

## A RESPONSE TO MARY HINES

### INTRODUCTION

The paper we have just heard asserts:

The church in the United States has increasingly defined itself as a public church with a message of human rights and human dignity for the world, a message based on its understanding of the human person as *imago dei*. The right of participation is symbolic of this fundamental human dignity and is so understood in the church's recent social teaching.

Further, since "anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must first be just in their eyes," this paper has focused on the need to develop and implement ecclesial structures "to ensure that the church accords to its own members the human rights and human dignity it advocates in its address to the world." Thus, the paper stresses the need for further development of structures "to ensure more inclusive participation [of the laity] in coming to an understanding of the church's faith for our time."

Two aspects of this paper seem to invite reflection "from a Canadian context": historical differences in the Catholic Church's development as a public church, and various approaches to lay participation in the life of the church. Historically, it is interesting to note, the Catholic Church in Canada has always been something of a public church. Further, especially since the Second Vatican Council, there has been a clear tendency to address public issues in collaboration with ecumenical partners. Participation of the laity in preparation for recent Synods of Bishops, especially that of 1987 on *The Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World*, offers one example of a consultative process which has been used in Canada. While this process may be seen as a kind of case study in encouraging lay participation in ecclesial structures, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' (CCCCB) more recent experience of responses to its stance on the World March of Women raises interesting questions about ways of interpreting the *sensus fidelium*.

### A PUBLIC CHURCH

*Historical Factors.* Canada is a vast land with a northern climate. Settlement stretches along the southern border leaving large parts of the interior and the north sparsely populated. Canadian society is a multilingual, multicultural mosaic of people from diverse ethnic origins. Reflecting its historical development, however, the country is constitutionally bilingual with English and French as the two officially recognized languages. According to 1991 Canadian government statistics,

approximately 83% of the population identifies itself as Christian. While there are more than thirty Christian denominations represented in Canada, eight churches (Catholic, United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Orthodox, Pentecostal) account for 91% of these. Slightly more than half of the Christian population are members of the Catholic Church and Francophones constitute about half of this number.

From a historical perspective, the Catholic Church's development as a public church in Canada has been marked by the role it was required to play at the time of the British conquest of New France. With the 1763 Treaty of Paris, the colony became part of George III's Protestant empire and its Roman Catholic population was granted freedom of religion "as far as the laws of Great Britain permit." Since Catholicism was legally proscribed under English law, the clause made no real commitment. While the instructions to Governor Murray prohibited "absolutely all Popish Hierarchy," and encouraged the establishment of the Church of England "in both principle and practice," a more pragmatic policy was pursued. Overcoming the opposition of the Archbishop of Canterbury, it was privately agreed that a bishop might be elected by the cathedral chapter, discreetly consecrated by papal authority, and recognized by Britain as "Superintendent of the Romish clergy." As the presence of a bishop ensured the stability and survival of the Catholic Church, the Canadians were convinced that they had won an important victory in being recognized as a distinct group, and their religion became an important rallying point against the absolutism of the occupying power.

Reversing the earlier plan to anglicize Quebec, the Quebec Act of 1774 admitted Roman Catholics to citizenship and to eligibility for public office, and allowed the church the right to tithe the faithful. Under British sovereignty, parts of the system of New France were restored with controls actually lighter than under the French Crown. Following the American Revolution, the Constitutional Act of 1791 modified but did not repeal the Quebec Act, leaving the status of the Roman Catholic Church untouched. Over the next fifty years, efforts to limit the authority of the Bishop of Quebec and to exert imperial supremacy in the appointment of priests were countered through careful diplomacy. With the 1841 Act of Union, the Catholic Church finally attained full recognition of its rights and freedom from British supervision.

Summarizing the situation just prior to Confederation, Brian Clarke comments: "What made the religious landscape of the British colonies unique in North America was that the Protestant denominations did not monopolize the religious spectrum. . . . [N]ot only was the Catholic Church more than two and a half times larger than the largest Protestant denomination, but in Protestant eyes, it represented the national church of a people who saw themselves as the country's cofounders. Thus even though Protestants vastly outnumbered Catholics outside Quebec, the French-Canadian face of Catholicism was a constant reminder of a religious, cultural, and linguistic presence that did not conform to their version of

Canada as a British Protestant nation, and that challenged the Anglo-Protestant cast of the country's public institutions."<sup>1</sup>

For sociologist Reginald Bibby, the historical evolution of Canadian society means that the rules of the "religious marketplace" are distinctively different from those in the United States. He states: "Canada grew out of the union of French and English colonies and has spent most of its history simply trying to consolidate 'the two solitudes.' In Westhues's words, 'Canada cannot be understood as an attempt to embody a theory of society, but only as an effort to achieve working agreements among diverse parties with conflicting theories of society.' In contrast to the Americans, 'we did not separate violently from Europe,' Pierre Burton reminds us, 'but cut our ties cautiously in the Canadian manner—so cautiously, so imperceptibly that none of us is quite sure we actually achieved our independence.' Our religious groups did not compete for truth but serviced the immigrants in the French and English expressions to which they had grown accustomed, aided in whole or in part by public funds."<sup>2</sup>

*Ecumenical Voice.* For Bibby, the focus on achieving "working agreements among diverse parties" leads to a Canadian society which "values pluralism over competition."<sup>3</sup> Whatever the accuracy of this assessment, the Catholic Church in Canada over the past thirty years has tended to seek ecumenical partners for collaborative research and effective advocacy in issues of social justice. At present, various social and religious concerns are located in more than fifty different coalitions. These include: Aboriginal Rights Coalition, Canada-Asia Working Group, Church Council on Justice and Corrections, Ecumenical Coalition on Economic Justice, Interchurch Fund for International Development, Interchurch Coalition on Africa, Interchurch Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, Interchurch Committee on Refugees, Project Ploughshares, Task Force on Churches and Corporate Responsibility. Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and United Churches participate in most of these coalitions. Other churches, such as the Mennonites, Religious Society of Friends, and Salvation Army, participate according to specific interests.

A number of the interchurch coalitions express their concerns about social issues by responding to government policies and actions with various briefs or statements. Some of these are in the form of an open letter signed by church leaders as in 1987, on Canada's defence policy. Others take the form of an annual report

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<sup>1</sup>Brian Clarke, "English-Speaking Canada from 1854," in T. Murphy and R. Perin, eds., *A Concise History of Christianity in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996) 262-63.

<sup>2</sup>Reginald W. Bibby, *Fragmented Gods: The Poverty and Potential of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Irwin, 1987) 217-18. Bibby's references are to Kenneth Westhues, "Stars and Stripes, the Maple Leaf, and the Papal Coat of Arms," *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 3 (1978): 258; and Pierre Burton, *Why We Act Like Canadians* (Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1982) 36.

<sup>3</sup>Bibby, *Fragmented Gods*, 227.

forwarded to a particular department such as External Affairs, on human rights in Latin America. Still others attempt to challenge legislation which is seen as unjust. Since 1989, for example, the Interchurch Committee on Refugees has been seeking to amend legislation through court action. Over the past few months, initiatives by various interchurch coalitions have enabled church leaders to issue a statement and appear before a House of Commons Standing Committee to discuss the moral urgency of a global drive to abolish nuclear weapons. Also, letters have been sent to the federal government opposing military action in Iraq and Kosovo; urging the government to address the grave and growing problem of domestic poverty, especially of child poverty; and supporting a settlement of Aboriginal land claims for the Lubicon people.

In recent years, new issues have given rise to new partnerships as the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) have collaborated on a number of common concerns. In this context, a number of *ad hoc* committees have worked ecumenically to produce statements, briefs, or court interventions on abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, pornography, and violence against women. Involvement with the EFC has encouraged contacts between the Roman Catholic Church and some of the smaller churches which usually are not participants in the interchurch coalitions.

In June 1997, the CCCCBB became a full member of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC). This decision represented the culmination of more than twenty-five years of discussion about the possibility of developing a more inclusive ecumenical structure for churches in Canada. A pamphlet published in 1985 outlines the bishops' reasons for seeking membership in the CCC. In brief, the text asserts, membership in a Council of Churches makes the Catholic Church's commitment to ecumenism more clearly visible. While ecumenical cooperation in specific projects can be very effective, Council membership witnesses specifically to the search for Christian unity. Further, membership provides a forum for sustained study of growth in unity and for dialogue on questions of Gospel and culture, evangelization, and ethical issues as well as on matters which divide the churches. It gives the churches a common voice to fulfil the prophetic function of Christian discipleship and enables them to act together more effectively on social justice issues both locally and internationally.

#### PARTICIPATION OF THE LAITY

*Consultations for the 1987 Synod on the Laity.* In his address to the 1987 Synod on the Laity, CCCCBB President Archbishop James Hayes proposed: "1) that this Synod, especially because it is a Synod on the laity, before departing, itself address a message to the people of God, as was done in 1971 and 1985; 2) that it accompany its words with a commitment to broaden the manner of participating in Synods so that all the baptized can be more clearly and closely associated with

deciding the future paths of the people of God."<sup>4</sup> Other interventions by Canadian bishops at this same Synod highlighted the participation of all the faithful in the mission of the Church, the participation of women in the life of the Church, the role of the laity in evangelizing culture, and the political dimension of the participation of the laity in the mission of the Church. Noting that the participation of women is of major importance for the future of the Church, Bishop Hamelin identified the need: "to move aside the canonical obstacles which block the access of lay Catholics (men and women) to positions of responsibility which do not require ordination."<sup>5</sup>

The Canadian Synod interventions reflected an intensive eighteen-month period of preparation which included surveys, consultations, and workshops with the laity. In November 1985, 4,600 questionnaires were distributed across the country. The main themes resulting from this survey were studied by 200 lay representatives of dioceses and 80 bishops during a special two-day study session in October 1986. Regions were asked to hold their own surveys or study days. Individuals, groups, and organizations were encouraged to participate in these or correspond with the CCCB directly. These soundings of Catholic lay opinions resulted in a 105-page survey report and 230 briefs and summary reports (134 English and 96 French). These were studied by the Synod delegates and the other members of the Synod preparation team to choose themes for possible Canadian presentations in Rome. Six themes were presented to the bishops and twenty lay representatives from across Canada at the CCCB Plenary Assembly in October 1987. Each theme was studied by bishops and lay representatives in workshop sessions. Notes from these discussions were used in drafting the texts of the interventions.

At the 1987 Synod, the four Canadian delegates were accompanied by a team of five resource persons including two lay women and one man who had been named by the pope as a lay observer. On their return from Rome, the Canadian delegates expressed their wish to report "not only to our fellow bishops, but also to the many persons and groups who helped us to prepare for this Synod." Issued on November 6, their six-page report identified a number of propositions that were discussed at the Synod and reiterated the Canadian bishops' request "that the Synod be more than a regular meeting in Rome, and that it become a sort of vast networking operation drawing together the synodal efforts of local Churches in the work both of preparation and of implementation." While it is clear that the delegates experienced some disappointment at the actual meeting of the Synod, they highlighted the positive aspects of Canadian preparation which gave "an unusually clear picture of the expectations and the strengths of the lay members of our Church." The importance of follow-up was stressed: "For the most part, that

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<sup>4</sup>James Hayes, "Open the Doors," Intervention of 2 October 1987, CCCB typescript.

<sup>5</sup>Jean-Guy Hamelin, "The Participation of Women in the Life of the Church," Intervention of 9 October 1987, CCCB typescript.

depends on us—as individuals, as parishes, as diocesan communities and as movements: in the Church in Canada. We were not in Rome to ask for permissions. We were there to speak for our Church and to listen to other Churches and to the Church of Rome, so as to strengthen and renew our own witness.”<sup>6</sup>

Follow-up from such an extensive consultation process is always difficult to assess. Further, changes at the CCCB have resulted in a reduced number of staff who would be available to organize and collate any future countrywide consultations. Yet the CCCB remains committed to involvement of the whole episcopal conference in Synod preparation and has continued to include lay men and women in the team of resource people accompanying its delegates to Rome. Synod preparation takes place at CCCB Plenary Assemblies where lay representatives, as well as ecumenical guests, participate in workshops which discuss and refine the texts or outlines of proposed interventions.

Lay participation in Synod preparation was a significant factor in the development of specific interventions on issues of concern to women for the Synods of 1971 on Justice and Reconciliation, 1980 on the Family, 1983 on Reconciliation, 1987 on the Laity, 1994 on Consecrated Life, and 1997 on America. From a review of the Synod interventions, it is evident that the experience of an ongoing dialogue with Canadian women provided the basis for the bishops' reflections on the issues they addressed. The dialogue began in 1971 with the reception of a brief from a group of women in Edmonton. At the Plenary Assembly that year, the agenda was expanded to include a colloquium between bishops and women. In light of this discussion, the bishops established a study commission which reported its findings to the CCCB's Permanent Council in 1974. Representatives of "Christians for Equality" met with a group of bishops in 1977 and representatives of "Women for Life and Family" met with bishops from the Commission for Ministry and Apostolates in 1986. An *ad hoc* committee on the role of women in Church and society was established in 1982. At the 1984 Plenary Assembly, this committee's twelve recommendations were discussed, amended, and adopted. A national consultation on "Issues of Concern to Women" was held in 1992, and in January 1996, eight of the Canadian women who participated in the Beijing Conference met with bishops and CCCB staff to review possible implications for the life of the Catholic Church in Canada.

*Discerning the "Sensus Fidelium."* On 18 February 2000, "Marching Together," a statement from CCCB President Gerald Wiesner on the occasion of the World March of Women, was made public. The letter expressed support for "the March's objectives of ending poverty and violence against women as being in continuity with a series of statements made by different CCCB bodies during the last ten years and in keeping with the position of the Holy See at several recent International Conferences." Recognizing that the March would attract an enormous number of participants with a diversity of perspectives on the implications of its

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<sup>6</sup>"Statement by Canadian Synod Delegates," CCCB press release, 6 November 1987.

objectives, the text stated: "Catholic leaders will also want to take their place in the March on the basis of our Church's teaching on the equality of men and women, the preferential option for the poor, solidarity with the oppressed, respect for human life and dignity, and on marriage as an equal partnership between husband and wife to which the transmission of life is entrusted."<sup>7</sup> The President's letter was reviewed and approved for circulation by the CCCB Executive Committee.

Response to this CCCB statement appears to have been initiated by an article which appeared in the April 10 issue of the archdiocese of Toronto's weekly paper, *The Catholic Register*. In this article, Jim Hughes, the national president of Campaign Life Coalition, accused an elitist leadership at the CCCB of misleading Catholics. According to Hughes, "You can say you're not going to take part in that part of it (calls for abortion access), but when you're in a parade of gays and lesbians and radical feminists that's who you're with." Maintaining that feminism and the Catholic Church are absolutely opposed, he concludes, "[i]f you espouse a feminist position, you have to espouse everything they espouse."<sup>8</sup> A letter and e-mail writing campaign ensued with the majority of the protests affirming Hughes's assumption of guilt by association. In addition, there have been a couple of letters claiming that support for the March is a form of "material cooperation in evil" to which the CCCB has responded by an assertion of the principle of double effect. More recently, the CCCB has begun to receive a few letters of support for its stance regarding the March.

While the CCCB is no stranger to letters of protest, particularly on issues of concern to women, this campaign has seemed particularly intense. The fact that the Catholic Women's League of Canada (CWL), the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP), and the Canadian Religious Conference (CRC) had also published statements of support for the March, seemed to increase rather than mitigate concern. On May 15, these four national organizations issued a "Joint Statement of Clarification on the March of Women 2000" in which they reaffirmed their "support of the objectives of this year's World March of Women." They stated: "We believe that Canadian Catholics should not allow themselves to be shut out of the March of Women because some groups decide to press for demands that are clearly unacceptable to us. The basis of Catholic participation should be the long-held Church teaching on respect for human life from its very beginning to its natural end, the preferential option for the poor, marriage as an equal partnership between husband and wife to whom the transmission of life is entrusted, solidarity with the oppressed, and the equality of men and women."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>"*Marching Together*, Message by Most Reverend Gerald Weisner, OMI, President, Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, on the Occasion of the World March of Women," CCCB press release, 18 February 2000.

<sup>8</sup>Michael Swan, "Campaign Life Concerned with Support for Feminist March," *The Catholic Register*, 10 April 2000, 3.

<sup>9</sup>"Joint Statement of Clarification on the March of Women 2000," CCCB press release, 15 May 2000.

## CONCLUSION

The ongoing controversy over support for the World March offers an interesting case study for our discussion of an ecclesiology for a public church. Specifically, it raises a basic question about participation in public life: How far can the Catholic Church go in becoming involved in sharing legitimate goals and purposes and collaborating with people who have other agendas it could not in conscience accept? Another, and perhaps more fundamental, question asks how the Catholic Church is to maintain an ecclesiology of communion in the face of differing assessments about appropriate responses to issues of public concern. Finally, in light of so many competing voices, how is the *sensus fidelium* to be discerned? Whether we live in Canada or the United States, I suspect that these are questions which must be addressed.

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