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## DOING CHRIST'S MISSION IN THESE CHANGING TIMES

Approved Quadrennial Theme, 2018-2022

### CHANGING TIMES

We are living in these changing times. "Change is coming!" proclaimed our newly installed president of the Republic, President Rodrigo R. Duterte. He solemnly promised that under his leadership graft and corruption, illegal drugs, and criminality will be reduced to the minimum, if not entirely eradicated. And he repeatedly said that he is willing to kill or to be killed to make this promise fulfilled. He said that his government is not only "a government of the people, by the people and for the people," but rather "a government for the least, the last, and the lost."

Similarly, Vice President Leni G. Robredo also emphasized that her services as the second highest leader of the land will be focused "to those at the margins of society." All these progressive statements make us extremely hopeful and expectant that fundamental changes in our nation's life will indeed come about with this new government.

Indeed, foundations of the present order of things politically, socially or even religiously are now beginning to shake. Some are alarmed, but many are excited that genuine changes people are longing for a long time may finally come to pass.

However, these hopeful promises should not make us complacent, but rather it should challenge us and make us even more vigilant in accompanying this new government in all its efforts to fulfil its promises for the common good. We must do our pastoral and prophetic tasks even more seriously. Our vision of the Kingdom of God must remain as our overriding vision of society.

Of course, the Duterte Government is not the Kingdom of God. All governments must be assessed and evaluated in terms of the values of the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus Christ our Lord in words and in deeds.

The Kingdom of God should be our hope as well as our criterion by which we view governments in terms of their distance or proximity to the aspirations which God himself projects for this world. In this way, the Kingdom of God helps us to live in this world, to care for this world and to involve ourselves in the transformation of this world.

## CHRIST'S MISSION STATEMENTS

Our next Quadrennium, 2018-2022, will be under the Duterte Administration. Hence, it would be good to reflect on Christ's mission even as we witness the unfolding of this Duterte Government. In this light, our proposed Quadrennial Theme will be: "Doing Christ's Mission in these Changing Times."

The church has no mission of its own. Christ's mission is the church mission. We have to understand our church mission in terms of Christ's mission in the world. The four canonized Gospels presented Christ's mission differently due to their varied contexts. Let's take a brief look into these mission statements:

### 1. Mark –

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served; he came to serve and to give his life to redeem many people." (Mk. 10:45)

According to the Gospel of Mark, which is considered the earliest gospel, Jesus claimed that he did not come to be served but "to serve and to give his life to redeem many people" (Mk. 10:45). The immediate context of this statement was an incident wherein Jesus' disciples had an argument over James and John's request to sit at the right and left sides of Jesus in the Kingdom of God. Jesus took the occasion to teach his disciples about power, authority, and servant-hood (cf. Mk.10:42-44).

In contrast to people's prevailing way of life at the time, Jesus saw genuine service to people as the primary purpose of power and authority. In other words, leaders were there not to lord it over the people, but to serve them. The people were not supposed to be dominated and controlled by those at the top, but rather they were supposed to be loved and served. It was this great concern of Jesus for people that transformed existing people's way of life in relation to power and authority. Jesus proclaimed that power structures and systems must always serve the people.

### 2. Matthew –

"Do not think that I have come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets. I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true." (Mt. 5:17)

Matthew had a different way of expressing the same mission of Jesus in his writings. He wrote that Jesus came not to do away with the teachings of Moses and the prophets, but to make them come true (cf. Mt.5:17). In what way did Jesus make them come true? Jesus' statement should be understood in relation to other texts in Matthew which would give us a picture of the religious situation not only of Matthew's time but also of Jesus' time.

Matthew 12:11-12 on the Sabbath Law and Matthew 23:23 on Jesus attacks against the Scribes and the Pharisees would show us how the Law of Moses had been seriously circumvented to suit the interests of the religious and political powers at the time. Certain aspects of the Law which were beneficial to them, at least economically like offerings and

sacrifices, were emphasized at the expense of the weightier aspects of the Law, like justice, mercy and honesty.

Ritualistic laws, like the Law of the Sabbath, were given priority over laws which would require deep human concern. This would likely be the case if laws were enacted, interpreted, and implemented devoid of serious considerations of its particular human and social context. Certainly, the law would become oppressive. And the ones most affected would be those at the bottom of the social pyramid (cf. Mt.23:4).

In the face of such understanding of the Law, Jesus presented a new way of looking at the Law, which was actually an attempt to go back to the original intention of the Law. He taught that the human person was more important than the Law; that the Law was made for the human and not the other way around (cf. Mt. 12:11-12). Hence, the Law would be valid only in so far as it would serve the human, in so far as it would bring about justice, mercy, and honesty. It would become invalid and demonic if and when the powerful would use them to harass, exploit, and dominate other people, especially the poor.

By pointing to this true intention and spirit by which laws were supposed to be formulated and implemented, Jesus made the teachings of Moses and the prophets come true.

### 3. Luke –

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people." (Lk. 4: 18-19)

Luke, for his part, wrote that Jesus' mission reflected that of Prophet Isaiah (cf. Isa. 61:1-2). He said that Jesus' mission was "to bring good news to the poor... to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people" (Lk.4:18-19). Luke went beyond Mark and Matthew by clearly describing the specific target group of Jesus' mission and ministry - the poor, captives, blind, oppressed - the dehumanized and marginalized sectors of society. Jesus' concern according to Luke was not just humanity in general, but rather that sector of humanity that suffered most from poverty and want. His concern for the poor and oppressed contradicted the idea that poverty and oppression were "divine dispositions".

Many believe during Jesus' time that the poor were poor because of their own sins. In other words, their poverty would show that God was punishing them for their own inequities; that it was God's will for them to be poor. This kind of consciousness, however, was debunked by Jesus' life and message as presented by Luke and even by the other disciples. With God's Spirit upon him, Jesus cured the sick, forgave the sinners, fed the hungry, and brought hope and empowerment to the poor (cf. Lk. 4:18).

### 4. John –

"The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life---life in all its fullness." (Jn. 10:10)

John's Gospel added more meaning to Luke's presentation when he said that Jesus came not to steal, kill, and destroy, like other shepherds do, but to give life "in all its fullness" (cf. Jn.10:10). This statement, of course, should be viewed in terms of Israel's history wherein leaders betrayed the people's trust by exploiting, maltreating, and leading them to destruction.

Life for Jesus, as John understood it, was meant to be shared. For it would be in caring for others and sharing one's life to them that life itself would find meaning and fulfillment (cf. Jn. 6:51;15:13). This was the truth for which Jesus came to speak about and to live out in this world (cf. Jn.18:37).

## **DOING CHRIST'S MISSION TODAY**

Now, how do we do Christ's mission today? The Book of Acts tells us about how the Christian faith spread throughout the Greco-Roman world through mission work. In Acts, Chapters 3 and 4, we read a story about Apostles Peter and John, who went to the Temple to pray and saw a lame man begging for money. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, the two apostles healed the lame man. And those who witnessed the event were greatly amazed.

Then, Peter and John took the opportunity to proclaim the message of Jesus' life and death. But they were still speaking when the Temple guards arrived and arrested the two apostles and imprisoned them. But nevertheless, many of those who heard the good news believed - about five thousand men.

Peter and John were questioned before the Jewish Council, even as they courageously testified for Christ. The leaders of Jerusalem were surprised to witness the two apostles' courageous testimonies, knowing that they were just ordinary men. But nevertheless, they warned Peter and John to stop speaking in Jesus' name.

However, empowered by the Holy Spirit, the two apostles responded saying: "You yourselves judge which is right in God's sight - to obey you or to obey God; for we cannot stop speaking of what we ourselves have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

The Jewish authorities would like to punish Peter and John, but they could not do it because of the people. Thus, they could not do otherwise but to release them.

Now, this Biblical story shows us what Christ's mission is all about. It provides us some valuable insights concerning mission work.

### **Speaking for the Truth**

Firstly, the Biblical story tells us that to do Christ's mission is to speak for the truth. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter and John spoke courageously about the truth of Jesus life, death, and resurrection. Without fear and favor, they pointed to the powers-that-be in Jerusalem as the ones responsible for the mistrial and death of the man Jesus of Nazareth,

whom God raised from the dead. Consequently, Peter and John were arrested; they were imprisoned; they were harassed and questioned before the Jewish Council.

Truly, an encounter with truth is oftentimes an encounter with suffering. In our world today, there are in fact torture chambers established to process truth into false confessions. There are investigations and trials being conducted to turn the truth into lies. And worst of all, there are killings being carried out to silence the truth. The wicked spiritual forces cannot withstand the truth. Truth is so naked that it must be covered with falsehood. Truth is so eloquent that it must be put to silence. This organized crime against the truth defiles our true humanity; it mocks the tears of people, and it defiles the power of God's love.

Truth is so bright and clear. But those who are blinded by the authority and power in their hands could not see it. The leaders in Jerusalem, at least, saw it. For the truth that the lame man was healed and restored into wholeness was right there in front of them. In fact, they could not help seeing it, because the man was standing right beside Peter and John.

This is something we should always remind ourselves, that we could not quarrel against the truth. The bearers of truth may be arrested and imprisoned, like Peter and John, but the truth would always come out. This is our hope and our courage to be; for our God is a God of truth.

### **Taking People Seriously**

Moreover, the story also tells us that to do Christ's mission is to take people seriously. The people are the basic force to build Christian communities. This is the reason why the disciples directed their proclamations of the truth of Christ to the people themselves. And thousands of them believed the Good News. And because of the people, the Jewish authorities were not able to punish Peter and John.

People have the truth. Of course, people do commit mistakes. As a matter fact, they have oftentimes committed mistakes. We remember the story of the Golden Calf in the Old Testament. In the absence of Moses, the people persuaded their acting leader, Aaron, to make a Golden Calf to serve as their god (cf. Ex. 32).

People could be manipulated by certain power groups for certain vested interest. This was the case of the crowd who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem shouting hosannas, but demanded his death shortly afterwards because of the manipulation of Jewish authorities. We must not make idols of people. People are not gods. We must remember this in our theology of people.

However, there are situations wherein people have the truth. These are situations wherein people are condemned to poverty, exploitation and hopelessness, or even death. This is where God seeks to exercise the power of hope. This is where we could most likely encounter our Living God at work. This is where we could discover the imperatives of our faith. For God takes up the cause of the suffering people as His own, and calls us to be His partners in this missionary task. It is in being with people and learning from them that we discover what God is telling us to do.

## **Obeying God rather than Men**

And finally, the story also tells us that to do Christ's mission is to obey God rather than men. Peter and John were commanded by the Jewish authorities to stop all preaching in Jesus' name. However, they answered that if and when they were required to choose between the will of God and the decree of men, they have no other choice but to obey God.

This uncompromising attitude of Early Christian believers can also be found in the apocalyptic writings, particularly the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament and the Book of Revelations in the New Testament. Both books were written at the time of political persecutions, because of their strong faith in God. Hence, these books could be considered the most political books in the Bible. They should be studied seriously by politically involved Christians.

The Book of Daniel was written during the time of the Seleucid ruler Antiochus Epiphanes wherein he tried to impose Greek culture and religion among the Israelites. He burned the Torah and put up the statue of Zeus inside the Jerusalem Temple. But the Israelites stood their ground and resisted the imposition as exemplified in the story of Daniel and his three friends: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (cf. Dan. 3, 6). They were steadfast in their faith in God, even though they were threatened to be thrown in the lion's den or burned at stake.

Similarly, the Book of Revelations was also written during Emperor Domitian's reign wherein he tried to impose Emperor Worship. He claimed divine authority and wanted to be worship as the Lord of the Empire. But the writer of the Book, John, and his fellow Christian believers refused to worship the Emperor. They believed Christ alone is Lord. John was exiled to Patmos, but he never gave up. He wrote the Book of Revelations to warn his fellow Christians never to compromise their faith (cf. Rev. 3), for God will intervene in due time, and he will "make a new heaven and a new earth...and the sea will be no more" (cf. Rev. 21).

Oftentimes, obedience to God rather than men would make us live a very dangerous life. But then, it is also such kind of life that brings hope in the midst of hopelessness, and resurrection in the midst of death.

## **Challenge of our Time**

Hence, the challenge of our time is for us to be genuine witnesses for Christ in the midst of a world that seems to be dominated by the wicked spiritual forces of this Dark Age. This means to offer ourselves for the cause of fulfilling Christ's mission in the world: to become bearers of God's truth in a society dominated by lies and deceit; to become instruments of God's love and forgiveness in a community wherein to deny one's self, one's pride, and one's hatred is the hardest thing to do.

Our world today needs men and women who are willing to manifest the love of God in a world of hatred and greed, and transform it into a world of peace, of justice and of love. This is our historic task. This is our mission.

## **SOME SUB-THEMES**

Now, we could divide the Quadrennial Theme into four sub-themes representing each year in the Quadrennium:

Year 1 (2018-2019): Doing Christ's Mission in these Changing Times  
Text: Mark 10:45

Year 2 (2019-2020): Making the Teachings of Moses and the Prophets Come True in these Changing Times  
Text: Matthew 5:17

Year 3 (2020-2021): Bringing Good News to the Masses in these Changing Times  
Text: Luke 4:18-19

Year 4 (2021-2022): Giving Life to the World in these Changing Times  
Text: John 10:10

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