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## A SIGN OF HOPE FOR OUR WORLD (3)

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The Canadian Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Elimination of Poverty urges us to identify the new poor in our own milieu and to continue the work of God. After having indicated the poverty of women, of aboriginal people, and of the uprooted, let us take a closer look at the situation of children and youth within families.

### POOR CHILDREN

« In 1994, the number of poor children was more than 1.3 million, and the poverty rate was 19.1 percent. To think that almost one Canadian child in five lives in poverty in one of the richest societies in world history is nothing less than a damning indictment of the present socio-economic order. Children in single-parent families were four times more likely to be poor than those in dual-parent households. In spite of the fact that in 1989, elected representatives of the three federal parties unanimously adopted a resolution that committed them "to seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000", four years later, child poverty increased by 55 percent. The Churches have repeatedly called for concerted government action to face this challenge. »

« A recent report of an inter-church coalition did not mince its words: «In our society, if a parent denies a child food, clothing, and social security, it is considered child abuse, but when our government denies 1,362,000 children the same thing, it is simply balancing the budget.»

### TO FURTHER THE LIBERATING WORK OF GOD

« Our pastoral reflection on poverty begins in the Old Testament, where the liberation from slavery of the people of Israel (Exodus 3:7-12) constituted a crucial religious and socio-political event. This liberation was the basis for the formation of the Chosen People, and became the defining element that revealed the God of the oppressed, the God of the impoverished. In response, the sign of the observance of the Covenant was an engaged care for the impoverished. As written in the book of Deuteronomy (15:4): "here shall be no poor among you." Thus one understands the Israelites' preoccupation with justice, almsgiving, and the passing of laws to make social solidarity a reality in their land. They saw the struggle to eradicate poverty as a sign of the presence of God and a cause of hope for better world. »

« In solidarity with the impoverished, the prophets announced the demands of the Word of God in unequivocal terms (Jeremiah 22:3; Micah 3:1-5; Sirach 34:20-22). Anything that interfered with the proper relationship of the Chosen People with God (whether money, earthly power, or oppressive relationships) was seen to be an idol: a false god worthy of only the fiercest denunciation. »

### DISCIPLES OF JESUS

« Our reflection reaches its pinnacle in the New Testament. In coming into this world, Jesus himself chose a life of simplicity. Throughout his ministry, he identifies himself with the poor and marginalised of the day. Rather than suggesting that economic prosperity was a sign of God's favour, Jesus was not afraid of

cautioning his disciples against the danger of possessing riches. Jesus' main activity was to preach the Good News to the poor (Luke 4:18; Matthew 11:5). With Jesus, "the Kingdom of God appears, first and foremost, as hope for those women and men who are socially marginalized... it is through them, through their lives, and through their hopes that the Nazarene speaks to everyone who is not rejected or excluded." In this was, Jesus' life illustrated a preferential option for the poor. Jesus goes so far as to say that whatever is done for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, is deemed as being done unto him (Matthew 25:31ff). »

« For the first Christian communities, a tremendous value was placed on the communal sharing of earthly goods (Acts of the Apostles 2:44-45; 4:36-37). This was a concrete way of putting into practice the new commandment of Jesus: to love one another (1 John 3:17; James 2:5). St. Paul organised a collection for the poor of Jerusalem and told the Corinthians that their participation would be a measure of the genuineness of their love. » (2 Corinthians 8:8).

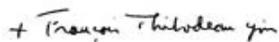
### **To STAND TALL**

« This brief review of the Scriptures is a reminder to Christians that it is God's will that our brothers and sisters be freed from oppression and from insult to their human dignity. And it is God who takes the first step in this liberation and who invites all to join this work. Liberation requires not only daily action on the part of individuals and groups, but also legislative action. The poor themselves are urged to rise up, stand tall, and proceed united towards new horizons. »

### **FOLLOWING UP**

The bishops' Declaration on the Elimination of Poverty aroused many comments, positive ones on the whole. In solidarity with the most impoverished, at the economic summit the Québec bishops called for zero impoverishment for these most destitute people in our society. At its next meeting, the Diocesan Pastoral Council will undertake an in-depth study of poverty among us. We are also contemplating the establishment of a Diocesan Commission for Social Affairs, at Edmundston.

Have a good week!



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