

THE CHURCH TODAY: ITS NECESSITY AND ROLE

If one can establish the necessity of the Church, one has already established something about its role. However, if one can establish something about its role, one has not, by that fact alone, established something about its necessity. In other words, it is possible that the Church should have a definite, but expendable, role in the world. The Church may have specific tasks to accomplish, but these tasks could be fulfilled even if the Church did not exist at all. In more traditional language: the Church may exist only by necessity of precept, and not by necessity of means; or, if by necessity of means, then only by relative, not absolute, necessity.¹

¹ The question of the Church's necessity seems to have been taken for granted in Roman Catholic ecclesiology. The Church is the "ordinary means of salvation." All men are called to the Church. To be in the Church is, for all practical purposes, to be in the Kingdom of God. Several contemporary Catholic theologians have challenged this assumption, but usually in an indirect and oblique fashion. I have addressed myself to this problem in *Do We Need the Church?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). The literature on the mission of the Church is large, indeed. I am limiting myself here to certain material published, for the most part, in the last decade: R. Adolfs, *The Grave of God: Has the Church a Future?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); G. Baum, *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), esp. chapters 1 and 5; —, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Experience* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), esp. chapter 3; —, "The New Ecclesiology," *Commonweal* 91 (October 31, 1969), 123-8; J. Bennett, "The Church and the Secular," *Christianity and Crisis* (December 26, 1966), 294-7; P. Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies* (New York: Doubleday, 1961); D. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (ET, New York: Macmillan, 1962); C. Braaten, *The Future of God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), esp. chapter 4; —, "The Church in ecumenical and cultural cross-fire," *Theology Digest* 15 (winter, 1967) 283-94; Y. Congar, *The Wide World My Parish* (ET, Baltimore: Helicon, 1961) esp. chapters 1-3; H. Cox, *The Secular City* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), esp. chapters 1, 5 and 6; R. Cardinal Cushing, *The Servant Church* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1966); C. Davis, *A Question of Conscience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), esp. Part Three; A. Dulles, *The Dimensions of the Church: A Postconciliar Reflection* (Westminster: Newman, 1967); J. Harmon, "Toward a Secular Ecumenism," *Cross Currents* 16 (1966), 153-66; E. Hillman, *The Church as Mission* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965); —, *The Wider Ecumenism*

According to the plan of this convention program, the papers presented in Group III were to have confronted this dual question of the necessity and role of the Church from three distinct points of reference; namely, morality, liturgy, and faith. I assume all the while that "Church" here means the whole Body of Christ: every Christian who confesses the Lordship of Jesus in the context of a visible sacramental fellowship which has committed itself to membership and mission for the sake of God's Kingdom. However, it is not made clear whether we are speaking here of morality, liturgy, and faith as such, or of Christian morality, Christian liturgy, and Christian faith. No limitation is imposed.

(New York: Herder & Herder, 1968); H. Kung, *The Church* (ET, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), pp. 79-104, 313-9, and 481-9; G. Lindbeck, *The Future of Roman Catholic Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), chapter 2; R. McBrien, *The Church in the Thought of Bishop John Robinson* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966); —, "The Church as the Servant of God," *Clergy Review* 48 (1963), 403-16; —, *Church: the Continuing Quest* (New York: Newman, 1970); J. Metz, *Theology of the World* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), pp. 81-97 and 107-40; J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (ET, New York: Harper & Row, 1967), chapter 5; W. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), pp. 72-101; K. Rahner, "Christianity and the new earth," *Theology Digest* 15 (winter, 1967), 275-82; —, "The Theological Position of Christians in the Modern World," in *The Christian Commitment* (ET, New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963); —, "Church and World," *Sacramentum Mundi, I* (ET, New York: Herder & Herder, 1968), 346-57; —, "History of the World and Salvation-History," "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," and "Christianity and the New Man," in *Theological Investigations, V* (ET, Baltimore: Helicon, 1966), pp. 97-153; —, "Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church," *IDOC-International North American Edition* (April 4, 1970), pp. 70-96; R. Reuther, *The Church Against Itself* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1967); —, "A New Church?" *Commonweal* 90 (April 4, 1969), 64-6; J. A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), chapters 4, 5, and 7; —, *The New Reformation?* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965); H. Schlette, *Toward a Theology of Religions* (ET, New York: Herder & Herder, 1966); E. Schillebeeckx, "The Church and Mankind," *Concilium* 1 (1965), 34-50; —, *God the Future of Man* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1968), chapters 3-6; Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes, Ad Gentes, and Lumen Gentium* (esp. n. 1 and 5); C. Williams, *Where in the World: Changing Forms of the Church's Witness* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1963); —, *What in the World* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1964); —, *The Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968); World Council of Churches, *The Church for Others: Two Reports in the Missionary Structure of the Congregation* (Geneva: WCC, 1967).

It seems to me, therefore, that each of the three papers could have considered at least four sets of questions—two of which concern the necessity of the Church and two its role, or function: (1) Do morality, liturgy, and faith as such call for the Church? (2) If so, what role does the Church play in facilitating morality, liturgy, and faith which are not distinctively Christian? (3) Do Christian morality, Christian liturgy, and Christian faith call for the Church? (4) If so, what place do these concerns occupy in the total missionary task of the Church? I should like to formulate these four questions in slightly greater detail.

A. Does Morality Call for the Church?

(1) If the Church did not exist, could man be faithful to "the process by which he comes to be himself" (Baum)?

(2) But the Church does exist. Does it have a role in the formulation of moral principles and in the shaping of styles of life around these principles? Does the Church have moral concerns beyond what is distinctively Christian?

(3) If there were no distinctive Christian community, could people who believe that "in Jesus Christ God has revealed the destiny of the entire human race" (Baum) be faithful to the gospel disclosed in him? If the Church did not exist, could Christian morality perdure?

(4) But there is a distinctive Christian community. Does it have a role in the formulation of moral principles derived from Jesus of Nazareth and in the shaping of styles of Christian life around these principles? What place does this function occupy in the overall missionary task of the Church? Is Christian morality merely an additive to the human condition? What relationship does Christian moral responsibility have with human moral responsibility?

B. Does Liturgy Call for the Church?

(1) If the Church did not exist, could mankind acknowledge the sovereignty of God over all creation? Could it give him praise and thanksgiving? Does genuine worship, of any kind, call for the Church?

(2) But the Church does exist. Does it have a role in the worship of God by mankind in general?

(3) If there were no Church, could people who believe in the Lordship of Jesus respond to the divine claims mediated through him? Could there be worship of the Father, in the name of the Son, and in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, if there were no distinctive community which confessed the name of Jesus? Can there be Christian worship without a Church?

(4) But the Church does exist. What place does liturgy occupy in its missionary task? Is Christian worship the only suitable worship given to God? The highest form?

C. Does Faith Call for the Church?

(1) If the Church did not exist, could man have any ultimate concern? Could he affirm any transcendent presence? Could he confess the graciousness of Being? Could he have hope in the absolute future of mankind? Could he believe in anything beyond himself?

(2) But the Church does exist. Does it have a role in mankind's discernment and expression of God's presence to human life and history? Is man able to believe only because the Church, a community of faith, happens to exist?

(3) If there were no Church, could people confess the Lordship of Jesus? Could they affirm the normative character of the Christ-event as it transpired in the history of Jesus of Nazareth? Could they have hope in the coming of the Kingdom at the end of history, a Kingdom whose fulfillment has been proleptically symbolized in the Resurrection of Jesus?

(4) But the Church does exist. What role does the Church have with regard to the formulation and proclamation of Christian faith, of the conviction that Jesus is Lord? What place does this particular role occupy in the total missionary task of the Church?

Only one paper, Gregory Baum's, confronts each of these four questions, although his discussion of the first two (the necessity and role of the Church concerning morality as such) is often indirect, implicit, and tentative. Kilian McDonnell, it seems to me, has discussed only the fourth question, but, even then, not directly. And Carl Peter explicitly excludes consideration of the first two questions

(the question of the necessity and role of the Church concerning faith as such) and limits his discussion to questions three and four. What follows is a brief summary and critique of their papers:

I. DOES MORALITY CALL FOR THE CHURCH? (Gregory Baum)

"Morality," Gregory Baum suggests, "is man's fidelity to the process by which he comes to be himself." Man does not struggle for his own humanity in isolation. Rather, God is present to "man's making of man."² There are two basic elements in this process: growth and reconciliation. By *growth* he means "the widening area of man's responsibility for himself, which includes greater personal unity," and by *reconciliation* he means "the creation of a fellowship in which all are allowed and encouraged to grow." A tension between growth and reconciliation exists in the conscience of modern man. "For this reason," Baum argues, "no moral theory should, in the attempt to come to neat solutions of concrete problems, disregard or explain away this creative, and at times uncomfortable, polarity."

Although the magisterium of the contemporary Catholic Church continues to confront moral issues in terms of the classical anthropology of the Middle Ages, Baum remains "strongly convinced that Christian morality demands the Church." Studies in the sociology of knowledge indicate that moral values and convictions are shaped and influenced by social context. Christian values and convictions are no exception. These have emerged from the Church as the "matrix of Christian life from the beginning." Indeed, "it was the reaction of the disciples to Jesus Christ that created a Christian consciousness expressed in a way of life and certain institutions. To discover Christ and to be led by him meant to be introduced to the new Christian consciousness available in the life of the early Church. The most private encounter with the Lord was in this sense mediated through the community."

According to Baum, to be Christian and to lead a Christian life means "to participate in the truths and convictions held by the Christian community, either the entire Church or a movement or

² For a fuller discussion, see Baum's recent work, *Man Becoming* (note 1, above).

tradition within it." Christian morality, therefore, calls for the Christian Church.

What role does this Church have in the formulation of Christian morality and in the shaping of styles of life and action that presumably follow from this moral perspective? The Church is no different here from any other form of organized religion. It would be unnecessary if it dealt only with the highly personal question of salvation, of inner life, of contemplation. The Church influences groups of men, for good or for ill, and through them it seeks to affect the wider community and thus contribute to the transformation of society. When the Church does its job properly, i.e., when it "proclaims and celebrates a divine vision of man," it "influences man's self-understanding and thus becomes a crucial factor in the humanization of culture." This, Baum insists, is "the primary mission" of the Church. Because of the Church's indisputable influence on human self-understanding, the Church is necessary not only to provide a place where Christian values may be "discovered and appropriated," but also to communicate these values to the vast numbers of people, "thus creating an intentionality which may eventually transform human life and humanize man's history on this globe." The Church teaches morality through the institutional life in which she involves Christians and through her moral doctrine. The Church teaches morality through her institutional life in three ways: through policies, priorities, and action. Christians are taught not so much by social theory enunciated in a papal encyclical, for example, as they are by the actual policies the Church follows in practice, the priorities it adopts in its mission, and the action it generates and participates in. The Church also teaches morality through her message: in the proclamation of Sacred Scripture, the celebration of the sacraments, and the issuance of moral doctrines.

Baum hopes that the magisterium of the Church will become "a powerful factor in the unification and concentration of the Christian movement and make a significant contribution to the creation of a world-wide new consciousness, by which human life may become more truly human."

Herein, Father Baum says explicitly that *Christian* morality demands the Church, and that the Church has a definite moral task:

vis-à-vis the Christian community as such (to unify and shape it) and even *vis-à-vis* the world beyond the Christian community (for the humanization of culture). He implies that morality *as such* does not call for the Church.

His argument is occasionally confusing, as he moves the discussion back and forth among three distinct realities: the Catholic Church as such, the magisterium of the Catholic Church, and the Christian Church as a general movement. Nor does he make sufficiently clear the distinction and/or nexus between Christian morality and general human morality.³ Is it enough to say, as he does, that "in Jesus Christ God has revealed the destiny of the entire human race," that "Christians (alone?) have been told the orientation of man's self-making." Is Christian morality one moral perspective among many? And if it is simply human morality *par excellence*, is an ecclesiastical magisterium of moral doctrine a matter only of suitability and convenience, or is it demanded by absolute necessity? Could mankind come to be itself if the Church and its moral magisterium did not exist at all?

Gregory Baum has confronted the question: Does morality call for the Church? His response has been: Yes, Christian morality calls for the Church. There can be no genuine Christian life without participation in the life of the Church and without some guidance on the part of the Church's magisterium. The institutional life and moral doctrine of the Church, in turn, have an effect on the wider community by "creating an intentionality which may eventually transform human life and humanize man's history." He is not so clear about the relationship between morality as such and the Church. He seems to imply, however, that such morality does *not* call for the Church. If these are his intentions, I agree with him on both counts.

II. DOES LITURGY CALL FOR THE CHURCH? (Kilian McDonnell)

Kilian McDonnell does not raise the question of the Church's necessity. Rather than asking, "Does liturgy call for the Church?,"

³ I am thinking here of the kind of discussion initiated by J. G. Milhaven, "The Behavioral Sciences and Christian Ethics," in *Projections: Shaping an American Theology for the Future*, eds., T. F. O'Meara and D. M. Weisser (New York: Doubleday, 1970), pp. 134-53.

he asks only, "What function does liturgy play in the Church?" He indicates that the purpose of his paper is "to examine [certain Catholic] trends [toward the structural patterns of the Free Churches] within the framework of liturgical imperatives." His presentation discusses the "ontologizing function of ritual action apropos offices and procedures" in the Church, and he asks "what ecclesiastical structural demands does the liturgy either demand or suggest, and are these demands in harmony with the Free Church pattern."

According to Father McDonnell, "the purpose of the liturgy is to give historical expression to the divine sovereignty through the mediation of sanctification, the invitation to conversion, forgiveness of sins, the proclamation of the risen Christ, and the demonstration of the power of his Spirit." The latter two elements indicate that he is speaking here not of worship in general but of Christian worship. He never says that Christian liturgy is the only authentic worship available to man, that all historical expressions of the divine sovereignty demand a specifically Christian structuring. But this is a question he might fruitfully have discussed in his paper.

He is careful not to identify the liturgy with eucharistic action alone, and refers to it rather as "the work of the people of God in praise of the Father through the Lordship of Christ and in the mediation of his reconciling power in the Spirit." But he considers this "work" primarily from a sociological rather than from a theological or an ecclesiological point of view. He is concerned especially with the proclivity of ritual celebration "to give ontological status to present institutional forms or relationships, with the result that the present historical forms, or even the present style in which the forms operate, are seen as eternal and unchanging reflections of a cosmic divine order." He reminds us that the liturgical churches in particular "tend to transform functions into essences, facts into structural ultimates, and history into metaphysical conditions. And it is precisely through ritualization that these transformations take place." The tendency is especially pronounced in Roman Catholicism.

Every social organization struggles for self-preservation, to the point where, in many instances, the organization becomes an end rather than a means to an end. It creates certain intramural needs which must be resolved before the organization can attend to the

goals for which it was established. Max Weber has called the displacement of goals by organizational means the process of rationalization. Father McDonnell implies that liturgy is part of this process of rationalization. If he does mean this, I should think this thesis would have been a useful one to pursue. It strikes to the heart of the question, "Does liturgy call for the Church?" If liturgy is simply a part of the rationalization process, then one might answer the original question in this wise: "No. Instead, it is the Church which calls for the liturgy."

The major practical intent of Father McDonnell's paper is to remind Roman Catholics, and all Christians of the various high-Church traditions, that Free Church polity and Free Church liturgy are not without inherent difficulties of their own. The absence of structure does not necessarily mean the absence of bureaucratic authority; rather, it means too often the absence of accountability. The authority is there, and it is sometimes exercised more tyrannically than in the more highly structured communities.

In the end, I must say that Father McDonnell has, for the most part, not addressed himself to the questions committed to Group III. He never says that liturgy, Christian or otherwise, calls for the Church, although I am sure that he could have argued, with characteristic competence, that Christian liturgy does call for the Christian community. But since he never confronts the question of necessity, he appears uncertain and ambiguous in dealing with the question of role and function.

What is liturgy for? Where does it belong with regard to the total mission of the Church? Are all men called to the worship of God? Could God be worshipped if there were no Christian Church? Indeed, does *God* need the Church?⁴

III. DOES FAITH CALL FOR THE CHURCH? (Carl Peter)

Carl Peter explicitly limits his discussion to Christian faith. He recognizes the diversity of approach to church faith among recent and contemporary Christian theologians. For one group, he says,

⁴ E. Schillebeeckx provides the kind of discussion I have in mind. See his "Secular Worship and Church Liturgy," in *God the Future of Man*, pp. 93-116.

faith is "above all an experience or an event . . . it is knowing someone as distinct from knowing about someone." Faith is not easy to formulate, nor can we clearly perceive how ethical action proceeds from it. Faith's presence is "detected much more readily by the spontaneity of personal existence than by conformity with past patterns of life."

For others, Christian faith is "far more a tested expression than a fleeting experience of an individual or group. Indeed it is a world-view that is divinely guaranteed." It is noetic or informative, and can be formulated in language which itself can be instrumental in evoking faith for the first time or over a period of centuries.

In Father Peter's view, the tendency toward polarization between experience-oriented and object-oriented views of faith should be discouraged. Both values must be safeguarded. Christian faith must be "an experienced union with the Divine Other but also an awareness of that mystery." Accordingly, "it is important that the norm or guarantee of that faith be permanently available to intelligent believers who today no less than previously seem tempted to say Either-Or when Both-And is called for."

Faith calls for the Church, he argues, because there must exist some norm, real for all men, by which one can judge whether or not he is a believing Christian. Father Peter contends that "such a norm exists in the New Testament and in the Christ event it expresses and seeks to communicate. Whether men agree or disagree with the tenets that are distinctively Christian, whether or not they find the distinctively Christian experience desirable or even harmful to the cause of man, there is general agreement that the New Testament serves as a norm to preclude the attribution of Christian whimsically to whatever one may feel like so designating." The Church, as the community of Christian faith, is necessary "both to avoid the unguided enthusiasm or the monotonous repetition of sterile formulae which are both the death of Christian faith."

If faith is to survive, it needs such a community "in which among other functions one in particular cannot be dispensed with; namely, an office of leadership over against individual members and groups with the role of calling to mind publicly (and this must be more than literally repeating it) the word in which the Christian professes to

find guidance for his experience and outlook. One can make a good case for the contention that if the New Testament had said nothing at all explicitly about the Church, what it does say about faith would indicate that some community is called for with the characteristics Catholic and non-Catholic Christians alike have come to call ecclesial." This community exists to preserve the standards of authentic Christian faith and of making the New Testament a living source of Christian influence. The relationship between Christian faith and the Church, therefore, is "intrinsic and not casual."⁵

Father Peter, it seems to me, leaves off where he should begin. He states his thesis very clearly in the last several paragraphs of his paper: Christian faith calls for the Church. He appeals, in generic terms only, to the New Testament as the norm of Christian belief, and to the Church as the community within which the New Testament remains a living witness rather than a dead relic. He does not raise the problem of faith as such. Indeed, he explicitly excludes this from his consideration. Thus, he does not say that faith in God would be impossible if the Church did not exist; or, conversely, that faith as such calls for the Church. What effect, if any, should the leadership's proclamation and formulation of Christian faith have beyond the confines of the Christian community as such? Does the Church play a necessary role in the mediation of faith as such to those who may not be called to explicit Christian faith? Why is it necessary that there should be a community that confesses the Lordship of Jesus? Is this by necessity of means, or of precept only?

IV. ECCLESIOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

How should I answer the four basic questions—two regarding the necessity of the Church, and two regarding the role of the Church—which I have, *post factum*, put to the authors of these three papers?

(1) I should not want to argue that morality as such, liturgy as

⁵ Verification of this thesis can be provided from a wide assortment of contemporary Christian theologians. See my paper, "Christian Identification," which has been published as part of the proceedings of the National Catholic Educational Association convention, Atlantic City, N.J., April, 1970 (*College Newsletter*, 32 [June 1970] 1-6).

such, or faith as such call for the Christian Church. At worst, this argument would imply that only Christian morality is valid, that non-Christian worship is false and, therefore, worthless, and that only Christians really believe in, and affirm, transcendent reality. At best, this argument would imply that non-Christian morality, worship, and faith would be impossible apart from the existence of the Christian Church. I think the burden of proof rests upon those who would propose an affirmative answer to this first question. In the absence of such proof, I should prefer to argue that morality, liturgy, and faith as such do not, in fact, call for the Church.

(2) But the Church does exist. The question arises whether or not it plays any role in the transformation of the moral, and thus the human, climate of the world. I think that it does, and generally for the reasons Gregory Baum provides in his paper. Christian morality is not somehow superimposed on human morality. Christian morality is human morality *par excellence*. "Christian faith," John Milhaven writes, "reveals a radically new dimension of human life, but . . . it alters in no way the secular, humanistic dimensions. The Christian dimension reinforces the value and importance of being a fully secular man, but it in no way changes this means. . . . As a result, Christian ethics is in no way different from a pure humanism in the specific obligations to which it concludes."⁶

Insofar as the principal concern of the Church is the realization of the Kingdom of God among men, the Church's ministry will enhance rather than diminish the humanity of man when that ministry is effectively on course.⁷ Although genuine human life is possible without the existence and/or mediation of the Church, the Church's moral preoccupations are potentially contributive rather than counterproductive. But this potentiality can be actualized only to the extent that the Church ministers to the Kingdom of God rather than to its own prosperity or survival.

(3) I should agree with Gregory Baum's argument that Christian morality calls for the Church: as a context wherein these moral values can be discovered and appropriated, and for the effective com-

⁶ *Art. cit.*, pp. 141-2.

⁷ For a fuller discussion of this relationship between Church and Kingdom, see my recent work, *Church: the Continuing Quest* (note 1, above).

munication of these values to vast numbers of people beyond the Christian community. And I should agree also with Carl Peter that Christian faith calls for the Church since this faith is historical, having particular roots in the New Testament and in the Christ event which the New Testament embodies and communicates. The burden of the New Testament seems to be that one confesses the Lordship of Jesus upon invitation of the community of faith and ratifies that confession in a sacramental act which brings membership in that community. And if Christian liturgy is seen, as Kilian McDonnell argues, as a wider reality than eucharistic action alone, then it seems that Christian liturgy calls for the Church for the same reasons that Christian faith calls for the Church. Christian liturgy is a "work of the people of God in praise of the Father through the Lordship of Christ and in the mediation of his reconciling power in the Spirit." It is the public, ritual expression of Christian faith. *Lex orandi, lex credendi*.

(4) What place do these three realities—Christian morality, Christian liturgy, and Christian faith—occupy in the total missionary task of the Church? The mission of the Church is for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This is the testimony of much of contemporary ecclesiology (Rahner, Küng, Schillebeeckx, Metz, Baum, Dulles, Moltmann, Pannenberg, Lindbeck, Braaten, Robinson, and others)⁸ and of the documents of the Second Vatican Council (especially *Lumen gentium*, n. 1 and 5; and *Gaudium et spes*, esp. n. 1-3, 39-43, 45, and 92-93). "While helping the world and receiving many benefits from it, the Church has a single intention: that God's kingdom may come. . . ." (*Gaudium et spes*, n. 45).

This responsibility for God's reign is threefold (see *Lumen gentium*, n. 5):

(1) The Church exists as spokesman for the Kingdom of God as it has broken in, continues to break in, and will yet break into human history, particularly in the ministry, death, resurrection, and exaltation of the Lord. It has a task of *kerygma*. The Church proclaims the Lordship of Jesus, that he is, in the words of *Gaudium et spes*, "the key, the focal point, and the goal of all human history"

⁸ For appropriate references, see note 1, above.

(n. 10). It not only proclaims this conviction, but it actively gives praise and thanksgiving to the Father for what he has accomplished in Christ and through his Spirit. Finally, this kerygmatic task includes the ministry of prophecy. The Church must discern the inevitable gap which exists between the Kingdom-of-promise and the Kingdom-in-process-of-realization. It must be prepared to expose, denounce, and, through moral force, dismantle those principalities and powers which work against the coming of God's reign in human history, which suppress rather than facilitate the presence of God among men.

(2) The Church exists also as a principal embodiment of the Kingdom of God, as its sign and sacrament. This is its task of *koinonia*. It is not enough that the Christian community should proclaim the Lordship of Jesus and give praise and thanksgiving for the love and mercy of the Father, but it must also be prepared to show itself as the principal test-case, the "first fruits," of its own kerygmatic hypothesis. It must be a genuine community of love and fellowship, of growth and reconciliation. The Church must show what happens to men and women when they are fully and explicitly open to the Word of God uttered in the event of Jesus Christ. "By this will all men know that you are my disciples. . . ."

(3) Finally, the Church has a responsibility for the realization of the Kingdom among men, not only within the community of faith, but in the world as such. This is its task of *diakonia*. The Church exists, not to build or create the Kingdom (only God can do that), but to facilitate its entrance, to enable it to happen. The Church must see and seize every opportunity for the triumph of compassion over indifference, peace over hostility, justice over injustice, righteousness over sin, hope over despair, love over hate. Church does not produce the Kingdom of God; it does not create the community that emerges wherever God is present to human life. The Church facilitates the Kingdom and enables it to happen. It is also possible, however, that the Church can, by its indifference or contrary activity, suppress the presence of God and become thereby a countersign of the Kingdom.

Abstractly considered, the Kingdom of God could be realized without the Church. Existentially and historically considered, the

Kingdom depends in some measure upon the existence of the Church as a community which keeps alive the memory of Jesus as the definitive sacramental inbreaking of the Kingdom, a community which gives praise and thanksgiving to the Father for the powers he has released in the Lord, and a community which offers itself as a visible sign of the transforming presence of God among men—in Christ and through his Spirit.

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