
2001-2002 : A REMARKABLE YEAR



It was in an atmosphere of gratitude that the annual meeting of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops took place, at Cornwall, ON, from October 17 to 22, this year. Ninety-seven bishops were present, along with twenty-six guests and observers. Established in 1943, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) brings together the heads of the sixty-three Latin rite and eight Eastern rite dioceses, and the bishops emeriti of Canada.

WYD 2002: A SACRED HISTORY

Bishop Jacques Berthelet, C.S.V., the CCCB president, began his 2001-2002 annual report by mentioning the World Youth Day. "I obviously can't give you this report without mentioning the 2002 World Youth Day, a joyfully and emotionally-charged historical event stamped with faith and full of hope for the archdiocese of Toronto as well as all the other dioceses. This event is more than a footnote in our history: it is in a sense a builder of a future sacred history. The WYD shows us how God precedes us on the paths we try to mark out. It shows us that the wonders of the faith continue to touch our hearts and lives, and those of our Churches. The WYD is henceforth part of our spiritual itinerary, and is now part of our youth ministry. It leaves us with obligations, but especially with a legacy we are urged to put into effect." The report is the inspiration of my comments, today.

CONTINENTAL VOCATION CONGRESS

Another major event was the Continental Congress on Vocations to Ordained Ministries and the Consecrated Life, held in Montreal last April. It was remarkable due to the high turnout of delegates and the quality of the discussions. The Congress revealed that the strength of the ideal and the authentic attraction to the following of Christ are still lively realities. The force and conviction of the messages to the Congress enriched our Church by rooting vocation in its biblical, theological and cultural soil, and connecting it clearly to the mission of the Church today. Just as with the 2002 WYD, the bishop's conference wants an adequate follow-up to the Vocation Congress. As far as our diocese is concerned, a new diocesan committee on vocations has been established; besides, the 2002 Pentecost Pastoral Letter with the vocation story of thirty-five of our priests, will surely be an inspiration to others.

GIVING A HUMAN FACE TO SOLIDARITY

A characteristic of the CCCB's history is its prophetic tradition; it has continuously been the voice of the destitute and the powerless, and a powerful reminder of the Church's social teaching. Following its declaration at the Summit of the Americas, in Québec, that no one should be deprived of the goods of the earth, the bishops decided to study more closely and to give as much of a human face as possible, to this phenomenon which is globalisation. In February, 2003, a new bishops' meeting in Québec will study the question of globalisation and the issue of culture more closely.

As WEEKS Go By

Throughout the year, the individual regional bishops' conferences keep on working: the Atlantic Episcopal Assembly, the Assemblée des évêques du Québec, the Ontario Catholic Bishops' Conference, and the Western Catholic Bishops' Conference, without forgetting the bishops of the Northern Territories – all of them persevere in ongoing pastoral work. And it is the same with the national and regional social affairs, social communications, liturgy, Christian education, ecumenism, evangelisation, development and peace, family life, reconciliation, and solidarity and communion commissions which have been established through the years.

DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

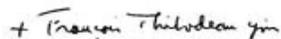
Recent court decisions have brought same-sex marriages to the forefront of the news. We live at a time when the Church's prophetic role must be exercised with wisdom and courage. Some jurists no longer pay the needed attention to the life-long commitment of heterosexual partners. The Organisation on Life and the Family has published a document called "In Love for Life." In five chapters, this short booklet deals with the meaning of marriage in its conjugal, social, and religious aspects. We also find there surprising statistics. Besides, clergy sexual abuse of minors has been brought out into the open. The disputes which have taken place on the question in the United States have also affected us. All through the course of our annual meeting, the mass media kept these sad events before our eyes. Here in Canada, facts show that since the 1990s, when several diocesan protocols were drawn up following CCCB recommendations in the document "From Suffering to Hope," responsible positions have been adopted. A working group established in 2001 will review the 1990 recommendations, with reference to recent developments on the question. On another note, we shall not forget our visit to the inmates of the Kingston Penitentiary, one of the eight we visited.

GRACE-FILLED EVENTS

The 2001-2002 pastoral year was marked by a twofold pilgrimage across the country: the WYD Cross and the relics of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus. Our diocese has warm memories of these events: August and December, 2001 will remain forever in our memories. In a number of ways we, too, are on pilgrimage in our own Churches, in answer to the Holy Father's invitation to launch into the deep, filled with faith: "*Duc in altum!*"

WITH EYES FIXED ON CHRIST

As we recall the fortieth anniversary of the start of Vatican Council II, it is worthwhile for us to remember these words of the Council which was announced on the day of Bishop Fernand Lacroix's episcopal ordination, October 20, 1970: "The Lord is the final end of human history, the point towards which converge the aspirations of history and of civilisation, the centre of the human race, joy of our hearts and fulfilment of our desires. He is the one the Father raised from the dead, exalted and seated at His right hand, making him the judge of the living and the dead." In the weeks to come, I shall return again to other elements of the bishops' annual meeting.



+ François Thibodeau, C.J.M.
Bishop of Edmundston

« From A Bishop's Journal » (460) (30 October 2002)