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Goals and Values Underlying Programs of the Catholic Church in Rural U.S.A.

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THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC Rural Life Conference was established in the 1930's to interpret and teach the goals and values embodied in Christian rural living. The Conference's philosophy springs from a conviction that religion does not end when we leave church on Sunday morning. Rather, the real test of religion is found in applying Christian principles to the practical affairs of business, agriculture, family life, recreation and education.

The NCRLC helps its members recognize and live by an integrated philosophy of life. Goals and values are the integrating forces. The ultimate goal is happiness. Happiness is found in loving and serving God. This, in turn, requires an orderly, purposeful way of life. Thus, we experience a rewarding fulfillment of our human capabilities and an abundance of love and understanding among family and friends. Since we have a body as well as a soul, this orderly living makes legitimate — indeed, it demands — the use of food, clothing, shelter and other material goods. A moderate use of these goods is a source of pleasure and happiness.

Not only is our philosophy of life theocentric; it is Christocentric. Christ is our mediator with the Father, the Elder Brother of all Christians, the greatest unifying force in our way of life. Christ has done much to make religion an everyday, practical affair. He is the Head of an organic Body of which Christians are members. This body He often referred to as His Kingdom. In the Kingdom there is work to be done, a social and economic order to be reformed. Christ carries on this work of the Kingdom through us, the members.

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Order, unity, purpose and goals are the hallmarks of this philosophy of life. We are seeking eternal happiness, to be sure; but to earn it we must establish and perfect the Kingdom of Christ on earth here and now. To the degree we succeed in this responsibility, order and peace, justice and love, happiness and fulfillment are experienced in this life by ourselves and our fellow men.

The public worship of the Church is often referred to as the "liturgy." The primary goal of worship is to pay homage — adoration, thanksgiving, love and reparation — to Almighty God. It is, however, at the same time a "liturgy," a work of the people. In our worship we consciously enlist the material things out of which our daily lives are constituted. Bread, wine, oil and water are used in the seven sacraments. In our liturgy we have blessings and dedications of soil, seed, machines, livestock and the grain, fruit and vegetables which we produce from the land. Through this type of liturgy we are made to realize that all of creation should be employed in the service of God and for the strengthening of the Kingdom of Christ on earth. The liturgy, then, is a way to bring a great degree of unity and integrity into our way of life. It focuses toward a single goal, namely, the strengthening of the Kingdom of Christ. It orders toward that goal both the natural and the supernatural, the temporal and the eternal, the human and the nonhuman objects of our environment.

This approach to the liturgy is especially appropriate in rural parishes. Most of the objects used in the liturgy or for which liturgical blessings are provided pertain to rural life. The NCRLC assists pastors and parishoners in such liturgical observances. Through leaflets and articles in our magazine, through sermons, retreats and days of recollection, we help our members observe the liturgy with dignity and appreciation.

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ORDER

Our concern for the practical affairs of business and agriculture is summarized in a single goal, the establishing of a Christian social and economic order. In the encyclicals of our popes and in much of the literature of the NCRLC, this goal is spelled out. Two reforms are necessary if the Christian social and economic order is to be established:

A. There must be a reform in our thinking and attitudes. We must practice fraternal charity toward one another. We must have more concern for the common good. We must eliminate selfishness and greed from our minds and hearts.

B. Adequate organizational tools must be created to bring about better farm income and the other goals we seek.

Among the organizational tools recently made available, one of the most promising is the Rural Areas Development program. In nearly 2,000 counties and larger areas of the United States RAD committees have been established. These committees coordinate the efforts of private organizations and agencies of the government. They seek to improve agricultural income, develop small industries and expand public facilities. The NCRLC heartily endorses the RAD program and promotes it at the national, state and local levels. We remind our people of their responsibilities toward their communities and urge them to assume positions of leadership in RAD committees. Our magazine promotes RAD. We recently published a policy statement regarding it and we give many lectures on this subject.

National and International Agencies

A discussion of social and economic issues leads necessarily to an evaluation of the government's role in such matters. We teach the principle of subsidiarity, according to which no task should be assigned to the government if it can be effectively performed by a private institution. The necessary corollary of this principle is the responsibility of citizens to take part in such private institutions. This point is emphasized in Pope John XXIII's encyclical, Christianity and Social Progress.

The principle of subsidiarity reflects a value prominent in both Christianity and democracy, namely, the dignity and autonomy of the human person. The government is established to serve the people, not vice versa.

Nevertheless, we are aware of the tremendous influence of government on the daily lives of our people. Hence, we maintain a Washington office where Fr. James Vizzard, SJ, represents our views at hearings of Congressional committees and reports to our members legislative and administrative developments affecting our way of life.

We do not confine our activity to this nation. As Christians we must be concerned for the welfare of the whole human family. This universal brotherhood of man is a value to which our Church is committed. Msgr. L. G. Ligutti, formerly our executive director, has been in charge of our international office in Rome. He has convened leaders of many nations to share thinking concerning economic, social and religious issues on a world scale. He has been active in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, in which he acted as Pope John's official observer.

Among the organizational tools for creating a Christian world order we are especially heartened by the Food-for-Peace program and the several People-to-People programs. In lectures, leaflets and issues of our magazine we explain the great work of the Food-for-Peace program and suggest ways to improve it. We encourage young people to volunteer for the Peace Corps, International Voluntary Services, Papal Volunteers for Latin America and similar People-to-People programs. These programs embody a pursuit of what we call the "corporal works of mercy." These works we value highly. It is, indeed, heartening to see them accomplished on such a large scale.

The Family Farm

However, the greatest institution in and through which we work is the family. The family ranks especially high in Christian values. It is established through the sacrament of matrimony. One of its purposes is to bring children into the world, to love and nurture them and, thus, to increase membership in Christ's kingdom.

Farming remains a family enterprise in the United States. Most of our farms are operated by and for a family. The family farm is an efficient means to produce food and fiber and a force for strengthening family bonds. It is a socio-economic institution which we value highly.

We strive, therefore, to preserve the family farm system in America. We use our usual means of lectures and publications to remind our members of the general public of the value of this great institution. Whenever governmental policy affects the family farm, we are quick to express our concern. We join with other leaders of private and governmental organizations in statements on this subject.

The Cooperative Movement

It is difficult for small family farm enterprises to survive in an economy dominated by giant corporations. Farmers can strengthen their hand by banding together in cooperative credit, purchasing and marketing associations. The survival of the family farm system will depend in large part on the development of such organizations.

It is not within the province of NCRLC to form cooperatives. Rather, our task is at a more basic level, namely, the teaching of

the values at stake in cooperation. We previously mentioned the autonomy of the human person. We now recognize a correlative of that value, namely, the social nature of man and his consequent social obligations. Moreover, cooperation in social and economic matters is an application of the Christian virtue of fraternal charity. Cooperation should be a feature of the Christian social order to which we referred above. Farm cooperatives are among the organizational tools through which a Christian social order can be formed.

Farm-City Relations

The NCRLC promotes better understanding and mutual help among farm and city people. Many rural parishes include farmers, townspeople and rural nonfarm residents. This diversity of personnel makes toleration and cooperation essential. Through lectures, leaflets and magazine articles, NCRLC helps farm and city people gain a more accurate picture of one another's rights and responsibilities.

FAR-REACHING CHANGE

In all these social, economic and religious matters, great changes are taking place. One of the most basic is the shift of population out of agriculture into other occupations. In face of such far-reaching change, two extremes must be avoided. The first is failure to recognize the need for change on our part. The second is to abandon the permanent goals and values which should guide us through change. The NCRLC encourages change among its members and, at the same time, holds before them the timeless theological and philosophical principles which will give them direction and stability while they change.

SUMMARY

Our chief goal is happiness, which is obtained through love and service of God. This, in turn requires an orderly, integrated way of life. Our efforts to strengthen the Kingdom of Christ is a goal which greatly unifies our activities. The liturgy is the primary source of motive and direction in this effort. As a practical sequel to the liturgy, we try to bring about a reform of ideals among our members and, at the same time, to persuade them to

use the organizational tools through which a Christian social and economic order can be formed. Those tools include Rural Areas Development, Food for Peace, People-to-People programs and farm cooperatives. Among the proximate goals are the strengthening of the family farm and the improving of farm-city relations. All of these goals are being pursued in times of far-reaching change. It is important that we adhere to our timeless values lest we change in a hapless, directionless manner.

These values include the dignity and rights of the individual, the social obligations of each, the universal brotherhood of man, the sacredness of the family and the proper use of material goods.