

THE CHURCH'S MISSION IN CONTEMPORARY U.S.A. :
PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

- A DRAFT STATEMENT -

This is not a finished document. It is
circulated with the hope that many people
will react to it and send critical comments
and constructive suggestions to:

The Executive Secretary
Division of Domestic Mission
815 Second Avenue
New York, New York 10017

THE CHURCH'S MISSION IN CONTEMPORARY U. S. A.: PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIESI. MISSION AND MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH IN THE U.S.A. TODAY

Almost everywhere in the U.S.A. the Episcopal congregation today finds itself, in company with one or more congregations of different Christian denominations, in the midst of a largely un-churched population. The moment mission among un-churched people is taken seriously, Christians cannot evade "ecumenism". As long as the prevailing posture is not in the direction of mission, ecumenism does not become an issue.

Ecumenism does not mean that we eliminate our Anglican -- and therefore Catholic -- heritage, either in the interest of unity on the basis of the lowest common denominator or of cooperation on practical matters of a non-theological nature. True ecumenism means nothing less than that various Christian bodies participate in the mission of the Church of our Lord in the world, each upholding its heritage to the best of its ability but also respecting others for what they are. (1)

The lack of concern for the un-churched is usually coupled with the introverted outlook. The question of cause and effect may not be too easily answered, but the two go together, and inevitably lead to the un-, if not anti-ecumenical attitude toward other churches. Far too often church members "come" to the church to be ministered to; seldom do they "go" out of the church into the world to proclaim the Gospel to the un-churched.

This state of affairs is bound to perpetuate the unbiblical dichotomy between the clergy and the laity within the Church at the expense of the basically corporate nature of the Ministry of the Church, which is inseparable from the Mission of the Church. We need to rediscover the Church's Mission and Ministry in terms of the collective task of the People of God, (be it a local congregation or a diocese or the national church) and in relation to people in the world. The world is the ultimate object of the Church's mission and ministry, not church members who are the missionaries and ministers.

II. MISSION OF THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

We are currently very much concerned with the breakdown of communication between the Church and the world, or between the church and the un-churched. The language of the Church is not fully understood outside of the Church and churchmen communicate with un-churched

- (1) Councils of Churches (local, state, national and world) are institutional frameworks within which churches of different traditions are better able to get acquainted with one another in mutual love and respect so as together to grow into that unity which God wills for them to achieve.

fellow citizens only in secular languages. Does this mean that there exists a sharp division in the life of churchmen themselves - their life in the Church and their life outside of the Church? Or, in the language of modern sociology, has the Church become one of the "in-groups" within the mass society?

How then can the Church reach the un-churched so as to win even a small number of them? Can it be done by bringing a handful of the un-churched into the "in-group" fellowship of the Church? What will happen to the Church, to those who thus join the Church, and to the society in which they continue to live? Is the mission of the Church to increase the number of people who somehow understand the peculiar language of the Church and support its institution? If the world of the un-churched is unable to understand the Gospel through the language of the Church, the numerical strengthening of church membership will have little effect on the life of the world.

We are thus compelled to ask what the true mission of the Church is in the U.S.A. today. It is not merely to bring all the people into the in-group fellowship of the variously instituted churches. It must begin by reminding those who are the Church that they are the People of God sent to the world. They are God's emissaries to the un-churched. This is precisely what it means to be the Church in the world. From this it follows that the churchmen must be in communication with the un-churched within the context of the "secular" world, not inside "the four walls" of the Church. We are faced by a set of crucial questions: how can churchmen be trained for mission? How can the clergy with the traditional forms of seminary education do the job of training the laity for mission adequately? Can the job be done apart from, or short of, direct engagement of churchmen with the un-churched within the secular frames of reference - business, politics, science, recreation, and what have you? What roles can the local congregation (i.e. parish or mission) play in this respect?

III. CHRISTIAN SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SECULAR

At this point, Christians in the U.S.A. today must face squarely two closely related questions: 1) What is the Christian significance of the secular? and 2) What is the secular relevance of the Christian Gospel? These are really two sides of one coin. (It must be noted that these phrases do not mean either a "Christian" business or a "businesslike" Christianity; "Christian" technology or "scientific" Christianity).

Secular does not mean anti-religious in the sense of denial of religion, nor does it mean profane in the sense of not being sacred. It means the areas of life in which man, having "come of age" (to use Dietrich Bonhoeffer's phrase), under God assumes full responsibility for his actions as well as being free from all religious restrictions. Business, industry, politics, agriculture, scientific research, recreation, etc., all belong to the category of secular. There can be no

such thing as Christian mathematics or Christian economics any more than a Christian ocean or a Christian steamship. But this does not mean that they all are outside the ken of God's rule.

Christian businessmen (i.e. business men who are Christian) need to ask what it is that God wills in and through the business in which they are engaged. To reduce all business to philanthropy is not to recognize the integrity of business. To run a business purely as means to make money, thinking that by giving as generous a portion of the net profit as possible to "charitable" causes one can fulfill one's Christian obligation of a businessman, is to dissociate business per se from God's rule. Both are wrong, and in order to arrive at a Christianly sound answer to this question, one needs a "theology of business": - to probe the meaning of the business enterprise as a secular work in the light of the Gospel, the Good News that God in Christ is reconciling the world to Himself.

IV. MISSIONARY FRONTIERS IN CONTEMPORARY U.S.A.

Since General Convention 1961 the Division of Domestic Mission has been working with increasing numbers of other units of the National Council, together seeking the most relevant and effective way for the Church to carry out its Mission in the U.S.A. today. Issue-centered or task-oriented inter-unit operation has increasingly become the norm, and consequently every officer of the Division is involved with officers of other units in more than one Joint Staff Committee or another: Indian Work, Urban Program, Race Relations, Missionary Education, Churchmen Overseas, Volunteers for Mission, etc. Indeed, even the line of demarcation between foreign and domestic has become blurred if not completely obliterated in much of what is undertaken by the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America.

This is nothing but a reflection of the socio-economic reality of the contemporary world - an emerging one-world society. Therefore, we are hard at work to re-define the missionary frontiers in the U.S.A. today. This means that every missionary program of the Church needs to be formulated in terms of Mutual Responsibility and Inter-dependence (not only of the Anglican Communion alone but of the ecumenical fellowship throughout the world) within the Body of Christ.

1. The Growing Metropolis And An Increasing Industrial Automation

The new society which is now emerging is a strange world to the Church - far more strange than the Afro-Asian (heathen) world was to the traditionally Christian West in the 19th Century! As in the 19th Century the Afro-Asian world with all its strangeness was the missionary frontier of the Church in the West, so today the U.S. society itself with its own strangeness is the missionary frontier of the Church in the U.S.A.

In our society, which is undergoing the most radical technological revolution ever known in human history, traditional boundary lines between the rural and the urban, between inner city, suburbia and exurbia, have all but been lost. In many instances political boundaries such as states, counties, and municipalities have crossed over by rapidly developing metropolitan areas. Millions of people face pretty much the same set of opportunities and dilemmas regardless of where they live and work. This is not peculiarly an American phenomenon. The destiny of people in the West Indies is just as closely tied up with that of people in metropolitan England, or that of the Puerto Ricans with that of the citizens of the mainland U.S.A. In the same way and to the same degree, the destiny of people in Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, etc. is inextricably tied to the destiny of people in San Francisco, Chicago, and New York and those in their immediately adjacent suburbs.

It is this concept of metropolis as a regional unit that the series of Metropolitan Planning Conferences (commonly known as "Metabagdad Conferences") have highlighted. Every metropolitan complex taken as a whole is now the most crucial of all the modern missionary frontiers. For there the presence of the Church must take radically different forms from what we have known in the past. Up to now totality of the metropolis has seldom come within the purview of the Church's mission and ministry. To discover this is to rediscover the oneness of the ministry and mission of the Church, to wit: Pastoral ministry is to outfit churchmen with "equipments of the saint" (Eph. 4:12) so as to enable (or empower) them to be missionaries among their neighbors who share the same human destiny within the same metropolis as the habitat of their souls and who are knowingly or unknowingly searching for a meaning of their existence as human beings in this strange, complicated, and often hostile world.

The crucial question then is how can the Church understand let alone influence the metropolis as the habitat of modern man's soul. It is humanly impossible and theologically unsound to attempt to reach men and women on an individual basis, for the express purpose of taking some (or, as many as possible) of them out of the secular milieu of the metropolis and bringing them into the "religious" milieu of the Church. By the same token, it is completely futile to think that the "secular world" can be influenced by a handful of professional clergy (as paid servants of the institutional Church). How then can the Church, as the People of God, corporately engage the metropolis as the empirically perceived world of modern man? What is the most viable operative unit of the Church Catholic as it encounters the metropolis? - a parish (or local congregation), a diocese, or something

involving more than one diocese?

The policy and strategy of the Church's mission and ministry in the metropolis must accept such areas of special needs as population-declining areas (mostly found in town and country), population-exploding areas, and pockets of poverty, (e.g. blighted areas in inner cities, urban and rural slums, ethno-cultural ghettos, etc.), as the responsibility of the total Church, not of the local congregations which happen to be there! At the same time, the traditional philosophy of the so-called "rural mission", or ministry in town and country, needs to undergo a radical change. The modern "farmer in business suit" is more urban in his basic orientation or outlook of life than the "gentleman farmer" of the previous generation.

2. Ethnic Groups in Mass Society After Civil Rights Legislation

Modern U. S. society is in principle an open society, and in character a dynamic and ever expanding society. Its mobility of population, both horizontal and vertical, is increasing both its pace and scope. As a result it is swiftly becoming a mass society in which many an individual citizen fears losing his self-identity. Caught in this predicament and feeling that the foundation of his very being is crumbling, modern man tends to resort to racism of one kind or another, whether violent or genteel. This becomes manifested in such terms as pride in one's own racial or cultural background, hostility to people of other racial backgrounds, etc. Racism of either kind performs the function of restoring a semblance of self-identity to him who otherwise has forgotten who he really is, though he pays a terrible price by warping his own character and imposing injustice upon others. Generally speaking, on the part of the dominant race, racism manifests itself more in terms of rejection of others, while on the part of the oppressed race, racism is proving something of a precondition of self-acceptance.

In the light of this we are driven to re-assess the meaning of human group in its relation to human personality, and especially of more or less a priori determined groups, such as racial and ethnic, to which one is destined to belong through no choice of one's own. In the U.S.A., until quite recently, members of most of the ethnic minority groups were made to feel that their ethnic identifications were decidedly a mark of handicap and, therefore, within them developed a tendency toward self-rejection or self-hatred. This, however, has changed radically in recent years. Members of various ethnic groups in the U.S.A. are now positively

asserting their ethnic identities and are demanding others to respect their human dignity irrespective of what they are. This is at the heart of the demand for immediate desegregation and ultimate integration.

In the face of this situation the Church needs to re-examine her policy and strategy of mission and ministry to and among people of various ethnic groups. Neither the indefinite perpetuation of ethnic congregations, nor the immediate liquidation of same will do; there must be a number of alternatives in different situations. It will be less than responsible of the Church not to discover solutions that may be relevant to each situation. Here, it should be noted that situations differ from one community to another, not merely from one region of the country to another, which means that solutions also will differ.

In our effort to develop viable forms of mission and ministry, we must also take note of the basic difference in the posture on the part of several ethnic groups toward the dominant group. To put it in the simplest possible terms, the Negro community is fighting for its ultimate and full integration as first-class citizens of the U.S. society, while the American Indian community is fighting for its collective survival as a nation or nations within U.S. society. Between them one finds Americans or Asian and Latin American origins struggling tenaciously to maintain their ethno-cultural identity, while at the same time they eagerly are seeking full acceptance by the dominant group. Faced by varying attitudes and outlooks of different ethnic groups, Christians of Caucasian background are often confused as to just what they should do.

These observations lead us to the conviction that along with the unequivocal support of, and the unflinching participation in, various forms of social action to eliminate racial discrimination in all areas of life in the U.S. society; the Church must also seriously consider how best to minister now to the total need of various ethnic groups, both within the context of the on-going civil rights revolution and looking toward the ultimate social integration of all ethnic groups.

3. Growing New Generation

There is an almost unbridgeable chasm between the generation of Americans who have experienced the great depression and/or two world wars, and the generation who have not experienced either of them. The proportion of this younger generation within the reach of the Church's ministry is extremely small compared with those outside. Far too many of them are growing up without being confronted, let alone nur-

tured, by the Gospel. They thus constitute another frontier for the Church's mission in the contemporary U.S.A.

How can the Church reach them? By first bringing them into youth fellowship or something of the sort in the Church or into the church-related schools so as to give them Christian education? Such will prove to be both futile and irrelevant today. The more pressing question is how the youths can be touched by the Gospel while they are in high schools, colleges, and universities, pursuing education in secular disciplines of every imaginable kind. Under the general rubric of the separation of church and state, the Church has in the past left the public schools, both at high school and university levels, entirely untouched. Consequently the Church has lost a significant proportion of the younger generation in this country.

What is at stake here is not Christian education so much as the Christian in education, that is, Christian witness within the context of secular education. This, of course, cannot be done by anything like "released time religious education", "prayer in class room", or even by introducing religious subjects into curriculum, and must never be equated by any or all of these things. What is needed is Christians who accept teaching (or education) as their Christian vocation. Such teachers will be able so to influence students that their minds be open to God's action in everything they learn. It is through such teacher-pupil relationships within the school (which is strictly a secular institution) that the Church come in touch with the younger generation. Here the Church operates primarily through its laity as professional teachers, educators, scientists, and school administrators, not through its ordained clergy.

To inculcate the Christian outlook of life in the youths who have been born into an affluent society and are growing up in an increasingly secular world, "baptized" by science and technology - this indeed is a formidable task for which the Church has not yet found a decisive, let alone definitive, answer.

4. Leisure-time, Recreation and Vacation

Due to what is commonly called automation an increasing proportion of our citizens will have an increasing amount of leisure time - long evenings, long week ends, long vacations, etc. - while work per se will be more and more free from toil and drudgery. This situation presents new opportunity to the Church in several respects.

- a. In an industrialized society man can hardly be his natural self while at work. Leisure is a necessity for him to maintain his genuine selfhood, or to remain a person. Leisure is required for him to recreate himself and repair his relationships with his family. Leisure provides that all too rare opportunity which he needs to look at himself as a person and reflect on the meaning of life. Therefore, what he does with his leisure, on his long week end or on vacation, should be of serious concern to the Church.
- b. If we are to probe the meaning of leisure in the light of the Gospel, we ought (in fact, we are compelled) to re-examine the meaning of work as well. Previously, work, toil, and employment were somehow synonymous in our thinging, but now we wonder whether it is necessary for man to toil in order to eat. In such a society, as our is soon going to be, what will it mean that he who will not work shall not eat? (c.f. 2 Thess. 3:10)
If machines can do all the work, thereby eliminating numerous jobs, why should man need to be kept on the job simply to legitimize his drawing a pay check? How can the technological progress and the population increase be creatively reconciled? To let the increasing number of skilled people fight for the decreasing number of jobs does not seem to be too civilized a solution to the problem. What does the Gospel say about this?
- c. If more and more people are spending a substantial block of time, from two weeks to a month, at a vacation land of one sort or another, how can the Church meaningfully relate itself to them while there? They are there as transient and avowedly to "have a good time", not for a "religious" purpose, but this may very well be the only chance they have throughout the year to think about deeper meanings of life.

5. Retirement

More people retire from "active" duty while they are still vigorous. Some are compelled to retire at the peak of their professional career in terms of experience, wisdom and maturity, simply to make way for the younger generation. They are not destitute but can be terribly lonely and frustrated, knowing they still have much to give to society. How can they be "faithful soldiers and servants of Christ" in their retirement? What does the Gospel have to say in

speaking to their situation if they have not found any positive meaning to their life of retirement? Just keeping them busy is no answer. What then is our answer?

EPILOGUE

Confronted by these and other missionary frontiers within the context of secular, pluralistic, and technological society, the Church needs to explore many previously untried methods in different places, with different issues. For this reason, we hope to hold a series of consultations on policy and strategy of the Church's mission and ministry. By the same token, the continuing exploration of "self-supporting ministry" by way of experimentation in several different situations is of great value.

At the same time, a serious attempt to develop "regional" strategy in such areas as the Appalachian South, the Navajo Reservation, a few metropolitan areas involving several municipalities and jurisdictions, is just as essential. In terms of racial and ethnic frontiers, many more experiments will be necessary along the lines of inter-racial team ministry, bi-lingual congregational worship, membership exchange, cooperative projects in tackling community problems or public issues shared by several congregations of different ethnic and confessional backgrounds, etc., before we can ascertain the most effective forms of Christian witness and service in such a pluralistic and fluid society as ours.

Few experiments or explorations can be adequate unless they are ecumenically conceived. This requires new learning, reorientation of our basic attitudes, and re-examination of our long cherished pre-suppositions, which can be done only through actual involvement in some corporate experience.