

Topic: The Diocesan Synod: A Means to Develop Doctrine
Convener: Catherine T. Nerney, Chestnut Hill College, Philadelphia
Presenter: Remi J. DeRoo, Bishop Emeritus of Victoria, British Columbia
Respondent: Thomas P. Rausch, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles

Using a praxis-based methodology as a way to engage the theme of "The Development of Doctrine," Bishop Remi DeRoo recounted his experience as bishop of Victoria, British Columbia, in the extensive planning and implementing of a diocesan synod over the five year period, 1986–1991. Setting his context in "The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*," DeRoo lauded its recognition of the historical nature of doctrinal development and the role "that the total *laos* (communion of saints) plays in its unfolding and practical application." From DeRoo's presence at the council and his sustained reflection on it, he derived two core ecclesial elements; (1) the principle of synodality with its corresponding component of collegiality and (2) an incipient theology of the Holy Spirit, so long neglected in the Western church. Both of these played decisive roles in DeRoo's thirty-seven years of episcopal ministry and his decision to convoke a synod.

According to DeRoo, the diocesan synod starts from the experience of the people and looks at what emerges in terms of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. DeRoo defined his terms as "right praise or worship" and "right living or doing" and explained how correct doctrine proceeds from them. He clarified his understanding of development as historical, rooted in a sound theology of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit deepens our perceptions of the divine mystery, revealed once and for all in Jesus Christ, but unfolding in the life of the church, notwithstanding her human limitations.

Bishop DeRoo's lengthy reflections set the stage for his presentation of the actual event of the Victoria Synod, 1986–1991. After two years of intense parish preparation, more than 1,000 suggestions, representing a wide range of contemporary church and societal concerns, were presented to the ninety delegates, mostly lay, mandated by the bishop to work for the good of the whole diocesan church. The delegates spent eleven weekends in prayer and discussion, reaching all decisions by consensus.

Results were organized into eight areas, described as shifts or new directions for the life of the church. The synod recommendations were sent to Rome for the consideration of the universal church. The entire process has been published in book form, *Forward in the Spirit: Challenge of the People's Synod* (Victoria, 1991). Remi DeRoo concluded: "Having lived through this process and watched it unfold through prayerful discernment, I believe it is indeed the work of the Holy Spirit and an authentic case of the development of doctrine."

In his insightful response, Thomas Rausch distinguished two functions of the synod. First, it serves as a "pastoral or spiritual agent for actualizing the community, animated by the Spirit, as a communion of life and worship."

Second, it is an agent for the understanding of revelation in the historical development of doctrine, a mediation of God's self-communication for the whole church. Rausch affirmed DeRoo's illuminating presentation of the Victoria synod as a powerful pastoral agent and recommended more clarification of its second function. How precisely did DeRoo understand doctrine and what doctrines specifically did he understand to be developing by means of the synod? A very appreciative and practical conversation followed, evidencing further concurrence with Rausch's response.

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