

THE LEGACY OF GAUDIUM ET SPES ET SPES IN CANADA (1965-1990)

William F. Ryan, SJ., Phd.
Jesuit Centre for Social Faith and Justice
wfxrsj@web.ca

Abstract:

Without aiming to be comprehensive, the author attempts in this essay to answer the question ‘What was the legacy of Gaudium et Spes [G&S] in Canada for the period 1964-1990?’ ‘Did it make any difference?’ The study centres on the core theme and challenge of G&S – how to become the church in the modern world, as understood and implemented by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops [CCCCB]. To be effective in their purpose the bishops organized, in 1964, a dynamic and top-quality secretariat equipped to give them specialized and competent service in discerning how to be this kind of church in Canada. The author documents several examples of the CCCC’s significant successes as well as some of its daunting challenges, difficulties and failures in this effort. He concludes that this legacy has been exceedingly ambitious and generous and in spite of some dashed hopes lives on in the Canadian church and continues to challenge the whole church – bishops, priests, religious and laity – to work energetically with the help of the Spirit of the Risen Lord to remain true to it.

Hundreds of commentaries and interpretations have been written on Gaudium et Spes [G&S], but much less study has been devoted to what has been its legacy for the church in particular regions or countries since Vatican II. Did it really make any significant difference? This paper attempts to discover such a legacy in Canada in the period 1965-1990. It does not pretend to be comprehensive nor does it attempt to correlate particular texts narrowly with particular initiatives, actions or events that have happened in Canada since the Council. Rather, it centres on the core theme of Gaudium et Spes -- the church in the modern world. This theme was developed further especially in *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and in *Octagesima Adveniens*; and in the statement on Justice in the World by the 1971 Synod of Bishops. A good case can be made that the central vision and spirit of G&S are found in its stark opening sentences: “The joy and hopes, the anguish and the sorrows of men [and women] of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hopes, the anguish and sorrows of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is truly human fails to find an echo in their hearts;”¹ and in the terse confirming statement of the 1971 Synod which said “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world appear to us as a constituent dimension of the preaching of the Gospel, or in other words of the Church’s mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation.”² Of course, the Council’s documents on the Church, Ecumenism and Religious Freedom are integral to grasping this vision of how to be church in the modern world. In fact, G&S is the final document that sums up and carries forward all the earlier insights of the Council, including the co-responsibility of local bishops with the pope for the

governance of the church, and the specific role of the laity to evangelize the secular world through their labour in secular society.

For the Canadian bishops at the Roman Synod on the Family (1980), Cardinal Basil Hume caught this vision and spirit compellingly in his whimsical, poetic dream which he mischievously shared with the pope and his brother bishops from round the world. He began: “Last night I had a dream ... I saw the Church as an enormous castle with many turrets, moats, battlements. All inside felt safe and secure - no one ventured outside. ... Then I had another dream. The Church was a very large group of people on pilgrimage ... the road signs were not always clear, some in fact were twisted or knocked down, but the people knew that they were being led by the Holy Spirit ... You know, I liked the second dream much better than the first.” There was silence when he finished, then applause filled the aula and Pope John Paul II wore a lovely smile. Hume’s dream resonates well the spirit of openness to the modern world and dialogue across differences that have marked the Canadian church since G&S.³

My personal vantage point for reporting the Canadian legacy is that of the CCCB [The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops; until 1977, the CCC - The Canadian Catholic Conference]. I served there as senior staff for twelve years -- first as co-director of the Social Action (later Social Affairs) office [1964-70], and as general secretary of the conference (1984-90). I believe that the CCCB was the primary agent in interpreting, communicating and fostering a new way of being the Canadian church in the world, both domestically and globally. I ask the reader’s indulgence where I revert to personal anecdotal experience and evidence to help fill out this Canadian legacy.⁴

But first a word about the Canadian context in 1964. Canada does not have an explicit constitutional separation of church and state. Publicly funded Catholic schools and hospitals are still common. In fact, for most of our history, especially in Quebec, governments and churches were partners in building the nation. Until the Quiet Revolution of the 60s, the Quebec church was the primary dispenser of health, welfare and education, heavily subsidized by the cheap labour of priests and religious men and women. There was even a Catholic trade union that dropped its affiliation and remains a very effective national trade union today; and a *caisse populaire* that started with mite boxes in poor churches has become today one of Quebec’s major sources of investment funds. In Atlantic Canada there was the strong tradition of cooperatives and credit unions fostered by the Antigonish movement. And in western Canada the Protestant social gospel inspired a “socialist” party, the CCF [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation], which raised the bishops’ hackles but which they refused to condemn explicitly, and out of which eventually came, through the leadership of Tommy Douglas, a Protestant minister, the inspiration for a universal medicare plan.

A remarkable sign of the times that Canadians were ready in the 60s to welcome the new openness on the part of the Catholic church, which represented over 40% of the population, is found in the rapid evolution of universal medicare. While the Council was still in session, in 1964, the CCC Social Action staff was asked to study the 900-page Hall Royal Commission Report that proposed a universal medicare program for Canada. They were soon approached by the top leaders of the Canadian Labour Council and asked whether the bishops would be willing to join Canadian labour in a coalition to bring about universal medicare and, if feasible, bring other denominations with them. Because my office

partner, Father Jack Shea, had already been exploring Catholic membership in the Religion-Labour Council in which most Protestant churches already had a membership, it was easy to engage their leaders through the enthusiastic efforts of Anglican Bishop Ted Scott. The CCC was soon a partner in a broad coalition hosting a major national conference on Canada's Health Charter in Ottawa in 1965, with distinguished Catholic laymen playing major roles. Justice Emmett Hall, author of the report, was keynote speaker; and Claude Ryan, editor of the newspaper *Le Devoir*, was Chair. The bishops who participated did so as individual concerned Canadians. This church-in-the-world conference was a very different forum from the closed traditional Catholic Social Life Conferences with which Canadian Catholics were familiar and where the bishops presided.

Earlier, the Canadian bishops had been involved in the preparation of G&S. In fact, more of them spoke in the plenary session on it than on any other Council document; and Cardinals Paul-Emile Leger and Maurice Roy and theologian Bernard Lambert were involved heavily in finalizing the text.⁵ But perhaps more important for our purposes is the intervention of Archbishop Anthony Jordon of Edmonton, president of the social action commission. He was keeping his promise to bring to the Council the reflections on the draft document made the bishops, priests and laity who participated in a Montreal Social Life Conference a few months earlier. He was heartened by the church's confidence in humanity and its clear identification with the joy and hopes, the anguish and sorrows of all peoples. And he welcomed the fact that "the myth unfortunately cherished by many Christians that the church and its ministers possess ready-made answers to the world's problems is systematically exploded in this document, and the church is portrayed rather in the posture of a humble enquirer, striving honestly, not without the help of all people, to tap the sources of divine and human knowledge in its search for truth."⁶

It was in this same optic of preparing themselves for dialogue with the world, as well as their awareness that only archbishops of larger dioceses had easy access to competent theological expertise to help them prepare adequate interventions at the Council, that in February 1964 the CCC Administrative Board decided to organize "a dynamic and top-quality secretariat, oriented towards study and research, equipped to give specialized and competent services promptly, able to discern social changes, to observe and analyze all problems of interest to the Church, whether in Canada as a whole, in the English and French sectors, or in the numerous regions and provinces of our vast country."⁷ In implementing this decision the bishops adopted a rule by which no special preference would be given to archbishops and cardinals, and all bishops would be eligible for election as president of their conference. The conference became genuinely bilingual in all its functions -- a rare achievement in Canada! It chose to name both an anglophone and a francophone general secretary, neither of whom would be a bishop, to oversee the daily operations of the secretariat. The post-council secretaries, Msgr Charles Mathieu and Gordon George sj, quickly surrounded themselves with thoroughly competent lay and clerical staff. They also organized an efficient postal system for regular communications with a hundred bishops across Canada's five and a half time zones, a system by which members could vote and take final decisions on all but a few matters reserved to plenary assemblies. And so the bishops' dream of how to become church in the modern world began quickly to take on flesh. Through their regular postal communications as well as by face-to-face board, executive and commission meetings and plenary assemblies, the bishops built strong bonds of solidarity which

enabled them to speak with a common voice for and with Catholics, on delicate issues with the Vatican, as well as on daunting social justice and crucial moral issues in the public forum. They adopted a common catechism -Come to the Father -- and set up an efficient bilingual publications facility to share common liturgical texts as well as other CCC statements and publications, and also to reproduce in an attractive form those coming from the Vatican. When Canadian bishops spoke at Roman Synods they spoke in the name of their brother bishops; their draft notes for presentation having been reviewed and received approval at the CCCB assembly. At the Synods (until the Synod on America) they always released their interventions to the media, in English and French, once they were delivered in the aula.

To inform and stimulate Canada's intellectual religious community, the bishops supported a major congress on the Theology of the Renewal of the Church on the occasion of Canada's centenary in 1967 on Toronto University campus. It brought together some thirty leading bishops and theological scholars who had significantly helped to renew Catholic thought at the Council, among them Cardinals L-J Suenens, Franz Koenig and Emile Leger; and theologians, Henri de Lubac sj, Karl Rahner sj, Bernard Haring cssr, Yves Congar op, M.-D. Chenu op, and Bernard Lonergan sj. Non-Catholic scholars such as Jaroslav Pelikan, Eugene Fairweather, and Abraham Heschel were also invited to make presentations. The proceedings were quickly made available in two published volumes entitled, *Renewal of Religious Thought and Renewal of Religious Structures*.⁸ It is not surprising that in this climate of openness the Canadian churches organized a common Christian pavilion and chapel at the Montreal World Fair in 1967. And in this same spirit of hope the bishops founded Development and Peace, a very effective lay Catholic agency for international aid and domestic education for social justice.

One of the earliest efforts of the bishops to apply the teaching of G&S was through their briefs to Canadian Federal Parliamentarians in view of changes in Canadian law on Contraception [Sept 9/66] and on Divorce [April 6/67]. Here they not only spelled out the responsibility of Christian political leaders to "impress the divine law on the earthly city" (G&S art.43) in these controversial circumstances; they also added in appendix in both briefs the section in chapter 4 of G&S on 'The Political Community [and the Church].'⁹

Because the CCC social action office had an established history before Vatican II, it helps to see how quickly dramatic changes in line with G&S were adopted in the new secretariat. As soon as the Council ended, the Social Action staff organized a 3-day national seminar with Jean-Marie Tillard op, a peritus for the Canadian bishops at the Council. Its purpose was to help forty priests with social justice backgrounds from across Canada to get a deeper understanding of the significance of this new pastoral document. This seminar was followed up by a tour by Shea and Ryan across the country to offer similar seminars to interested priests. Charles Mathieu and Jean-Guy Hamelin carried out similar programs in francophone Canada, and in 1966 they set up an advisory conseil national d'action social as a way to get Catholic lay leaders in Montreal to understand better their mission in the world. And the social affairs staff with the support of their commission began to shift their work from specific Catholic social life conferences and publications to broad consultations, research, educational activities, ecumenical collaboration

and outreach into Canadian and international society, while continuing to prepare public statements, interventions and publications for the bishops.

The intensity of their work can be judged from the 2-volume compilation of 153 conference and commission statements between 1945-1990 by Edward Sheridan sj. All but a dozen date from 1964 and half of them focussed on issues of social justice and peace. After 1964 these statements drop their more deductive and moralizing approach and follow a teaching method familiar to Catholic Action see-judge-act approach, looking in detail at some realities, judging them in the light of the Gospel or other Church teaching, and then suggesting actions that should be taken either by public authorities or the Church itself. Now enhanced by more professional staff, many of these statements reached out ecumenically to society generally and were, at times, co-signed by the leaders of other churches. Their chief concerns become the universal general destination of material goods for all people, socio-economic and cultural development, problems of world poverty, disease, literacy, human rights worldwide, the anomaly of poverty in Canada, marginalization of native peoples, and irresponsible stewardship, including that of transnational corporations. But more important, as Sheridan points out, is “the growing insight that it is the dominant ideology and the economic mechanisms of Canadian and world orders which create and maintain the injustice under which a majority of mankind labours.”¹⁰

There is no evidence of American church influence in these statements, but ample evidence that, during this period, the bishops kept their eyes particularly on Rome (where the Secretariat for Justice and Peace was flourishing under the presidency of Cardinal Maurice Roy of Quebec), on Latin America (where Canadian missionaries abounded), and on the United Nations. The influence not only of G&S but also of *Populorum Progressio*, *Octagesima Adveniens* and *Justitia in Mundo* is clearly evident in these statements. Already in 1970 Latin American language about liberation and sinful structures is found in Canadian texts. The CCC was part of ecumenical delegations at the key United Nations conferences of UNCTAD [United Nations Conference on Trade and Development] on the New International Economic Order in Chile, on population in Bucharest, in Rome on Food, in Stockholm on Environment, on Housing in Vancouver, etc, where they cooperated with and monitored the initiatives of the Canadian government and shared their independent views with the Canadian public.

With Cardinal Roy’s support, the first Secretary of the Pontifical Secretariat, Mgr Joe Gremillion, built strong bonds with the CCC’s Social Action staff, as did his very active and creative associate, Barbara Ward. For example, they arranged for one of them to participate in the World Council of Church’s Geneva conference on “Christians in the Technical and Social Revolution” in 1966; and in the broadly based international conferences of SODEPAX -- the new experimental joint social WCC/Vatican secretariat in Geneva -- held in Beirut on World Co-operation for Development in 1968; and on *The Search for Theology of Development* in 1969, in Geneva.¹¹

The Canadian ecumenical delegation to the 1966 Geneva conference decided to follow it up with a broad-based conference in Montreal in 1968 on “Poverty at Home and Abroad.” This

conference proved a milestone for social ecumenism and Christian outreach in Canada. It brought together such international notables as Barbara Ward and Archbishop Helder Camara of Recife, as well as Canadians from all walks of life, including a loud impatient contingent of Montreal's poor. Out of this widely acclaimed public conference evolved a National Coalition for Development, initially joined by some 40 English and French speaking national groups, including trade unions, native groups, farmers, welfare organizations -- even the Chamber of Commerce, for a while -- all committed to working together on four priority issues: third world development, native rights, building community groups, and a more just Canadian tax system.¹²

When this coalition proved after a few years of experimentation to be premature or perhaps too ambitious, the churches turned to creating several ad hoc coalitions -- which were initially task forces combining the staffs of the different national churches but later had their own staffs -- to study, educate and exert political pressure to promote the New International Economic Order; human rights at home and abroad; corporate responsibility, care for refugees, etc. This successful 30-year experience of social ecumenical coalitions is unique to the Canadian scene.

The publishing of *Humanae Vitae* with its unexpected rejection of artificial contraception proved a supreme test for the solidarity of the Canadian bishops. In their carefully prepared public response they referred to the teaching of G&S six times to support their own position. Preparing this response dominated their plenary meeting in September 1968 in Winnipeg. With the help of theological experts, the bishops worked through their fourth draft statement paragraph by paragraph and then took their final vote, an almost unanimous vote, with no negative votes and one abstention. They stood with Paul VI in his pastoral teaching, but they also reached out to those faithful laity who could not, even with an informed conscience, accept this teaching on artificial contraception -- advising them that this should not keep them away from the sacraments. The bishops were, of course, heartened when they received the response of Paul VI, who said he had taken cognizance of their statement "with satisfaction."¹³

This difficult but fruitful experience of mutual trust and solidarity emboldened the bishops to continue to face public challenges with openness and courage. However, there is no doubt that their strong sense of collegiality with Rome was shaken by Pope Paul VI's unilateral action on this delicate topic, which had not been thoroughly discussed at the Council.

The bishops were also increasing their contacts with other episcopal conferences. Soon there were regular informal biennial meetings between the Canadian, the American and Latin American conferences [CELAM]. The executives of the American and Canadian conferences met informally annually; and the general secretaries of the CCC also met annually with those of USA, Brazil, France, England, Germany and Switzerland. These were always relaxed enjoyable meetings which gave the bishops and the general secretaries a sense of what was going on in other conferences and in their relations with Rome, and perhaps especially in their preparations for upcoming Roman Synods. In this regard the interamerican meeting of 1971 was significant for Canada. Though already Director of the Center of Concern in Washington, I was asked by the American and Canadian conferences to prepare, in cooperation with US theologian Father Joe Komonchak, a draft entitled, "Liberation of Men [sic] and Nations - Some Signs of the

Times,” responding to the preparatory Roman document for the 1971 Synod on Justice in the World. The growing solidarity among the bishops can be judged by the fact that the Canadian and Latin American bishops endorsed the statement enthusiastically, while the US bishops were somewhat divided, with Cardinal J. Dearden voting for it and Cardinal J. Krol standing alone in voting against it.¹⁴

These stimulating hemispheric debates were prelude to a Synod where the involvement and influence of the Canadian bishops were at their peak. I mentioned earlier that individual bishops spoke at synods in the name of the Canadian bishops who had earlier vetted their draft presentation notes. Here their synod interventions received ample coverage in the international press. Bishop Alex Carter’s intervention on the potential abuse of multinational corporations won him an invitation to Geneva to meet with the leaders of UNCTAD; and Cardinal Flahiff’s intervention on education for justice received warm personal congratulations from Pope Paul VI. Flahiff’s often quoted statement addressed the vexing problem of why Catholic social teaching has so little public impact. He said, “When we ask ourselves, sometimes with not a little anxiety, why the social teachings of the church have so little impact, I believe we may have to admit that we have too often believed that an academic knowledge of them was ... sufficient. I suggest that henceforward our basic principle must be: only knowledge gained through participation is valid in this area of justice; true knowledge can be gained only through concern and solidarity. We must have recourse to the biblical notion of knowledge --experience shared with others. We have too frequently separated evangelization from social action and reserved social involvement to elites and, eventually to the clergy. Unless we are in solidarity with the people who are poor, marginal or isolated we cannot even speak effectively about their problems....”¹⁵ Here Cardinal Flahiff’s words not only had an impact on the final synod statement; they set the tone for more political and action oriented statements and education programs by the Social Affairs Commission of the CCC.

Two significant events in the 1980s confirmed the bishops in this thrust. First, the overwhelmingly positive response on the part of the Canadian public to their statement “Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis,” in 1982. Second, the 12-day visit of Pope John Paul II to Canada in 1984.

On New Year’s Eve, 1982, Ethical Reflections was leaked to the Canadian media. With substantial help from the mass media, the 8 Canadian bishop members of the bilingual Commission for Social Affairs of the CCC were able to say out loud what most Canadians were secretly thinking: that to have over 12% of Canadian workers unemployed was “a moral disorder.” It did not have to be; it could and must be changed. The CCC assembly later endorsed this strong statement that sharply challenged the federal government’s policy of controlling inflation on the backs of Canadian workers.¹⁶

No CCC statement -- including their much debated pastoral response to *Humanae Vitae* in 1968 -- has received such public acclaim. When asked one year later why the bishops had not produced a similar statement for New Year’s Eve, then President of the CCC, Bishop John Sherlock, explained that the Commission had been too busy talking publicly about their earlier statement to prepare a new one. The

fact that Cardinal Emmett Carter, Archbishop of Toronto, publicly deplored that he and other bishops not on the Commission had not been consulted, only served to intensify the public's interest. Later the Cardinal organized his own independent public hearings on the statement, chaired by Dr George Ignatief, Chancellor of Toronto University. These well publicized hearings received over 100 written briefs confirming the general thrust of the bishops' statement, namely that the high rate of unemployment in Canada was unacceptable – “immoral” in the bishops words -- and was, indeed, Canada's most crucial problem.

There is no adequate explanation why this 55th public episcopal statement on socio-economic political affairs was the one that Canadians chose to heed and debate over all others. Like others it was based openly on a preferential option for the poor and the inherent dignity of every human -- both basic gospel principles. Perhaps the bishops' terse formula for what should be the priority goals of more just government economic policy caught people's imagination. These were 1) the needs of the poor have priority over the wants of the rich; 2) the rights of workers come before maximization of profits; and 3) the participation of marginalized groups has precedence over preservation of a system that excludes them.¹⁷

It is clear to any Canadian who raises with Pope John Paul II the topic of his 12-day visit to Canada in 1984 and of his 1987 return visit to Fort Simpson in the Canadian north to visit with the native peoples that these visits were very special for him, as they were for Canadians. The first was a very public visit and was covered live for 160 hours by the national CBC TV's best newscasters, assisted by knowledgeable religious experts. During these visits the pope strongly confirmed the Canadian bishops' ongoing social teaching and practice of social ecumenism as their way to be church in the modern world. Social justice was a recurring theme in his homilies and reached its pinnacle at his outdoor Mass at Edmonton, where addressing a huge crowd he shouted into the howling wind, “Yes, the South - becoming always poorer; and the North - becoming always richer.... Nevertheless, in the light of Christ's words [Mt 25] this poor South will judge the rich North. And the poor people and poor nations - poor in different ways, not only lacking food, but also deprived of freedom and other human rights - will judge those people who take away from them, amassing to themselves the imperialistic monopoly of economic and political supremacy at the expense of others.”¹⁸

Of course, behind the visible solidarity of the bishops on more specific social statements there was considerable give and take among bishops and staff but there were very few open breaches of solidarity. For example, besides the very public initial dissent on the part of Cardinal Carter to the social affairs commission's “Ethical Reflections on the Economy” in 1982, a gnawing disagreement came to light later when the former Director of the Social Affairs office, Dr Tony Clarke, published a book, entitled *Behind the Mitre*¹⁹ in which he blames the bishops for lack of moral leadership in merely questioning the social justice aspects of NAFTA [The North American Free Trade Agreement], rather than simply condemning it outright as unjust. While it is true that there was little enthusiasm among the bishops at that time to condemn the agreement, there is no supporting evidence of Clarke's assertion that pressure from the National Business Council played a role in their decision.²⁰

It is remarkable that the bishops' solidarity on controversial public social statements prevailed in face of a growing sentiment among Canadians that the 'truth' even on social questions came only from Rome.

I could continue to dwell on the rich public statements that continued to emerge from the CCC as well as from their ecumenical partnership. The supportive role of the Canadian religious, especially women religious, in their social justice teaching and support of an enhanced role for women in the church cannot be exaggerated. Likewise, the very visible role of lay groups such as the Development and Peace, the Catholic Women's League and the many social ecumenical coalitions, as well as of social justice lay and priest leaders in local dioceses is a compelling story in itself which I only allude to here.

But this history of the CCCB's evident success as an episcopal conference would not be complete, even in this summary forum, without discussing some of the important challenges, difficulties and failures the bishops experienced during this period. However, these were not sufficient to scare them away from their original purpose stated in 1964 when they set up their modern secretariat. At their 1989 plenary the bishops voted unanimously an ambitious, refined definition of their collegial assembly in line in with G&S's vision of being church in the modern world. "Its purpose is to enable the bishops, united with the Pope, to discharge their collective pastoral office with and for other members of the People of God in the mission confided to the whole Church. This involves working with all men and women to evangelize contemporary culture and to build a society of justice and love called for by Jesus Christ. It also involves the promotion of unity among Christian Churches and of understanding with other religions."²¹ This statement prefaced a plan for a detailed reorganization of the CCCB secretariat, commissions, etc., worked on by a Task Force of nine senior bishops over two years. Their crucial central proposal, voted unanimously by the plenary assembly, was that the bishops themselves in plenary session should debate and vote the pastoral priorities of the CCCB for the coming year together with their financing, and thus secure clearer ownership of the CCCB's activities by all the member bishops. The fact that the unanimous recommendation from the Task Force that extraordinary funding should be sought from the Catholic community was scuttled at the plenary session suggested a continuing uncertain future for the CCCB.

Challenges, Difficulties, & Failures

From the beginning the CCCB's achilles' heel has been a recurring shortfall of adequate stable financing. It is raised through a per capita tax - not on the number of active Catholics but rather on Canadians in each diocese identifying themselves as 'Catholic,' earlier in the diocesan records, and more recently in the federal census. This arrangement has proved an extra burden in some Quebec dioceses where Catholic practice continues to fall; and also for members of the Assemblée des Evêques du Québec [AEQ], which does not require the services of the CCCB in those instances where it produces culturally adapted pastoral programs in French for its members. This problem became more acute in the 70s, after the CCCB encouraged the active pastoral presence of regional episcopal conferences. Recurrent crises in finances have forced the

CCCB Secretariat to rethink and reorganize itself on several occasions. At times this has been done through creative planning, but at other times mechanically through a percentage cut in staff and programs. As of 1990, the bishops had not been able to find consensus on an alternative more effective way to finance the CCCB.

An early challenge came to the bishops from Cardinal Roy, who claimed that he would not be credible in promoting justice and peace commission round the world as long as Canada did not itself have a model commission. His request was discussed over several years but the bishops' remarkable early successes with social ecumenism, especially with issue-oriented ecumenical coalitions, made them wary of adding a new specifically Catholic organization, and so it simply never came about. Ironically, it is only in the Canadian Council of Churches, of which the CCCB became a full member in 1983, that we find a justice and peace commission today.

The bishops, over this period, came to favour and prioritize a few central issues: poverty and social justice; social ecumenism; the rights and development of native peoples; an enhanced role for women in the church and in society; and facilitating laity to claim their rightful task of being the church in the world, and not just representatives of the clergy. These last three priorities proved the most difficult to make visible progress in -- in spite of persevering efforts on the part of the bishops.

Although Pope John Paul went out of his way to visit the native peoples in Canada, and though the bishops made visible progress in promoting the personal and treaty rights of natives, their recurring request that natives should have their own married clergy continued to be stonewalled in Rome.

From the beginning the bishops were anxious not to have their conference identified as the Canadian Catholic Church; nor did they want to be seen, in the words of Archbishop P. Pocock of Toronto, as "a bishops' club." As already noted, they founded and supported Development and Peace as a visible and effective lay Catholic organization. They continued to support and subsidize several lay organizations, but as early as 1967 began to discuss the feasibility of initiating a Canadian Pastoral Council to represent all the people of God which would work in close liaison with the CCC to foster gospel life and the renewal of the Church in Canada.²² In 1969 the bishops approved an exploration to set up such a provisional Council, but it failed in spite of valiant efforts on the part of several bishops, priests, religious and laity to save it. All agreed on the need for an national institutional pastoral expression of co-responsibility. But for some it seemed premature to organize it outside the CCC; and yet no consensus could be found on how to develop it inside the CCC. The fact that the experience of "Catholic" lay organizations in the Quebec Church, after the Quiet Revolution in the 60s, differed greatly from that of the rest of Canadian Church only served to complicate this difficult dialogue and exploration. This bad experience made the bishops gun shy of a CPC and they settled for organizing a small pastoral team inside their secretariat and having an annual meetings with representatives of national Catholic organizations. This structural gap considerably undercut the bishops' steady rhetoric about Catholic laity, by right of their baptism, being the church in the

modern world, not merely representing the hierarchy. The CCCB, as a national institution, remained remote and largely unknown to most Catholic laity.

The bishops' efforts to promote the role of women in the Church and in society met with some successes but also major obstacles. At the Roman Synod on the Priesthood in 1971, Cardinal Flahiff, speaking for the Canadian bishops, caused a sensation by asking the question from the floor: "Are new or changing ministries to be limited to men?" He stated that as far as he knew "there is no dogmatic objection to reconsidering the whole question today." He suggested that since Vatican II categorically rejects all discrimination against women in the Church "we would be failing in our duty towards more than half of the Church if we did not at least speak of the subject."²³ The Canadian bishops wanted to promote research into the feasibility of ordination for women. Though regularly rebuffed and even ridiculed for this stance over the years, we still find Bishop Jean-Guy Hamelin suggesting at the Synod on the Laity in 1987 on behalf of the Canadian bishops that some form of diaconate should be explored for women; and Bishop Robert Lebel, as CCCB President, was still, in 1989, making the point with Cardinal Ratzinger that since the Vatican was secure in its position, it should not be fearful of bishops' conferences encouraging research into this question of ordination for women. The importance given by bishops to the promotion of women is evidenced in how they persisted in promoting inclusive language in the liturgy, and in having women in the most senior positions in key CCCB Secretariat offices. Among them were Ella Zink, sos. and Bonnie Brennan in Public Relations; Bernadette Tourangeau and Joanne Chafe in Religious Education; Donna Geernaert, sc. in Ecumenism and Interfaith Dialogue; and Jennifer Leddy as Legal and Policy Advisor.

The area of abortion legislation proved particularly difficult for the CCCB, especially in the 80s when the bishops were taking the position -- later confirmed by the Vatican -- that it is preferable to endorse imperfect legislation in this controversial area and to keep trying to improve it rather than have no law on abortion (a result brought about by Canada's pro-life movement's more rigid position). The bishops' task was not made easier by the fact that since their controversial statement on *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, a confrontational pro-life public opinion had developed that caricatured the bishops as being unfaithful to the pope. Some Canadian Catholics were undercutting the bishops and their social teaching in Rome, at times, it appears, with the support of Roman officials. At the annual meetings of CCCB leaders with the heads of the Congregations and the pope personally they were always assured of full approval and support, nevertheless, overtime this energy-draining experience took its toll on the solidarity between Rome and the CCCB as well as between the bishops and the Catholic laity.²⁴ Eventually, the usual solidarity among the bishops failed when some bishops and laity disagreed sharply and publicly on whether Development and Peace and the Catholic Women's League and Catholics generally could support and be involved in a national Women's March against Poverty, given that some of the women's organizations involved were known to support abortion.

Likewise, the recurrent suggestion of the bishops that the Roman Synod should meet more often and become legislative rather than merely advisory to the Pope fell on deaf ears, as did the efforts of Archbishop Maxime Hermaniuk, Metropolitan for Ukrainian Catholics in Canada, in his more basic demand for a Permanent Synod. The Canadian bishops' frustration with the

heavy-handed management of the synod processes was clearly evident at the Synod on the Laity in 1987 when, on behalf of the delegates, Msgr Donat Chiasson moved a motion of non-confidence in the Secretariat's synthesis of the reports from the bishops' workshops, only to be publicly rebuked and ruled out of order by the Chair.

Nor was the proposal of the bishops, put forward by Bishop Bernard Hubert at the Extraordinary Synod in 1985 that, given that many serious questions, listed by the reporter Cardinal Daneels' summary, such as collegiality of bishops, theology of local churches, church in the service of the world and other daunting problems could not be handled in the two-week session, why not identify these and then adjourn for a year or more. This would give the delegates sufficient time to consult with their brother bishops and all the faithful who are also the Body of Christ and are responsible for its wellbeing. Hubert's proposal to engage the whole Church in the processes of the extraordinary synod evaluating Vatican II was not favourably received by the Synod. Nor was his view that the principle of subsidiarity, so basic in Catholic Social Teaching, must also apply to the life of the church.²⁵ It was becoming clearer that Vatican officials were steadily backing away from the exercise of strong collegiality and co-responsibility by all bishops in union with the pope for the governance of the church through the instrumentality of effective episcopal conferences; as well as from an independent role for the laity in evangelizing the secular world.

During this post-Council period, some Vatican officials continued to raise questions about the theological foundation and teaching authority of episcopal conferences. In Canada, at least, this questioning of conferences had the effect of diluting, in public opinion in the church, the Vatican II teaching that the bishops, "together with their head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him, have supreme and full authority over the universal Church." The pope's "full, supreme and universal power" was not being questioned; but the emphasis on papal authority alone in the absence of effective means for local bishops to exercise their "supreme and full authority over the universal Church,"²⁶ clearly reduced the ability of the Canadian bishops to bring the teaching of G&S to full flowering in the church of Canada. Why should people in the pews in Canada accept the teaching authority of Canadian bishops when their teaching authority as a conference was being questioned in Rome itself?

One inconsistency or failure stands out above the others. The apparent disconnect between the voluminous exemplary social teaching of the bishops over thirty years and the evident lack of social faith consciousness among lay Catholics in the pew and active in public life. Indeed, several bishops commented on this failure on the occasion of the CCCB's 50th anniversary celebration.²⁷ Vatican preoccupation with trying to keep bishops' interventions made at Roman Synods secret has to bear some responsibility for this anomalous situation. The Canadian Synod delegates prepared their interventions in cooperation with theologians and lay experts -- often in wider consultation with laity -- and they spoke in the name of their brother bishops. It is hard to see any pastoral justification for keeping this treasure-trove of excellent pastoral teaching of their bishops secret from Canadian Catholics.

But the bishops have to bear some responsibility for the present lack of social faith consciousness among the laity and even among many priests since they were noticeably less energetic and enthusiastic in promoting and preaching their social teaching at the diocesan and parish levels than they were in endorsing it at the national level. Nor were bishops regularly visible in promoting or defending this social teaching with the Catholic political, business and education leaders, who, by this very teaching, are supposed to be the vanguard of church in the modern world. The premature decision of the bishops in the 70s that CCCB staff should discontinue animation workshops, etc at the local and regional levels also played some role here; as did the inadequate social justice emphasis in the conference's adult faith education programs.

As mentioned earlier, the bishops had tried to take the social teachings of G&S on the role of Catholic political leaders to the controversial parliamentary discussions on proposed changes in the laws on contraception and divorce. But distinguished Catholic leaders of the time such as Pierre Trudeau, John Turner and Marc MacGuigan saw only that the bishops, in their briefs, would not directly oppose changes to the legislation. They seemed to fail to understand that the bishops were not ordering them but inviting them as Catholic lay leaders to take personal responsibility for discerning prudently how best to work for more fully human laws and values that image the divine in the earthly city.

Nevertheless, this weakness remains a second achilles heel in the Canadian bishops' otherwise amazingly positive experience of experimenting creatively with being church in the modern world. As both human and financial resources available to the CCCB continue to dwindle, one can only hope that a recreated CCCB secretariat will take seriously as its first priority to help fashion effective pastoral instruments and training programs to help bishops, priests and laity acquire that mature social faith consciousness, spirituality and formation necessary for Catholics to be at once faithful to their beliefs and effective citizens in Canada's secularizing, pluralistic democracy. Else the dream of G&S, imaginatively described in Cardinal Hume's dream of the church he would prefer to live in, will be tarnished by events such as those witnessed in recent North American elections wherein individual bishops turned to scolding and attacking Catholic political leaders publicly, thereby giving evidence of a lack of trustful pastoral dialogue between bishops and Catholic public leaders.

Sincere dialoguing across differences of world faiths and ideologies is today, as Pope John Paul keeps insisting, an essential part of evangelization; but even of more immediate importance for bishops is being able to dialogue across differences with Catholic lay leaders, whether face-to-face or in small groups. Besides, working with and asking lay leaders' help may be the most feasible way an effective CCCB can remain financially solvent and the bishops escape that fate they have always been determined to escape of becoming isolated as 'a bishops' club.'

Some readers may be aware that some of the concerns for the future of the CCCB mentioned earlier have escalated into crisis proportion in recent months. However, research and analysis of these recent developments are outside the scope of this essay and beyond the personal competence and experience of its author at this time. And so I conclude that for the period under study the legacy of G&S in Canada has been exceedingly generous, ambitious and creative.

There have been failures and dashed hopes, but this rich legacy lives on in the Canadian Church and challenges all its members – bishops, priests, religious and laity – to continue to work energetically and in solidarity to remain true to it – fully conscious that such fidelity is a gift of the Spirit, as G&S reminds us in its final sentence, “Now to him who by the power of the Spirit within us is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or imagine, to him be glory in the Church and Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” [Eph. 3:20-21]

¹ Gaudium et Spes, Vatican II, December 7, 1965, par #1.

² Justice in the World, November 7, 1965, par #4.

³ Msgr Joseph MacNeil, a synod delegate. From his personal “Observations on the Legacy of Gaudium et Spes in Canada.” Shared with the author, October 2004.

⁴ I am greatly indebted to Bernard Daly, longtime journalist and senior staff person of the CCCB for his personal counsel and his indepth research in his two publications: *Remembering for Tomorrow - A History of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops* (Ottawa: CCCB, 1995); and *Beyond Secrecy - The untold story of Canada and the Second Vatican Council* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2003). I am also indebted to Edward Sheridan sj for his compilation of all the major social statements of the CCCB, 1945-1989 in E.F. Sheridan sj. Ed., *Do Justice! – The Social Teaching of the Canadian Bishops (1945-1986)*; and *Love Kindness! – The Social Teaching of the Canadian Bishops (1958-1989) A Second Collection*. (Sherbrooke: Editions Paulines, 1987 & 1991 respectively).

⁵ Bernard Daly, *Beyond Secrecy*, p. 197.

⁶ Cited in Bernard Daly, *Ibid*, p. 199.

⁷ Cited in Bernard Daly, *Remembering for Tomorrow*, p. 173.

⁸ L.K. Shook, CSB, Ed., *Theology of Renewal*, vol I, *Renewal of Religious Thought*; and vol II, *Renewal of Religious Structures*. *Proceedings of the Congress on the Theology of Renewal of the church centenary of Canada, 1867-1967* (Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1968).

⁹ E.F. Sheridan, sj., Ed., *Love Kindness!*, Section II, Document 2, CCC Presentation to the House of Commons’ Standing Committee on Health and Welfare: *On Change in the Law on Contraceptives*, Note 2, p. 134; and CCC Presentation to the Committee on Proposed Changes of the Law of Divorce, Introduction, p. 69 and Note 2, p. 74.

¹⁰ E.F. Sheridan sj., *Do Justice!*, Introduction, p. 37.

¹¹ The Exploratory Committee on Society, Development and Peace, *World Development: The Challenge to the Churches*. The Conference on World Cooperation for Development, Beirut, Lebanon, April 21-27, 1968. The Official Report to the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968); and The Committee on Society, Development and Peace, *In Search of a Theology of Development*. Papers for a consultation on Theology and Development, Cartigny, Switzerland, November 1969. (Geneva: SODEPAX, 1969).

¹² Strategy Committee Report to the Canadian Council of Churches and the Canadian Catholic Conference, *Poverty and Conscience – A Church Response. Towards a Coalition for Development. Recommendations: A Unified Strategy for the 1970’s: Priority Steps in 1969* (Ottawa: CCC, 1969).

¹³ Cf Bernard Daly, *Remembering for Tomorrow*, p. 13.

¹⁴ Cf William F. Ryan sj. and Rev. Joseph Komonchak, “Liberation of Men and Nations – The Role of the Church in the Americas,” in *The Catholic Mind*, (New York, NY: America Press, September 1971, p. 17. See also in Bernard Daly, *Remembering for Tomorrow*, Note 100, p. 184, where he describes this Interamerican meeting of the bishops.

¹⁵ E. F. Sheridan, sj., *Do Justice!*, Document 28, p. 219.

¹⁶ *Op cit.*, document 55, “Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis,” December 22, 1982.

¹⁷ *Ibid*.

¹⁸ John Paul II, “The Poor South will Judge the Rich North,” homily given at Edmonton airport, Sept 17, 1964, in *Canada Celebrating our Faith* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1985), p. 272.

¹⁹ Tony Clarke, *Behind the Mitre: The Moral Leadership Crisis in the Canadian Catholic Church* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1995).

²⁰ Cf Bob Chodos & Jamie Swift, *Faith & Freedom: The Life and Times of Bill Ryan sj.* (Ottawa: Novalis, 2002), pp. 201-

202, where the authors claim to have found no evidence of a right-wing alliance of business interests and conservative clerics to have the Canadian bishops retreat from their position of leadership in social justice.

²¹ Taken from Bernard Daly, *Remembering for Tomorrow*, pp. 108-109.

²² Cf op cit., p. 22, where Daly describes this process.

²³ Ibid, p. 79, where Daly quotes this intervention of Cardinal Flahiff.

²⁴ Ibid. pp. 150-151. Here Daly describes this phenomenon and includes a press release issued by Mgr Robert Lebel, then president of the CCCB, where he discusses openly and frankly this problem with the press on his return from a visit to Rome in 1990.

²⁵ Mgr Bernard Hubert, "Witness of Hope and Truth – Synodal Orientations," in *Twenty Years Later – A Study of texts for the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops* (Ottawa: CCCB, 1985), pp.14-16.

²⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, Vatican Council II, November 21,1964, par. #22.

²⁷ Bernard Daly, *Remembering for Tomorrow*. P. 171, where he reports these findings.