

traditional and Christic way. That symbol is "mission."⁶³ As was the mission of Christ, so the Church is sent to the world and for the world, especially the dispossessed, to help make all things new in the name of Christ.

COMMENTS ON ROGER D. HAIGHT'S ARTICLE

In a joint issue on Church a question will inevitably emerge: How would the two systematic positions on "Why the Church?" respond to each other? This comment attempts an answer to the legitimate request, and thus presupposes some acquaintance with my article "Trinitarian Love as Ground of the Church."

Haight's choice of "mission" as symbol for understanding the Church not only responds to an empirical tendency of our day to "Show me," but also calls the Church to a much-needed conversion from complacency and institutional in-turning to examine itself for signs of real self-transcendence in the form of service to the world. He takes the world seriously, both as a place where God's grace acts and as being in need of the Church's service of love. On all of these points there is basic agreement between us.

The difference between our two positions appears both in our points of departure and in our underlying philosophies. Haight begins with the problematic the modern world gives us—pragmatic, empirical, aware of historical relativity. Scripture is appealed to as responding to that problematic. In my view, our present culture not only provides new possibilities of understanding Scripture; it is also called into question by Scripture. In some ways we always fall short of God's revelation in Christ, and we have to look to that source to judge even our own time. As I see it, present-day inadequacy is manifested in our very tendency to think only functionally and empirically, with the result that permanent commitments—whether in marriage or the churches—are being progressively

⁶³ Michael A. Fahey, S.J., in "The Mission of the Church: To Divinize or Humanize?" (address to the national convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, June 1976; will appear soon in the *Proceedings*), assumes a concrete and realistic perspective, examines the shifts in the meaning of the term "mission" through history, and reacts against the sudden escalation in its usage over the past couple of decades together with its inflation to include too many different roles for the Church in the world. His point is that specific tasks or any single activity among many should not be identified with *the* mission of the Church. It would be better to speak of the "tasks" of the Church. He then constructively explores the new meaning contained in the idea of the *munus* of the Church, a term employed in Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes*. He concludes that the Church has several areas of responsibility outside itself to the non-Christ-confessing world even after the gospel has been announced. These areas correspond to the "integrational, prophetic, and eschatological" functions or dimensions of the Church. I would agree that "mission" can be and has been abused and cheapened, especially when it is used in everyday descriptive and inspirational language about the activities or agenda of the Church. However, as a theological symbol that opens up meaning and mediates understanding, it can help to link the qualities of Vatican II's *munus* with the New Testament and tradition, can help to ground those qualities therein. On this level, and for this reason, I think Fahey would agree that the symbol should not be abandoned but rather explored even further.

undermined because of our inability to face the inevitable dark and unrewarding times such commitments entail. If Christ has won a final victory, the Church's participation in that victory must somehow be valid for all time. How it will be lived out in any age certainly changes, but the basic structure of committed communal love remains constant. In my view, the most pressing need of the Church today is to rediscover that spiritual groundwork as the basis for any solid missionary work.

As for our philosophies, Haight appeals to empiricism and functionalism as most suitable for today's mentality. My position looks to empirical data, especially that of depth psychology, but is unabashedly ontological—and, indeed, with an interpersonal ontology. Empiricism thinks from the outside in, looks for marks of credibility and functional effect. An interpersonal ontology thinks from the inside out, to discover the energy sources from which the outer effect will be lasting and fruitful. Both are needed. Without looking to outward effect, inner dynamics will stagnate in mere process; but unless the interpersonal dynamic is attended to, our social action will collapse through lack of staying power. Contrary to Haight, my view of our present problem is that inner dynamics are most neglected, and that unless we rediscover spiritual growth and community, a mission-oriented approach is in danger of perpetuating our present alienation from self-understanding, much as the Protestant churches are discovering the inadequacy of a merely social gospel in our day.

It is the difference in philosophies that determines our different views of finality in the Church. Haight sees one overarching finality, that of mission. I have affirmed a double finality, like that of marriage. As conjugal love and procreation of children are both seen as ends of marriage, so I see Christian community and mission as double ends of the Church. Haight's view corresponds to a functional philosophy; it has the efficiency of one goal that can clearly direct decisions. My view follows from an interpersonal ontology in which persons are never means to an end. Since our union with Christ and community is already an end—much like the love of spouses—it cannot be subordinated to mission, even though its authenticity is revealed in the desire to communicate this love to others. A Trinitarian view is at home with such a complex finality, since it reflects the different processions in the Trinity. These different positions are not without implications for decisions. For me, the Church does have a mission to itself, its own conversion and growth. Hence a spirituality serving deeper relation to God—even monastic spirituality—may ever be needed to empower the other finality of mission. Further, a double finality is not solely focused on the transcendent kingdom; it celebrates the present kingdom, and out of this celebration is motivated to give with joy what it has found. This view sees in the community a love that “never ends,” so that all attention is not simply focused on the “not yet” of mission.

Thus I see “mission” as but one aspect of the complex goal of the Church. If the total goal is not kept in mind, it seems to me we will be consigned to a recurrent dialectic from one neglected aspect to another, without being rooted in an adequate overview. “Mission” itself will differ according to particular needs. The present need is most likely what Haight sees—to extend the service of God's

love to the oppressed and neglected. But liberation itself is only a beginning. One needs to build committed community and to transform the world in final submission to God. The world may reject this, since a God-centered, communal view demands the cross, but the Church cannot tailor its call to what the world is ready to accept. The Church's call may be as mysterious as that of a Mother Teresa of Calcutta, which calls the world out of its own self-centered ends to a recognition that beyond all, and relativizing all, is the eternal community with God and fellow believers that all our hopes are grounded in and foreshadow.

ROBERT T. SEARS, S.J.