



From A Bishop's Journal (721)

Bring Peace to Our World

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops ended its 2007 plenary meeting in Cornwall, Ontario, with the announcement of a new encyclical by Pope Benedict XVI. Some 80 Catholic bishops met from October 15 to 19, and the meeting was not marked by the weight of the 30-odd items on the agenda, but by the fellowship and solidarity of the members forming one body, the “college of bishops,” successors of the Apostles: they restated their firm desire to take part in the new evangelisation of our country. I would like to write about all the points discussed, but all I can do is give you a bird’s-eye view of those days of friendship and hope.

Ouellet, Bibby, Champagne, and Delic

Before writing about the different workshop topics, and the discussions under the chairmanship of outgoing CCCB president Archbishop André Gaumond of Sherbrooke, I would like to introduce four people who left their stamp on the meeting.

– **Cardinal Marc Ouellet**, archbishop of Québec, invites us all to the 49th International Eucharistic Congress to be held in Québec City June 15 to 22, 2008, on the theme of *The Eucharist, Gift of God for the Life of the World*. Information on the Congress is available on the following website: <http://www.cei2008.ca>. The Congress programme is already available. Fifteen thousand people are expected to take part in the Congress discussions and catecheses that will take place at the Cité Eucharistique established in the Québec Coliseum. We hope that at least two people from every parish will register for the Congress. There is no end to deepening this great mystery of our faith. Registration for the Congress can be made through the Diocesan Centre at 735-5578.

– **Sociologist Reginald Bibby**, well-known throughout Canada for the quality of his work and his many publications, shared his optimism with us, relative to the Canadian social and religious tendencies. While family life has gone through many changes, it still continues to be the place of intimacy and renewal: family hopes and dreams are always good. Even though weekly, monthly and annual religious practice varies from one region to another, and the phenomenon of secularism is present everywhere, interest for spirituality has not diminished; quite the contrary, in fact. The expression of spiritual needs is making itself felt more and more, in the West as well as in Québec and the Atlantic region. Statistics show that over 65% of those surveyed believe in the presence of God, and most of them declare that they pray daily or weekly. They have many and varied

“experiences of God,” and despite the changes in society and the Churches, they profess belief in a merciful God who is present in their lives.

– **Bishop Claude Champagne, O.M.I.**, auxiliary bishop of Halifax, gave an outstanding talk on the New Evangelisation. His talk can be read at the CCCB website <http://www.cccb.ca>. The Bishop showed us how the Holy Spirit is still at work throughout the world, and that through his resurrection, Jesus the Living One went before us to all people and all places we want to reach. Referring to the encyclical on the mission of Christ the Redeemer, Bishop Champagne reminded us that we must show the world the salvation brought about by the Risen Jesus who wants happiness and life for all humankind. Everything we had adopted at the 2006 Diocesan Pastoral Congress, Bishop Champagne reiterated with conviction and feeling. The new evangelisation is addressed to all so that together we may renew our zeal for proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God, with methods that are better suited to our times.

– **Imam Zijad Delic**, the director general of the Canadian Islamic Council, was born in Bosnia. He brought us the greetings and reflections of the inter-religious guests at the Conference, as is done at every plenary meeting. In a fraternal address, he told us that Islam believes in one, merciful God, and how Muslims believe in a religion of love, peace, and forgiveness. In these days when there is so much talk of accommodations, his words were an invitation to continue our dialogue.

Priority Recommendations

While the federal government is planning on making public “apologies” to the First Nations, the Conference reflected at length on the attitudes we must have and the proposals to be made to the Justice and Truth Commission, on this subject. We are aware that the Catholic Church has done much for the First Nations, but we are also aware that at times we have failed. We acknowledge our failures and we hope that the national Commission will be fair regarding all that has been done by all the Christian communities in the country.

Sacrament of Forgiveness

Following Pope John Paul II’s *motu proprio* on the importance of the sacrament of forgiveness for all the baptised, we passed the national decree which the Holy See would make on our behalf. In each of our dioceses, the priests are disposed to celebrate the sacrament of forgiveness for all the baptised, but in exceptional situations (lack of clergy; inclement weather, and distance), we hope that collective absolution may be given. The experience of over thirty years cannot be discarded overnight.

Liturgy Documents

Our national commissions on liturgy have not been without work. They have translated and made celebrations for most of the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, penance, Confirmation, and matrimony. We shall be able to receive these new rituals with greater understanding, as was the wish of Vatican council II.

Sexual Abuse

The national committee for the prevention of sexual abuse did a lot of work. Every diocese is asked to publish its own code of ethics. In April, 2006, the diocese of Edmundston gave a press conference on the subject. The document can be accessed on our diocesan website, http://www.diocese-edmundston.ca/en/docs1/ethics_code.pdf

Long Live Life!

I want to end this short report with the work being done by the Catholic Organisation for Life and the Family, and the Canadian Catholic Organisation for Development and Peace. We can be justly proud of these two organisations that promote life and the development of all nations. These organisations have their own websites: <http://www.colf.ca>, and <http://www.devp.org>. The Development and Peace Organisation has been urging us for forty years to be in greater solidarity with the most dispossessed on our planet.

Appointments and Elections

Pope Benedict XVI has appointed Bishop Anthony Mancini archbishop of Halifax and apostolic administrator of Yarmouth, and Bishop Martin Currie archbishop of St. John's, NL. The Conference of Bishops for its part, elected Archbishop V. James Weisgerber president of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Bishop Pierre Morrissette, its vice president.

Conclusion

May all the prayers, discussions, contacts, and projects help in our country's new evangelisation. May hope be always alive and well, at all these meetings and in all the discussions! I hope that you have a good pastoral year!

+ François Thibodeau ym

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