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In new book, Cardinal Wuerl encourages Catholics to challenge culture

Mark Zimmermann Catholic News Service | Dec. 19, 2011

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WASHINGTON -- In his new book, "Seek First the Kingdom," Washington Cardinal Donald W. Wuerl calls on Catholics to seek God's kingdom and then reflect it in their everyday lives.

When Catholics deepen their own faith, their hearts are transformed, and when they share it with others, they can change their community, their nation and their world, the cardinal wrote in his book, which is subtitled "Challenging the Culture by Living Our Faith."

"To be in the kingdom is to be with Christ always, and to be for Christ always, in season and out of season, in private and in public, on the job and on our days off," he wrote in the book, which was published in November by Our Sunday Visitor.

At a time when many people only know kingdoms from history, fairy tales and royal weddings, Cardinal Wuerl points out how God's kingdom "forms the heart of the Gospel," and as Pope Benedict XVI has noted, the phrase "the kingdom of God" appears 122 times in the New Testament, including in 90 quotes from Jesus in the Gospels.

Cardinal Wuerl's new book emphasizes the importance of Catholics taking up Pope Benedict's call for the new evangelization, to learn their faith, to live it and share it with others, especially family members, friends, neighbors and co-workers who may have drifted away from the faith or never heard the good news of Jesus. The book also encourages Catholics to reflect their faith at home, in the workplace, in their community and in the public square.

"You could make a very strong case that 'Seek First the Kingdom' is a response to the question, 'How do we do the new evangelization?'" the cardinal said in an interview with the Catholic Standard, Washington archdiocesan newspaper.

In his book, Cardinal Wuerl noted that, in the face of the world's secularism, materialism and individualism that distract people from Christ and from true happiness, Pope Benedict has called on Catholics to be engaged in the work of the new evangelization, "to re-propose the perennial truth of Christ's Gospel."

Last year, Cardinal Wuerl wrote "Disciples of the Lord: Sharing the Vision," a pastoral letter on the new evangelization, for Catholics in his archdiocese. He has said that effort to encourage Catholics to be disciples of Jesus and witness to Christ's love and life in today's world would be the center of his pastoral ministry as a bishop.

Pope Benedict recently named Cardinal Wuerl as the relator, or recording secretary, of the 2012 Synod of

Bishops on the new evangelization, which will be in Rome next fall.

The title and theme of Cardinal Wuerl's new book also reflects his episcopal motto, "Thy Kingdom Come," which is drawn from Jesus' words in the Lord's Prayer. "I see the work of the church, and, therefore, the work of each priest and every layperson as the task of manifesting, realizing the kingdom in our world," the cardinal told the Catholic Standard.

Manifesting the kingdom, Cardinal Wuerl said in the book, can take place in the quiet moments of everyday life, in the form of a mother's love for her children, youths offering a good example to their classmates, workers pursuing an honest living, and people serving others in their parish and community.

"When the Magi found the Child Jesus, they presented gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Every person in the church, each member of the heavenly constellation, has rich gifts to offer: your talents are yours, given by God, and the same is true of your time, your energy, and above all else, your love," the cardinal wrote.

The book also traces how religious freedom was a cornerstone of the Maryland colony from its establishment in the mid-1600s, and that fragile right was undermined decades later when Maryland Catholics by law could not worship in public. The right of religious freedom enshrined in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1791 has in recent times faced erosion, as have the conscience rights of people of faith who oppose issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage, Cardinal Wuerl wrote, echoing the theme of a recent statement on religious freedom by Maryland's Catholic bishops.

The U.S. Conference of Catholics Bishops has also in recent months emphasized the need for Catholics to stand up for their religious liberty at a time when it is increasingly threatened at local and federal levels.

In the book, the cardinal warned that silence allowed historical evils like slavery and genocide to occur, and he urges people not to remain silent in the face of contemporary evils like abortion. Both Catholic voters and Catholic public officials have a responsibility to have correctly formed consciences, and to know and follow church teaching on, for example, the dignity of all human life from conception to natural death, the cardinal wrote. The church's teaching, he writes, provides a moral framework to guide people in facing the challenging issues of today.

"What the Catholic Church brings to the world, to our society, is Jesus Christ, his Gospel, his vision, his way of life," he wrote.

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