
PASTORAL PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (3)



In this final segment of the report on the first World Congress for the Pastoral Promotion of Human Rights I want to share with you the encouraging and challenging words of Pope John Paul II's address to the Congress.

COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

As the Congress was coming to an end I thanked God for having given me the opportunity to share in this visible display of the universal Church's work for the promotion and defense of human rights. Once again, I find the words of Pope John Paul II in his apostolic letter for the Jubilee Year 2000 to be most appropriate. He writes: « *It must also be said that commitment to justice and peace in a world like ours which is marked by so many conflicts and intolerable social and economic inequalities, is a characteristic aspect of the preparation for the celebration of the Jubilee.* » The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, especially its Commission on Social Affairs, its Human Rights Committee, its different justice committees, its pastoral social ministry offices, and its committees for the promotion of human rights will find in this first World Congress for the Pastoral Promotion of Human Rights a precious resource and excellent support material in the difficult pursuit of justice in the name of faith.

HUMAN DIGNITY

Pope John Paul noted that « *The first objective of the pastoral promotion of human rights is to see that the acceptance of the 'letter' of universal rights also entails their practical application in 'spirit', everywhere and in the most effective way, starting with the truth about man and the equal dignity of every person, man or woman, created in God's image and become the child of God in Christ. On this earth, every person has the right to know the truth about man, and to be able to live by it, each according to his personal and irreplaceable identity with his spiritual gifts, his intellectual creativity and his work, in his family - also a specific subject of rights - and in society. Each human being has the right to make the gifts he has received from God fruitful. As a result, every act which belittles man's dignity and frustrates his potential for fulfilling himself is an act contrary to God's plan for man and for all creation. The pastoral promotion of human rights is therefore closely connected to the mission of the Church herself in the modern world. The Church, in fact, can never abandon man, whose destiny is closely and indissolubly linked to Christ.* »

THE SCANDAL OF POVERTY

« *The second objective of the pastoral promotion of human rights consists in making "the essential questions concerning man's situation today and in the future" [Redemptor hominis, n. 15] with objectivity, loyalty and a sense of responsibility. In this regard, one can see that in our times the economic and social conditions in which people live assume particular importance. The persistence of extreme poverty, which contrasts with the opulence of a minority in a world marked by great humanistic and scientific breakthroughs, is a real scandal, one of those situations that seriously hinder the full exercise of human rights today. In your work you will certainly have noticed, almost every day, the effects of poverty, hunger or the lack of access to the most basic services, on people's lives and on their struggle for their own survival and that of their loved ones.* »

RIGHT TO WORK

« Too often the poorest, because of their precarious situation, are the worst hit by the economic crises that effect developing countries. Economic prosperity, we must remember, is primarily the result of human work, of honest and often laborious toil. The restructuring of the economy on a world scale must be based on the dignity and rights of the person, especially on the right to work and the worker's protection. Today therefore this requires that fresh attention be paid, within the general framework of human rights, to social and economic rights which are inseparable. »

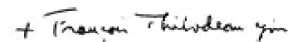
FOSTERING HUMAN RIGHTS

« Today the educational dimension is assuming particular importance in the pastoral promotion of human rights. Education in respect for human rights will naturally lead to the creation of a true culture of human rights, necessary if the state of rights is to function and if international society is truly to be based on respect for rights. [...] It will in fact be possible for total respect for human rights to be integrated in every culture. Human rights are by nature universal, for their source is the equal dignity of every person. »

SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

« The pastoral promotion of human rights must, by its nature, be particularly concerned with the person's spiritual and transcendent dimension, especially in the current context where there is a tendency to reduce the person to a single economic dimension and to consider development first and foremost in economic terms. From a consideration of the person's transcendent dimension follows the obligation to protect and promote the right to religious freedom. This pastoral Congress gives me the opportunity to express my solidarity and supportive prayer for all those in today's world who are still unable to exercise that right fully and freely, personally and as community. I address to national leaders my pressing and renewed appeal to guarantee the concrete realisation of this right for all their citizens. Public authorities will find among the believers men and women of peace who are keen to collaborate with everyone with a view of building a more just, peaceful society. »

Have a good week!



+ François Thibodeau
Bishop of Edmundston

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