

**Remarks for Book Launch for Father Mark Stelzer's
Along the Way: The Life, Lessons and Legacy of Father Hugh Crean
(Andrews McMeel 2022)**

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Thanks to all who made this book possible, and to my colleagues with a special thanks to Father Mark.

As a historian my job was to set a context for our memories of Father Crean. For me Hugh Crean was a Vatican II priest, like so many I came to know around the country. As Sister Mary Johnson writes: "Hugh is a wonderful example of a person who lived, preached and taught the Council. He was shaped by the Council's vision and came to embody its spirit."

So I offer three ideas about Vatican II, which began just sixty years ago this month, an event punctuated by the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Human Dignity: *Dignitatis Humanae*, the title of the religious liberty decree which we Americans were watching closely. This was far more than a matter of church and state but an acknowledgement of human rights. In the spring John XXIII offered *Pacem in Terris* with its history-making endorsement of human rights and plea for world peace. In the wake of Vatican II heroic Catholics and local churches across the divided Cold War globe, from Poland to South Africa to Chile and Brazil, emerged as defenders of human rights. From this commitment flowed the option for the poor and affirmations of liberation. And of course freedom and human dignity are contagious as poor people and women and people of color and once colonial and handicapped people and gay and lesbian and transgender people raised their voices and claimed their place at tables public and private, often with chips on their shoulders. Closer to home, in parishes and schools and local communities, reflections on human dignity led people like Father Hugh and women and men in this room to sacraments of friendship, as described by Father Mark, and to creative ministries that lifted spirits and opened hearts. Human dignity, a major focus of renewal from Vatican II.

Solidarity: God loves each of us, personally, and is as close as our interior yearnings. And God loves all of us, together. This sense of solidarity informed the dramatic decision of the bishops to speak of the church first of all as the "people of

God" and only then of bishops and clergy and laity, and that term came home to us in liturgical reform and renewal projects. Stumbling at times, we created new boards, commissions and committees, diocesan and parish pastoral councils, even the first and only national Catholic convention, anticipating synodality by 45 years. And our solidarity as God's people informed wider solidarity with others, all others, impulses toward unity inspired by our history of world wars and empires and genocide. Pope John addressed himself to all people of good will, and the council opened its last major statement with those important words: "The joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties, of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties, of the followers of Christ." Once we Catholics thought of ourselves as "certain and set apart," now we called ourselves to accompany others, all others, in taking responsibility for our human family and our common home.

Mission: Human dignity and solidarity led us to a renewed understanding of our mission as Christians and as a church, to be Christ's presence in and for and with our world. God's agape love fills us with compassion and purpose, to bring God's kingdom, the beloved community, to life in our time and place. For Hugh Crean and other Vatican II priests and religious, that meant affirming and supporting the work and witness of the community, including its lay men and women, in their families, neighborhoods, workplaces, and public squares. Mission was to shape identity, not the other way around.

So, shorthand for the last of my five minutes:

Human dignity led Father Hugh to what Pope Francis calls a "culture of encounter": it's all about people, as we find each other; pastoral ministry is the basic ministry, and all ministry must have a pastoral dimension.

Solidarity means that shared responsibility for our church, our communities, our world and its people, is a fact as well as an option, built into who and what we are.

And **mission** leads to the deep Catholic idea that God loves everybody and everything, our human family and our common home, so the world, our world, actually matters. How history turns out is important, and the promised kingdom of God, the beloved

community, is not just a dream or a vain ideal but the goal of our life together, the inspiration of our faith hope and love.

Human dignity, solidarity, and mission may seem like recycled idealism unsuited to our experience of disappointment and division. I suspect that Hugh Crean, who, like me, entered on adult life as John F. Kennedy was running for president, would agree that we were a bit innocent in those days, thinking that it was great that the church was catching up with us Americans. We thought we had already worked out religious liberty, human rights, and the common good for ourselves, and we were defending such ideals in the Cold War. But notice the years: October 1962 with the Cuban Missile Crisis as the council opened, and 1965, when it ended, when some of us Americans beat up other Americans on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, and we decided in February to begin sending some, indeed many, of our young men to Vietnam to fight, kill, and sometimes die on our behalf. And much has happened in the 60 years since that requires our continuing on the Vatican II way of peacemaking and justice, seeking to be altogether realistic about what that requires.

Hugh Crean talked a lot of such Vatican II matters, and, I am told, he did so with faith-filled confidence, a gentle modesty, and a smile. People like that who make a little history and seem happy doing it illustrate the lessons of Pope Francis's apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel.") In my favorite words from Father Crean in this book, he says in the mid-1980s that Vatican II had not ended, "it was just beginning". He would ask us, I suspect, to keep moving "along the way."

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