
FOR A JUST AND LASTING PEACE



Since several media have failed to publish in its entirety the New Brunswick Catholic Bishops' fall 1999 message following the Supreme Court's judgement on aboriginal rights, and their more recent message on the Miramichi conflict, I publish them today in the *Journal*, following several requests from you. These are documents which I signed along with Archbishop Ernest Léger of Moncton, Faber MacDonald of Saint John, and André Richard, C.S.C., of Bathurst. These messages are a call to dialogue and justice. May our action joined to earnest prayer contribute to a just and lasting peace.

FALL 1999

As we look at the results of the recent judgement of the Supreme Court recognising that the Natives have almost limitless rights to fishing, we can see how fragile peace is among human beings. We strongly desire that our leaders not let this situation deteriorate further, and that they very clearly assume their responsibilities. It is for them to find practical and just solutions for all parties.

Moreover, we call on all people concerned to show creativity and patience. It is not in the long-term interest of the Native and non-Native fishermen to work against each other, nor to practice overfishing. The decision of our highest court is here to stay. Nevertheless, it is not easy to understand why the judge did not deem it appropriate to provide for a reasonable cooling-off period or conditions before judgement was applied. They could have easily envisioned the prospect that their decision would create dissension among populations that find it more and more difficult to earn a decent living through diminishing resources.

Considering what looks like an administrative gap, many of our fishermen are tempted to resort to violence. This is excessive and brings about no real long-term solution. On the contrary, it can only increase animosity and hatred among people and communities whose best interest is to live in peace and understanding.

In the name of the Christian faith and as Catholic pastors of our region, we appeal to each and everyone concerned to spare no effort in searching for and finding useful and legitimate solutions. We especially hope that the use of violence in word and deed will cease. Every action for a permanent and just solution for all concerned can only bring a favourable peace to the hard-working people of our communities who generally rely on nature and the work of their hands for their subsistence and that of their families.

FALL 2000

Over the past five hundred years grave injustices were committed against the aboriginal people and first nations of our country, the effects of which have been catastrophic on all points: spiritual, social, cultural, and economic.

In recent years, attempts have been made and doubtless will need to be continued in the future to correct these situations. The questions raised have no easy answer. Gestures of reconciliation and healing are needed, and this affects us most deeply. Whether it be institutional, governmental, church, or personal

undertakings, our relations with native people and communities force us to question the honesty and fairness of our behaviour towards our aboriginal Native and sisters.

At this time we, bishops and pastors, cannot help but be disturbed by what is happening at Esgenoopetity\Burnt Church. Violence, threats and intimidation can never resolve anything or create an atmosphere conducive to dialogue which is so necessary in trying to solve present difficulties. As a matter of fact, inflammatory words and acts can only lead to what has already been called the supreme form of violence: silence. Such a consequence destroys all hope of reaching a fair and equitable solution.

- We recall Pope John XXIII's encyclical *Pacem in terris* which stated that peace is not possible without truth, justice, love, and freedom. In this year 2000 when we recall our tradition of jubilee (Leviticus 25), two principles must impact our reflection. The first is the imperative to work at restoring equality among all of God's people and secondly, to call everyone to recognise that the riches of creation are to be considered the common good of all humankind. The task of those involved in the dialogue at Esgenoopetity\Burnt Church should be to strive for this result.
- We as Catholic pastors and bishops of the region call on all involved to espouse calm and non-violent actions and statements. Those who suffer most often when this is not the case are the elderly and the young. The elderly lose their sense of security and suffer the stress of concern for their families' and communities' safety and well-being. The young are scarred with memories of violence and can carry into the future the hurt, suspicion and mistrust which result.
- We ask for continued dialogue and negotiating among all parties involved. This is essential if the disputed questions are to be resolved. *This dialogue has to recognise the legitimate aims and aspirations of First Nations people regarding their fishing rights.* At the same time, dialogue has to be held with the other fishermen so that they may be treated justly as well. To do otherwise will only sow future division and work against any future reconciliation between peoples and communities.
- Finally, we call on all involved to recognise and acknowledge the dignity granted to all by the Creator-God. We have no choice but to stand in solidarity with the Native people in their efforts to have that dignity recognised. We are all brothers and sisters who are called to live in peace which is the inheritance of our traditions, and what we share in common.
- We believe that there is reason to hope for a mutually agreeable settlement to the dispute. It has happened elsewhere. It can happen here.

JUBILEE OF PRIESTS

September 27 will long be remembered, since this was the date when for the first time in our history the bishops, priests and future priests of New Brunswick met together at St. Michael's Basilica, Miramichi, to mark Jubilee 2000. Carefully prepared for over a year, the meeting was an exercise in priestly solidarity and of sharing with Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte on Pope John Paul II's Exhortation on the Church in America, and to celebrate the 2000 years of the coming of Jesus Christ. The Cardinal's message drew our attention to the person and message of Jesus, and on the plight of the poor.

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