
STEPPING ASIDE TO ALLOW ONESELF TO BE TAUGHT



In St. Mark's gospel, we read that after their first mission, Jesus invited the apostles to come aside, rest, and share what they had experienced. The evangelist also mentions that Jesus had pity on the crowds because they were like sheep without a shepherd; we are also told that Jesus instructed his disciples at length. It is to a like invitation that the bishops of Canada responded by holding their annual meeting at Edmonton, Alberta, from October 12 to 17. More than 90 bishops, among whom there were eight who had been ordained only these past few months, met under the presidency of Bishop Jean-Guy Hamelin of Rouyn-Noranda.

AS THE SECOND MILLENNIUM DRAWS NEAR

Focused on preparing for the Year 2000 Anniversary, the bishops thoroughly studied the theme of appropriate spirituality for the present situation. Christians must more than ever be able to witness to the hope which has emerged from their spiritual experience. With participation from Archbishop Quinn of San Francisco, the bishops discussed the special importance of this hope, at the heart of today's debates and challenges. Several workshops dealt with one or another aspect of the spirituality of the year 2000: a thirst for spirituality, and new religions, spirituality in an ecumenical and interreligious context, spirituality of the diocesan priest, the spiritual thirst of youth, native spirituality, the spirituality of men and women of today, spiritual progress, and spiritual mentoring.

NATIONAL AND SECTOR COMMISSIONS

The episcopal commissions carry on their difficult mission throughout the year according to priorities set by the Conference at its annual meeting: social affairs, canon and inter-rites law, relations with associations of priests, religious, and lay persons, mission, ecumenism, theology, social communications, Christian education, and liturgy. The reports made by the commissions to the Conference cover the whole gamut of the episcopal mission throughout Canada. This is an indication of the richness gained by the pooling of such resources.

SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Since the Conference appointed me chair of the National Commission on Social Affairs, I thank them for their confidence in me. Thick "files" and big "challenges." The Bishops' Commission will shortly be publishing a working paper on the environment. It will also continue as a priority the reports on poverty in Canada, especially as it affects women; this commission will exercise the utmost diligence concerning reforms to social programmes and health care. At the express request of the Holy See, and on the eve of the Synod of Bishops for the Americas, the Commission will pursue its study to include the three Americas. And finally, in response to the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace, it will prepare a study on armament sales. Through all these different dossiers, three important poles are to be kept in sight: the link between justice and the Christian faith, justice in our land, and justice in the world. The other bishop-members of the Commission are Archbishop Marcel Gervais of Ottawa, Archbishop Bertrand Blanchette of Rimouski, Archbishop Peter Sutton of Keewatin-Le Pas, Manitoba, Bishop Pierre Morrissette of Baie-Comeau, and Auxiliary Bishop Nicola De Angelis of Toronto. Bishop Gérard Dionne graciously accepted to be a member of the Christian Education Commission, and Bishop André Richard of Bathurst becomes a member of the Social Communications Commission.

ECCLESIAL AND SOCIAL SITUATION

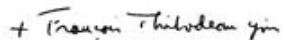
The bishops discussed several aspects of Canada's ecclesial and social situation. The Church has to pick up strong challenges of new evangelisation, in all parts of the country. Several diocesan Churches are having synods, others stress faith education of both youth and adults; still others are working at creating better links between faith and one's daily commitments in the world. Many bishops are worried about the swing to the right taken by a number of provincial governments. One of these [governments] even told the bishops to look after the victims of the drastic cuts to be made in social aid programmes. And the Québec Referendum regarding its constitutional links with the rest of Canada occasions a remembering of the position taken by the Canadian bishops in 1967 and again in 1972 regarding the right of the people of Québec to self-determination. The referendum that took place in Newfoundland to deeply modify certain constitutional guarantees in educational matters continues to pose serious doubts regarding the seriousness of these guarantees.

1995-1996 PRIORITIES

In keeping with the principal of alternation of its francophone-anglophone element, the Conference elected as its new president Archbishop Francis Spence of Kingston. The new vice-president is His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte, Archbishop of Montréal. The conference will pursue its programmes and priorities; it will pay attention to newly-arrived immigrants, especially regarding a greater awareness of Church structures to their presence and capabilities. The Conference will also remain vigilant regarding the impact of clergy who are newly-arrived from other countries and cultures, what this clergy can bring to the pastoral ministry, and how they are welcomed and integrated in the local Churches. The conference will closely follow changes proposed for social programmes, and it will state as clearly as possible the Church's teaching on questions at issue.

This has been a brief summary of many hours of discussion and reflection. The meeting is finished; the work must continue.

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
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