

A New Mentality Among Roman Catholics

In 1963, at the close of the Second Vatican Council's second session, Cardinal George Flahiff of Winnipeg said that the most significant thing in the Church of Rome was "the new mentality."

The RC theologian Richard P. McBrien, in his recent two volume work *Catholicism*, calls this "new mentality" a "state of crisis." In his opinion, the Roman Church has been in that state ever since the beginning of the Second Vatican Council, which opened the Church to new ideas and, at the same time, to new problems.

Decrease

The RC Church in Canada has suffered mass defections during the 1960s and 1970s. Gallup surveys showed that the proportion of Catholics attending weekly mass dropped from 83 % in 1965 to 55 % in 1976, and the members in religious orders decreased even more sharply, primarily because fewer young people than ever before want to be priests and nuns. In 1967 there were 1,377 young men in Canadian seminaries. By 1981 the number had dropped to 220.

Liturgy

Liturgical renewal made its presence felt during the last few decades. In 1980 Cardinal G. Emmett Carter warned Toronto archdiocesan clergy against "certain abuses which appear to be creeping into our liturgical celebration and which I would ask you to correct immediately." The cardinal noted that some of the abuses stemmed from the wrong notion that the ordained priesthood is just different from the priesthood of the faithful.

Priesthood

The priesthood and celibacy became a matter of controversy. By 1971 Canadian bishops were in favour of ordination for married men, but the Pope remained opposed unless the priest is a convert who came to the Catholic Church already married. Women sought to participate in the worship services. Nuns and other women were preaching frequently in the Toronto Catholic parishes. In 1977 the Rev. Philip Pocock, Archbishop of Toronto, ordered a halt to this new practice. His order was part of the general tightening of discipline in the light of a Vatican document which said that women can never become priests.

Family

The modern breakdown of the family didn't bypass the RC. Statistics indicate the RC divorce at the same rate as the general population – two in seven marriages are dissolved. Birth control practice, as advocated by the church, became subject to heated debate. Dr. Gregory Baum of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto said, in

1967, regarding birth control, that there are circumstances in which it is possible for a loyal catholic to disagree with non infallible statements of the Church. In 1968 Pope Paul VI issued his controversial *Humanae Vitae*, which stood by tradition.

Many Catholics disregarded its central notion. They argued that in an overcrowded world some form of contraception is not only acceptable but morally called for. A Dutch-born priest, Rev. Albert Lannoye, when pastor in Metro-Toronto, voiced his doubts about the encyclical. He asked, "Are we acting as if we believe that they (the laity) are able to make conscientious decisions?" Lannoye felt that personal conscience should be the final arbiter in the birth control question.

Catholics remained firm in their pro-life stance. Catholic Charities have pulled out of Toronto's United Appeal on the issue of Planned Parenthood.

Schooling

The RC is still committed to the separate school system. However, it feels that today its purpose is questioned. A decision handed down by the Supreme Court of BC, in 1980, that a RC teacher in a Catholic school, who married a divorced man, should be allowed to continue was seen as a threat to the very existence of Catholic schools in the province. Archbishop James Carney of Vancouver commented that "in hiring teachers of our Catholic schools, we are not permitted to choose practicing Catholics over Catholics who, even by a public act, have repudiated the most important Catholic values.

Shift

The Canadian RC Church made a significant shift to the left. For years the RC was strongly opposed to socialism. In 1934 Archbishop Gauthier of Montreal condemned, in a pastoral letter, the socialist CCF (Cooperative Commonwealth Federation) as irreconcilable with Catholic social teaching and declared that Catholics were not allowed to join or support it.

In the 1970's RC official teaching in regard to socialism underwent a notable change. In 1971 Pope Paul VI permitted RC to belong to socialist parties as long as they are not identified with a materialist ideology.

The RC shift to the left in Canada was mainly due to the influence of the Latin American inspired liberation theology. Many bishops, priests and nuns were debating the usefulness of Marxism as a Christian tool. Victoria's Bishop Remi DeRoo, one of the RC church's most articulate leftists, uses new Marxist language to express his views on social issues. Some RC even asked whether or not violent revolutionary action is an option for changing a corrupt society. Critique of multinational corporations and resisting the testing of cruise missiles in Canada made the news.

Theology in a State of Flux

In 1966 Professor Leslie Dewart of St. Michael's College, known for his leftward look in politics and his pro-Castro views, wrote *The Future of Belief* with the aim to map out a radical reconstruction of Catholic theology, trying to make it relevant for the 20th century. He eased out the doctrine of the Trinity and the concept that God is omnipotent and eternal. Truth changes and grows. It undergoes development.

International Congress

In 1967 an International Catholic Congress on Theology was held to commemorate Canada's centennial. The congress brought to Toronto some of the leading theologians of the world; not only RC, but also Orthodox, Protestants and Jewish.

Little interest was revealed in biblical exegesis. Many RC gave a sympathetic hearing to Barth Bultmann and various existential philosophies. While "tradition" was re-interpreted as the process of handing on the faith of the church; it remained more dominant than the Bible. "Tradition," said a RC scholar, "is no longer regarded as an extra-bag of truth."

More ecumenical

The RC also established ecumenical ties. It is now an official observer of the WCC. Since the 1970s, the RC, United Church members, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Lutherans have set aside doctrinal differences and tried to work on a common approach to social and political questions. This trend towards liberalism and socialism didn't remain unchallenged. Numerous movements have risen in counter reaction.

Charismatic movement

Neo-pentecostalism made strong inroads. It is growing faster perhaps within the RC than in any other denomination.

The RC charismatics don't consider doctrinal agreement as a prerequisite to fellowship. Yet they believe that their charismatic experience makes them better Catholics in theology and practice.

In 1970 Catholic Pentecostal prayer groups were introduced in Canada. In 1975 the Canadian bishops addressed a message to all Catholics regarding the Charismatics. Though the bishops largely approved, they did caution against excesses and extreme emotionalism. They also warned against "a professed tendency to smooth away the differences which still divide Christians."

In 1976 the first Ontario RC conference attracted 3,750 in Toronto's Varsity arena. In 1979 some 50,000 converged in Montreal's Olympic Stadium for one of the largest charismatic gatherings in history.

Marriage encounter

Marriage Encounter, a ministry to married couples, was started by Gabriel Calvo, a Spanish priest. Along with the charismatic renewal, it has been called one of the fastest growing movements in the RC. The first encounter was held with 78 couples in 1962 in Barcelona. It has become a mass phenomenon in Canada, the U.S., several Latin American countries, and is now rapidly expanding in Japan, Philippines and other parts of Asia.

The purpose of Marriage Encounter is to provide an antidote to communism, modernism and to reassert the vitality of the family. Couples are brought together for a 44 hour weekend directed by an already encountered team of several couples and a priest with the intent to develop communication with each other in their life together as husband and wife.

In 1980, 7,000 joyous celebrants gathered at the Montreal Forum for Marriage Encounter's first national Francophone convention.

Cursillo courses The Cursillo movement originated in Spain in 1949. It was designed as an instrument for Christian renewal. The method for renewal involves a three-day weekend called a cursillo ("course") and a follow-up program known as the post-cursillo. The weekend is an intensive experience of community living and built around 15 talks (10 by laymen and 5 by priests), active participation in discussions, related activities and the celebration of the liturgy. These cursillos have been held in Canada since 1965.

Opus Dei

Opus Dei appears to have emerged as a spiritual assault force in our secular "faithless" age. The Spanish originated movement was founded in 1928 with the purpose to "spread throughout all social classes, especially among intellectuals, a life of evangelical perfection."

Opus Dei is backed by strong financial resources. The movement had close ties with the Spanish dictator Franco. A Spanish law professor described his government as "the most homogeneous government that the country has known since the end of the Civil War. One could even go so far as to say that the people who hold the reins of power are subject to the same religious, moral and perhaps even the same political discipline - I am referring to the Opus Dei"

Opus Dei is believed to control 24 banks in Spain, some 14 Spanish newspapers and a score of publishing houses. It also supports right-wing dictatorships in Latin America. At times the movement has been called the "Holy Mafia" because of its secretive nature. Pope John Paul II has often praised Opus Dei and prayed at least once at the tomb of the founder Msgr. Jose Maria Escriva de Balageur. It doesn't only have the ear of the Pope; it also reports directly to him.

In Canada Opus Dei is behind the Montreal-based Foundation for Culture and Education, which in turn operates several boys and girls clubs, retreat centres and residences. The head of the Canadian Opus Dei branch is a Spanish priest.

The future?

Which movement or theology will gain the upper-hand? Though current trends within the RC are confusing for the devout the RC in Canada seems to have become more optimistic about the future.

A large part of this spirit of confidence is due to the influence of the extra-ordinary and dynamic personality of Pope John Paul II. He is a conservative leader, with a keen intellect, warm heart, and endowed with great physical and emotional energy. When he visits Canada in 1984 he will – draw large and adoring crowds.

Have the modern trends fundamentally changed the Church of Rome? The many amazing and even dramatic events that have occurred have not altered Rome's basic dogmas. I am reminded of what a general of the Jesuits once said of his order, which statement has often been applied to the Roman Church as well, "It must remain what it is or it will not be."

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