
OPEN UP! OPEN UP!



In a few weeks I shall be completing my term as chairman of the Bishops' Commission on Social Affairs. It is not my intention here to draw up a balance sheet of these rather demanding but very beneficial four years. Along with my brother-bishops and the staff of the Commission on Social Affairs, we studied some very pressing and delicate situations requiring an appropriate pastoral response: poverty in Canada, the equality of women, respect for human rights, federal elections, alternative budgets, multilateral accords, cancellation of the debt of poor countries, etc. Beyond the responses made, it is the serious reasons motivating them which draws me to these commitments, and these motivations I want to examine with you today.

ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST

It seems to me that first of all, it is the encounter with the Living Christ that is the most decisive, in this pastoral work. Jesus identified himself so much with humankind that it is impossible for me, in a spirit of faith, not to recognise him in my brothers and sisters. The great mystery of the Incarnation still touches us, even after 2000 years after the birth of Jesus at Bethlehem. The mystery of the Emmanuel, of God-with-Us. Last January 22, in Mexico City, Pope John Paul II, in his apostolic exhortation on the Church in the Americas, presented Jesus Christ as the way to conversion, communion, and solidarity. This encounter with Christ is the main reason for my implication as pastor, in social affairs.

EPISCOPAL COMMITMENTS

The obligations I contracted when I was ordained bishop on January 4, 1994 are the primary reasons of my pastoral commitments. Daily commitments. In accepting the apostolic charge and in committing myself to it until death, I want to work at building up the Body of Christ by looking after the people of God with a father's concern. In the name of the Lord, I want to lovingly welcome the poor, the strangers, and all those in need. And like a pastor, I want to search out and bring back to the Lord's fold those sheep that have lost their way. I want to pray without cease for the people of God, since prayer is essential to all pastoral work.

UNLIMITED BOLDNESS

On October 22, 1978, on the inaugural day of his ministry, Pope John Paul II challenged all the baptised to take on a world-englobing mission. I remember these famous words: *"Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid to welcome Christ and accept his power. Do not be afraid! Open, open wide the doors to Christ! To his saving power open the frontiers of states, the economic and political systems, the vast areas of culture, civilisation, and development. Do not be afraid! Christ knows what is in man, and he alone knows it! Today, man very often ignores what he has in himself, in the depths of his spirit and his heart. He is so often unsure about the meaning of life on earth. He is assailed by doubt that becomes despair. Please allow Christ, I humbly implore you, to speak to man. He alone has the words of life, yes, of life everlasting."*

OPEN THE DOORS!

These words struck a deep chord in me, and with Father Armand Chouinard, C.J.M., and Brother Yves Granger, S.C., I composed a song on these words: *Open the doors to the Lord our God, open the doors to the Lord our God. Do not be afraid! Open! Open! Open wide the doors. Open up! Open up! Before his power of salvation, open up! Open your hand, your house, because Christ Jesus alone reconciles the world. Before his power of salvation, open up! Open the doors of countries since Christ Jesus alone can open the world to you. Before his power of salvation, open up! Open the borders of nations, since Christ Jesus alone knows what is in the heart of man."*

TEN COMMANDMENTS

As it is my concern to spread the Church's social teaching, I summarised it in such a way as to give you the desire to develop it further, because this also is an expression of the living Christ:

1. You shall proclaim the coming of the Kingdom
By your actions and the work of the Spirit.
2. The human person you shall fully acknowledge
In all his or her dignity.
3. You shall vigilantly exercise
Stewardship of the earth.
4. You shall take the road of justice
In solidarity with the poor.
5. You shall show patience and love and mercy
In the manner of God.
6. You shall exercise power
By being faithful in service to others.
7. You shall respect the rights of others
In a spirit of mutual responsibility.
8. You shall forcefully defend
The freedom of all from slavery.
9. You shall courageously have
Upright relationships.

10. You shall build a civilisation of love
By boldly hoping for the best, ever.

These are only a few guideposts to the motives leading me to live as intensely as possible the Gospel of Jesus in my daily life.

+ François Thibodeau

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Bishop of Edmundston

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