 4

Mahony L
1655

BIBLIOTECA
EL COLEGIO DE MEXICO

Introduction

We three are diocesan priests from Chicago who have been loaned to the Archdiocese of Panama for "permanent" work in the parish of San Miguelito. From our experience of working with Panamanians for six months and our experience of several years working with Latin-American immigrants to the United States, we have outlined for ourselves a general policy. We have done this because we believe we can hardly accomplish anything significant unless we see clearly our goal and define well what seem to us the best means to reach that goal. We offer this outline to our fellow-priests in the ministry in Panama, not in an attempt to tell you what to do, but rather to offer a base for discussion from which we may possibly all learn something.

I. What is Christianity?

Goal: What is our goal? -- simply to preach the Word of God. The Word of God, powerful, creative, demanding is essentially the call to unity. As He once said, "Fiat lux," and there was light; so God says, "Be one with Me and with one another."

The Word of God reached its fulness in Christ who came to unite all men and thus all of creation into one--not by force or propaganda but by love--love in its fullest sense of emptying self in order to give oneself to others. He thus became the First-born of the New Creatures. Christ is the Ultimate Word of His Father and at the same time the perfect response of man for He is the Son of Man. He gathered to Himself a company of men to further that work of unity and sent it out into the world on the day when He sent His Spirit, the fulness of His love, to energize this company. Pentecost worked the first of the harvesting. The Last Day will see the completion of the Harvest, when all who so will, will be One.

Church: The Church then is the answer to God's creative word, to His demanding challenge, to His insistent call. The Church is the company of men who freely elect in the Name of Christ and by the power of His Spirit to live and work (this means to love) so that all may be one. This company--this gathering of men, the Church, is a true union, both human and divine, and like all unions must find expression both in form and in actions.

Structure: The form will be a structure which must be essentially similar to the original company set up by the First-Born. It must be founded, therefore, on Peter and the Apostles. Further structuring is not of its essence and will depend on time and circumstances--parishes, orders, groups, Cardinalate, etc.

Law: The divine-human group has its own Inner Law or Dynamic which also must find expression externally in the Law.

Action: Finally, expression must come in the form of action lest the union be sterile or artificial. Expression in action will always be symbolic, although real, because the inner reality can never adequately be expressed. Towards the group itself the action will be liturgical--ceremonies of love and loyalty within the group. To the others outside the expression of unity in action will be charity--real, effective, but symbolic of the innermost desire to die to self and live for others.

Temptations of the Church: The gathered ones--the Church--as it works towards the last day, encounters two perennial temptations--the danger of being worldly. The Church must be in the world and for the world but because it exists for the world, it must very often be against the world. The Church is tempted "to make herself at home in the world, to regard its worldly successes as the coming of the Kingdom, to be intent only on making itself secure and powerful and free from opposition and persecution; to involve itself with some particular economic or social system, with some form of government or pattern of society or thought."

The danger of being churchy. Yet the Church must not live for itself alone, leaving the world to be the world. It has to be the leaven in the world. It must not make itself at home within its own walls--to become the goal instead of only the way--to regard its own organization as an end in itself. Like Christ, the gathered ones must be the Way, not the End.

The Church then must always be like the Apostolic Community--a gathering of men in the world, often against the world but always for the world. A group, therefore, neither churchy nor worldly. A group with its own Spirit and Law--with its own expression of loyalty to the group and to the cause--with its own inimitable Face to the world, that of Charity. Each successive age of Christianity has attempted to reincarnate that original community--always succeeding in part, because of the Promise of its Founder and the Presence of His Spirit--but always failing in part because men are men and the Old Man (of selfishness) is not yet completely dead.

II. The Task in Panama

Defects: We who have been called by God to this group and who have answered, face the task of reincarnating the Church here, of ever making it new and relevant. Frankly, the task in Panama is a

formidable one because the Church here is weak in terms of structure, knowledge, and practice. The people of God in Panama is a sick people seriously weakened by the infirmity of ignorance and attacked by the vicious virus of corruption in family and public mores.

Assets: We do not, however, agree with the prophets of gloom who say that the Church here is "sick unto death." There is a basic strength in the Panamanian people which needs to be exploited and uncovered--that strength is simply the marvelous deposit of the Faith that is, thank God, the Panamanian inheritance. That faith is expressed today in a certain type of disquiet, a phenomenal thirst to learn about Christ and His Message; though disastrously weakened by ignorance still the Panamanian retains certain basic Christian qualities and ideals: the preeminence of charity, the dignity of the individual, the importance of family and further Christian relationships (e.g., compadrazco), inner qualities of joy and hope and freer expression of emotion.....

Plan: How to use these assets and overcome these defects in order to produce a "people of God" much more in conformity to the original model and prototype, the Apostolic Church, is our problem. For this purpose we submit the following plan.

1) Adults. The "gathered ones" are those who freely commit themselves to the cause of Christ: the unity of men in Christ through His Spirit. Primary attention, therefore, must be given to those who are most capable of such commitment, namely adults. Emphasis must be switched from concentration on children to that on adults.

Children are capable of very shallow commitment, if any at all. By themselves they cannot be full Christians; they can but belong to a Christian family.

One reason we have put so much emphasis on children is that it is relatively easy to propagandize children, not nearly so easy to convince adults. We have the example of Christ himself to follow: he dealt exclusively with adults. Even the one statement he made about children, "Unless you become like one of these little ones," refers to our becoming like the "little ones of the world" (la clase humilde) so say the Scripture scholars. At any rate, one can hardly conclude from this one passage that Christ came to found a "Kindergarten." Yet one could easily get this impression from the emphasis of our work with children.

2) Instruction. Since commitment is the term of our training and not academic learning, we must choose those methods that more aptly produce commitment: Cursillos, retreats, discussion groups, C.F.M., and play down, if not abandon entirely, methods like rote learning of catechism, preaching of systematic theology and not the Word of God. Further, since money and personnel are so scarce, and since one cursillo seems to produce more than years of formal teaching, should we not put more time and emphasis and personnel in such methods and reduce our inversion in the traditional form of instruction which is less likely to produce commitment.

3) Men. Since the dynamic of Christianity is self-extension (through death to self, live for others--sacrificial love) and since the Church is not to be churchy but rather the Light and the Way for the "others," it follows that we should concentrate on those who, by their very nature and position, can best carry that Light and be the Way for the world--men. It seems to us beyond doubt that the clue to the reform of Christianity lies in working with men.

But first we must de-feminize our Catholicism. We can do this by intense concentration on men and by preaching the Sacraments in a masculine manner: firstly, the Sacrament of the Church as a sharing of the noble cause of unity with Christ Our Brother--as a commitment to love by sharing Christ's work, not as a direct love affair with Christ which is quite unmanly; secondly, by preaching the Seven Sacraments as opportunities to give rather than to receive

4) Matrimonies. The root problem of morality is very probably the lack of good Christian marriages. There seems to be a lot of love between parents and children but between spouses, generally speaking, there is nothing even close to a proper Christian relationship of mutual love, respect and fidelity, whether among the upper or among the lower classes. Besides working with men, therefore, we think that very high priority should be given to working with couples in movements like the C.F.M., Cana and Pre-Cana Conferences. The most important educational structure in our society is the home--all other educational structures are secondary and supplementary. The greater portion of our time and personnel ought to be devoted to this primary grouping, for if it is not sound and effective, the other structures are doomed to failure from the start.

5) The Way. We must carefully train ourselves and all those involved in this marriage to the notion that the Church is the Way, not the End. Christianity means therefore to be in the world, not of its spirit, but for the world. Consequently, it means that the new creatures, according to their abilities, way of life, etc., must become involved in many different works and movements by which the world is being

propelled by the Spirit to unity. We must hold that it is as important to organize a labor union as it is to organize a parish, that it is just as important to be a politician, as it is to be a priest. If then the Church is not the End, then still less are its means of commitment and sanctification the End (the Mass, the Sacraments). They are the means by which Christians derive the power to illuminate and lead other men.

6) Articulation of the Word.

A. In Structure: every Christian group we form, every parish in which we work must be primarily communities--Communities of love and service to others, and not merely juridical entities or service stations.

B. In Law: every Christian group must be conscious of the Inner Law of the group: love. "He who loves his brother fulfills the Law." Christ did not say: "If you keep my Commandments, you will love Me," rather just the opposite.

We must stop preaching the Law and begin preaching the Ideal of Love and Sacrifice. We must rid ourselves of the notion that people do not obey the law simply because they are ignorant of it. We have yet to encounter a Panamanian who doesn't know, for instance, that he is obliged to assist at Mass on Sundays and be married in Church. If we continue to preach the law, we will only deepen the sense of sin among our people and do nothing to help them fulfill the Will of God. As St. Paul puts it, "I did not know what sin was until I knew the law ... the law kills and does not justify ... if the law could make people holy, we would not have needed the Redeemer." Surely we want to make our people a law-abiding people. But the dynamic of Christianity, as St. Paul clearly states, is to call people to the ideal of love and show them the way so that they can and will obey the Law. The contrary dynamic is a serious misunderstanding of Christianity.

C. In Liturgy: every cult group must express itself in symbolic worship. That ceremony must be meaningful--truly expressive of the group's being, desire and mystery. Both then in language and in form it must be native, that is, expressive of the group. Dynamically, a specific group (a church) becomes Universal (Church) only through the liturgy (the Eucharistic service). The dynamic of liturgy then is from the singular to the universal. The liturgy should cause universality, not presuppose it. It follows then that the liturgy of the New Church, with due concern for the universal action of its Founder, will be expressive in language and in form of the specific community, here in Panama in Spanish and in terms of Panamanian culture. Anything less would make the liturgy out to be magical rites instead of divine rites.

D. In the action of Charity: The final stage of the Word of God is Christ. That word is now spoken to the world through Christ extended, the Church. What does the Church in Panama say (or symbolize) to the world? Love, unity, charity, respect, cooperation, poverty? or does it say aloofness, division, law, power, education, riches? The Church in Panama, even the smallest group or parish, must cry aloud the word Love! Until all the world can look at us and see immediately and primarily Charity for all, we shall have failed to incarnate Christ here in Panama and we shall have hidden the Light under the bushel.

7) The Priesthood: Those of us who are priests must realize that we do not fully constitute the Church, nor do we exhaust its priesthood. We are primarily preachers of the Word and Liturgists. There are many other mediator roles, both in the ecclesiastical and temporal order, which belong more properly to the lay priesthood. By gradually and prudently giving up these extraneous roles, we shall allow laymen to be truly men in the cause of Christ - aggressive and responsible-- we shall allow them to exercise their priesthood. A great part of our time should be spent in training these men and encouraging them, not only to be apostolic and priestly, but to act like apostles and priests.

Conclusion

Because we, the new creatures, dwell in the light and share the Faith, we above all should be known for our optimism and joy. We, above all, should recognize that though the Adversary is still present, yet people here in Panama and indeed all over the world are desiring and looking for unity--that the world now is a better place than it ever was, precisely because of the Spirit of Truth and Love who dwells in us.

We should also be famous for our confidence and our humility. Confident that we are approaching the Final Day of Harvest--humility to recognize that if the divine thrust among men toward unity is not moving fast enough, it is not because people are not good, or, at the very least, wish to be good--but because we do not have enough Faith, Faith in the Word of God so we preach our own--Faith in the Spirit of Love so we use force--Faith in the Christian Community, the Church, so we place first institutions like schools--Faith in Christ who said, "Do not fear, I have conquered." So we are insecure, fear to risk ourselves and hide for protection.