

CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEET #3

The Church exists because of the initiative of God. It is sustained by the Spirit of Christ and our cooperation. It bears similarities to all other human organisations but is, in the end, unique, essentially different from all other merely human organisations. It exists to bear witness to, and be an instrument of, God's salvific will. Its work in the world, like its renewal, is ultimately by the grace of God. It may help to think of a *primary level* (Spirituality), a *secondary level* (Community) and a *tertiary level* (Communal expressions and needs) in the Church and the renewal process.

PRIMARY LEVEL: SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is primary because it is essentially about our relationship with God, self, others and world; that fourfold relationship is the heart and soul of humanity; spirituality situates our lives within the Trinity via the Paschal Mystery; it gives ground, energy and direction to everything else; it keeps us focused on the Spirit of Christ and the Kingdom; it helps us to judge everything against the Person and Teaching of Jesus; spirituality will express itself in some sort of communal way - to discover my true self is to discover that I am a relational being, to be me is to be in relationships.

SECONDARY LEVEL: COMMUNITY

The Church is a community of disciples, gathered by Word and Sacrament; life-giving community grows out of and feeds back into solid spirituality; it lives in and on the Spirit of Christ - it is not just any merely human group; by its very nature Christian community will be a worshipping, serving and evangelising group.

TERTIARY LEVEL: COMMUNAL EXPRESSIONS AND NEEDS

We might think of this tertiary level as manifested in four interdependent types of expressions and needs:

LITURGICAL

Worship
Ritual
Symbol
Music
Presiders
Sacred space

PASTORAL

Poor
Sick
Aged
Hospitality
Visitation
Education

ORGANIZATI
ONAL

Authority
Roles
Responsibilities
Committees
Accountability
Policies/proced
ures

BUSINESS

Finance
Management
Plant
R & M
Insurance
Legalities

In an ideal renewal process, all three levels of Church life will be fully addressed. Different people and groups have different gifts to bring to the renewal process.

The *primary level* holds the key to renewal. Advances can be made at the *tertiary level* - even spectacular advances - but if they are not supported by a well-grounded spirituality it is probably better if they do not happen. On the other hand, if there is a genuine spirituality present - and this will be evident in some form of genuine community life - renewal can proceed, eg, amidst inefficient organisation, bad music and very little money, for example.

The *tertiary level*, being mostly concrete and immediate, presenting jobs to be done and problems to be solved, easily attracts the most attention in the efforts for renewal. Needs and success can clearly be seen and measured here. There are tangible rewards. Efforts will only bear fruit in the long run, however, if this *tertiary level* work is well grounded in and expressive of *primary level* work. Clearly it is preferable if those doing the work for renewal at the *tertiary level* are also putting in effective effort at the *primary level* and the *secondary level*.

In the end, renewal is not a question of jobs to be done - though jobs need to be done - nor is it a question of problems to be solved - though problems need to be solved. A reductionism that reduces renewal to jobs to be done and problems to be solved is ultimately destructive - despite early positive signs to the contrary. Such reductionism is especially destructive when it is done amidst the rhetoric of spirituality and community but without the reality of spirituality and community. If we are serious about renewal, we must live the Paschal Mystery as generously as we possibly can. The reality of the Cross must never be far from our minds - especially when we are assessing successes and failures.

For the most part renewal will proceed in hidden and incremental ways: "the march of the ants". Successes will sometimes look like failures and failures will sometimes look like successes. The key will be people with dispositions such as constancy and fidelity, generosity and big-mindedness, patience and forgiveness, courage and wisdom, which allow God to do what God will do, in God's way and God's time.

Like a tree that sinks its roots before and while it spreads its branches, so those working in renewal must grow deep in the Spirit of Christ, individually and communally, before and while they spread their branches.

In Catalyst for Renewal we believe genuine conversation can serve the work of renewal admirably. It requires - and in turn fosters - respect and care, listening and learning, life-giving relationships and communion in the Spirit of Christ.

(CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEETS are published by Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated, PO Box 139, Gladesville 2111)

Reflect on the following references from Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975):

15. Anyone who rereads in the New Testament the origins of the Church, follows her history step by step and watches her live and act, sees that she is linked to evangelization in her most intimate being:

- The Church is born of the evangelizing activity of Jesus and the Twelve. ...
- The Church remains in the world when the Lord of glory returns to the Father. She remains as a sign.
- The Church is an evangelizer, but she begins by being evangelized herself. She is the community of believers, the community of hope lived and communicated, the community of brotherly love; and she needs to listen unceasingly to what she must believe, to her reasons for hoping, to the new commandment of love. She is the People of God immersed in the world, and often tempted by idols, and she always needs to hear the proclamation of the "mighty works of God"(41) which converted her to the Lord; she always needs to be called together afresh by Him and reunited.
- The Church is the depository of the Good News to be proclaimed.
- Having been sent and evangelized, the Church herself sends out evangelizers.

20. What matters is to evangelize human culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et spes*,(n.53) always taking the person as one's starting - point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.

31. Between evangelization and human advancement - development and liberation - there are in fact profound links. These include links of an anthropological order, because the people who are to be evangelized are not abstract beings but are subject to social and economic questions. They also include links in the theological order, since one cannot dissociate the plan of creation from the plan of Redemption. The latter plan touches the very concrete situations of injustice to be combatted and justice to be restored. They include links of the eminently evangelical order, which is that of charity: how in fact can one proclaim the new commandment without promoting in justice and in peace the true, authentic advancement of humanity?

32. We must not ignore the fact that many, even generous Christians in their wish to commit the Church to the liberation effort are frequently tempted to reduce her mission to the dimensions of a simply temporal project. They would reduce her aims to a human-centred goal; the salvation of which she is the messenger would be reduced to material well-being. Her activity, forgetful of all spiritual and religious preoccupation, would become initiatives of the political or social order. But, if this were so, the Church would lose her fundamental meaning. Her message of liberation would no longer have any originality and would easily be open to monopolization and manipulation by ideological systems and political parties. She would have no more authority to proclaim freedom as in the name of God. This is why we have wished to emphasize ... 'The need to re-state clearly the specifically religious finality of evangelization. This latter would lose its reason for existence if it were to diverge from the religious axis that guides it: the Kingdom of God, before anything else, in its fully theological meaning'.

41. Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses. It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus - the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the

powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.

46. In the long run, is there any other way of handing on the Gospel than by transmitting to another person one's personal experience of faith?

75. The Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church. It is he who explains to the faithful the deep meaning of the teaching of Jesus and of his mystery. It is the Holy Spirit who, today just as at the beginning of the Church, acts in every evangelizer who allows himself to be possessed and led by him. Without the Holy Spirit the most convincing dialectic has no power over the heart of man. Without him the most highly developed schemes resting on a sociological or psychological basis are quickly seen to be quite valueless. We live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What good thing has happened in your parish in the last year? Why do you call it "good"?
2. Where do you think the main energies for renewal ought to be directed? Why?
3. Would it be possible to change structures in the Church without renewing the Church? Discuss this.
4. Would it be possible to renew the Church without changing structures in the Church? Discuss this.
5. Do you think "we live in the Church at a privileged moment of the Spirit"? Discuss this.
6. What does it mean to say "the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church"?
7. What does it mean to "evangelize human culture and cultures"?
8. What does it mean to say "the Church must begin by being evangelized"?
9. How might the mission of the Church be "reduced to a simply temporal project"?
10. Get a copy of Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and read it meditatively. Discuss it with someone.

(CATALYST SUGGESTION SHEETS are published by Catalyst for Renewal Incorporated, PO Box 139, Gladesville 2111)