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The West and the Muslim World

On October 1, 2002, Karen Armstrong, the acclaimed British writer and historian, was invited to speak to the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development. This Centre is presently engaged in dialogue with Canadian and foreign experts on Canada's foreign policy in relation to the Muslim world. Karen Armstrong is the author of Islam: A Short History *(2002),* The Battle for God *(2000),* Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths *(1996),* A History of God *(1994) and* Muhammed: A Biography of the Prophet *(1992).The website of the Canadian Centre for Foreign Policy Development has published the following summary of Karen Armstrong's presentation.*

1. Religious fundamentalism is a modern phenomenon. It exists in every religion and is rooted in a fear of annihilation by the secularizing influences of modernity.
2. September 11 was an example of how modern technologies of communication and travel can be used as weapons to express a profound discontent with modernity itself.
3. Policy makers must devote greater attention to religion and the impact of religion on the conduct of international relations. Understanding religion should be equally as important in foreign policy as knowledge of the economics, politics, geography and natural resources of a region.
4. Suppressing fundamentalist movements is dangerous because it increases the conviction that they are under siege. As well, exploiting extremists (as the United States earlier utilized Bin Laden) is equally dangerous.
5. Throughout history, Muslims have been able to blend creatively with diverse cultures (e.g., Spanish, Greek, Persian, Indian, among others). This is already happening in Western Europe and North America.
6. In Western societies, support for moderate Western Muslims in their efforts to develop a progressive, indigenous Western Islam can ultimately counter fundamentalist movements. We need to accelerate this process.
7. The development of an indigenous, Western Islam could draw on the U.S. Catholic example. In this case, the status of American Catholics evolved from a marginalized minority to a fully accepted part of American society (demonstrated by the election of

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John F. Kennedy in 1960) that became a force for progressive change within the Catholic Church at Vatican Council II.

8. Resentment against the West is by no means confined to the Muslim world. It exists elsewhere in the South.
9. Secular conflicts, if allowed to fester, can take on a religious hue. We must work to ensure that these conflicts do not reach the stage at which they become "hijacked" by fundamentalist agendas (a danger in the Palestine–Israel conflict today).
10. It is not possible to impose Western-style democracy on Muslim countries. Indigenous democracy requires education for the people in order to help them understand democratic institutions and properly use their right of franchise.
11. Western states must avoid supporting authoritarian regimes in the Muslim world. This has contributed to resentment and alienation in the Muslim world and is undermining efforts to democratize Muslim countries from within.
12. In foreign policy, further emphasis should be placed on education programs to foster democracy from the grassroots level in Muslims in a manner that is compatible with their culture. For instance, democracy and civil society are presently taking root in Iran in an Islamic context.
13. An attack on Iraq would further legitimize religious fundamentalism in the Muslim world and could destabilize the entire region.

Unblurring the Vision

South African Churches Assess NEPAD

The world has treated Africa harshly in the past no more than it does now. Africa in the global human community today is like Lazarus surviving on the crumbs of the rich man's table.[1]

So begins a recent assessment by South African Churches which goes on to paint a very grim picture of the crisis besetting the continent:

> While Africa holds ten percent of the world's population, seventy-five percent of the world's people living with HIV/AIDS are in Sub-Saharan Africa[2] and one-third of the world's poorest people live in Africa. Half the continent's population lives in absolute poverty.[3] Nearly half of the estimated 515,000 women who die annually from pregnancy or childbirth are African, meaning that one African woman in 13 dies during pregnancy or childbirth.[4] After more than fifteen years of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs),[5] unemployment rates are estimated to be well above thirty-five percent on the continent. Nineteen thousand children die in Africa each day as a result of preventable diseases and malnutrition.[6] Yet Sub-Saharan Africa has a foreign debt of more than $170 billion and pays creditors $40 million a week to service debts[7] accumulated as a result of the Cold War, apartheid, and failed projects.[8] Despite some remarkable African efforts at reconciliation, endless wars and genocide have ravaged the continent without the world being too concerned. Unscrupulous companies have plundered natural resources, destroying whole environments and social systems on the continent. (*Unblurring the Vision*, 9-10)

And yet, in spite of this grim assessment, the Churches conclude: "Africa's people have hope that a better life is possible in the twenty-first century." (*Unblurring the Vision*, 10)

A New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD)

At the June 2002 G8 meetings in Kananaskis, Alberta, a program for Africa's recovery and development was tabled and approved by the G8 leaders as the best way forward to assist the beleaguered continent. The plan was developed by African leaders themselves, to pull the "forgotten continent" out of its impoverishment and marginalization.

Dubbed the NEPAD for the New Partnership for African Development, the plan is an ambitious call to the G8 leaders to negotiate a new relationship so that the African continent that has been "plundered for centuries" will "take its rightful place in the world."[9]

The NEPAD document, released in November 2001, was cobbled together primarily by South African President Thabo Mbeki along with leaders from Senegal, Nigeria and Algeria. Drafts of the plan were presented by these leaders at last year's G8 meetings and at the World Economic Forum in Davos. At no point did the leaders seek the input of their civil societies in the drafting of the final text. Since then, however, the document has been closely scrutinized by civil society groups throughout the continent.

For its part the Canadian government has pledged "$6 billion in new and existing resources over five years...to support Africa's Development."[10] These new funds, along with those pledged by other world leaders, will be directed at "African nations that embrace and implement the principles of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), defined as promoting peace and security, good economic and political governance, and human rights."[11]

So, what are the African leaders proposing and how are Africans themselves responding? According to the South African Churches, "The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) presents itself as a dynamic and visionary initiative by a nucleus of new generation African leaders to transform Africa into a continent of peace and prosperity. It proposes to make this the African century, through a new qualitative relationship be-

tween Africa and the rest of the world." (*Unblurring the Vision,* 10)

NEPAD

The NEPAD document begins by enunciating several laudable goals:

- The need to negotiate a new relationship with their development partners: "Africans are calling neither for the further entrenchment of dependency through aid, nor for marginal concessions." (par. 5)
- A focus on "African ownership and management" and on "self-reliance."
- The importance of national and regional priorities in the formulation of development plans.
- Meeting the goals set by the United Nations, such as reducing extreme poverty by half by 2015 and a sustained average gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate of above 7 per cent per annum for the next 15 years.

Although such goals are noble, and much of the analysis of the causes of Africa's problems is correct, the program contained in the NEPAD document contradicts these goals and its own analysis.

The NEPAD document correctly observes that "For centuries, Africa has been integrated into the world economy mainly as a supplier of cheap labour and cheap raw materials. Of necessity this has meant the draining of Africa's resources rather than their use for the continent's development." (par. 19) It also acknowledges that "globalization has increased the ability of the strong to advance their interests to the detriment of the weak, especially in the areas of trade, finance and technology." (par. 33) The program goes on to call for even more integration into the global economy. "The objective is to bridge existing gaps between Africa and the developed countries so as to improve the continent's international competitiveness and to enable her to participate in the globalisation process." (par. 98)

NEPAD proposes to prepare Africa for "genuine integration into the global economy" by creating the "right" kind of conditions through "good governance," understood as involving Western-style elections, an opening up to foreign investment and a withdrawal of the state from many regulatory and social functions.

The key priority of NEPAD is to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in energy, agriculture, communications and human resources. Ambassador Robert Fowler, appointed by Prime Minister Chrétien to steer NEPAD through the G8 Summit, has summarized the chief thrust of NEPAD by saying "It's about putting into place the conditions that will allow investment to come to Africa."

In order to achieve the ambitious development and growth targets on their own in the long term, African leaders are asking for significant increases in aid and debt relief to the tune of US $64 billion per year in order to build the infrastructure necessary to attract investment. In return, African governments pledge good governance and respect for human rights.

How Are Africans Responding to NEPAD?

The NEPAD document has provoked an unprecedented and intense debate about the problems besetting the continent and the solutions proposed. A conference held in Accra, Ghana, in April 2002 drew together over 80 academics and NGOs from across the continent. And, on May 4-5, 2002, CIDA invited over 130 Africans and 400 Canadians to Montreal for a consultation on NEPAD. The message which is being repeated through all of these analyses and consultations can be summarized in three points:

1) NEPAD provides a welcome opportunity to engage in a serious discussion about the problems facing Africa. Africans, civil society and governments, must be the ones to diagnose the problems and propose the solutions.
2) The process by which the NEPAD was developed is deeply flawed. African leaders did not consult their people in the process of drafting the document. Before NEPAD is implemented there must first be a consultation process of African governments with their people.
3) While the analysis of Africa's problems has some merit, the proposed solutions are deeply flawed. As the statement of civil society participants to the CIDA meeting declared: "The economic strategy at the heart of the NEPAD is based on the discredited package of IMF/World Bank–inspired economic policies that have been implemented by African countries for the past two decades with disastrous effects for their economies."

At the centre of the often intense debate is whether opening up the continent to further trade and investment will lead to true human-centred development. A number of analyses have pointed out that Africa, far from being marginalized from the global economy, is more integrated than any other region of the world. After 21 years of structural adjustment, Africa exports nearly 30 per cent more today than it did in 1980 but the prices that it

receives for these exports have fallen by 40 per cent over the same period. Thus Africans produce more for the external market but receive less for their labours. Implementing NEPAD will only further this kind of exploitative integration. What Africa needs to do is to develop its internal markets for its products first by developing industries that process raw goods into finished products. This strategy requires that governments protect industries until they can compete in the global economy, a strategy that every modern industrialized economy has pursued at an earlier stage of development. Structural adjustment policies and now the World Trade Organization rules prohibit African countries from pursuing such a strategy.

African participants at the CIDA consultation in Montreal were particularly critical of the fact that NEPAD ignores the place of women in economic development and the gender issues that are at the heart of the feminization of poverty. Women are heavily involved in subsistence agriculture in Africa and in the provision of health care, education and water. Yet the threat to women posed by export-oriented plantation crops and the privatization of social services is nowhere acknowledged.

NEPAD's proposal for debt relief represents a significant step backwards from what the Jubilee movement in Africa and internationally continues to demand: 100 per cent cancellation of low-income country debts without structural adjustment conditions, plus the assessment and cancellation of illegitimate debts that have their origin in apartheid and military dictatorships. The NEPAD accepts the framework for debt relief offered by the G8 known as the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative (this comes with many harsh conditions attached and has yielded very little actual relief from the debt servicing burden of the poorest countries, 'most of which are in Africa).

NEPAD's critique of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) is very weak: "The structural adjustment programmes provided only a partial solution. They promoted reforms that tended to remove serious price distortions, but gave inadequate attention to the provision of social services. As a consequence, only a few countries managed to achieve sustainable higher growth under these programmes." (par. 24)

African civil society groups go much farther and deeper in their criticism of SAPs. They joined the World Bank and several national governments in a five-year project known as the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network. The SAPRIN study concludes that SAPs have significantly increased hunger, stagnation and poverty throughout the continent. SAPs promote export crops at the expense of food self-reliance, reduce effective demand through imposing spending cutbacks and cause unemployment through unilateral trade liberalization. SAPs have led to the privatization of such essential services as clean water, and made health care and education inaccessible to the poor due to insistence on user fees.[12]

The South African Churches reach a similar conclusion in their assessment of NEPAD. They praise the initiative for containing some important "mustard seeds" that contain signs of hope, especially if it can mobilize efforts towards reconstruction and development. However, the South African Churches condemn NEPAD for its continued attachment to a development model that has already proved disastrous for the continent:

> NEPAD fails to offer any alternative to the dominant market fundamentalist development model that places unquestioning faith in uncontrolled, private sector led, rapid economic growth as the answer to the problem of rampant poverty, despite the evidence that this strategy in fact deepens poverty, increases unemployment, and widens inequality in the short and medium term, while making national economies extremely vulnerable to speculative capital and "market sentiment." NEPAD in fact promotes a market-driven strategy as the solution to Africa's problems, effectively sacrificing the poor who are here now for some uncertain end in the distant future. (*Unblurring the Vision*, 21)

Entrenching NEPAD

Neither African leaders nor the G8 have paid any heed to the deep concerns expressed by churches and NGO groups about NEPAD. The newly reconstituted African Union has officially endorsed NEPAD and the Canadian government remains an ardent supporter. During a trade mission to Africa led by Canada's Trade Minister, Pierre Pettigrew, in November 2002, Canada announced a $100 million fund out of the aid budget to promote Canadian business links with Africa. Canadian NGOs have criticized this direction of using the Canadian aid budget to further Canadian corporate interests in Africa. Clearly the continent is open for exploitation and Canadian companies are more than willing to oblige with the assistance of the Canadian government. This orientation parallels in many respects the direction of

U.S. aid policy. The Bush administration also announced in November a $5 billion fund that will operate outside of the aid framework for countries that are committed to democracy and following "free market principles."

Yet, as Northern countries move to entrench the NEPAD framework into their aid policies, a growing movement in many African countries of civil society is rejecting NEPAD's economic framework and calling on their leaders to engage in a true consultation.

Dr. Molefe Tsele, General Secretary of the South Africa Council of Churches, spoke for many of African civil society groups when he addressed the Ministerial Round Table of the UN International Conference on Financing for Development at Monterrey, Mexico:

> We cannot allow this new pan-African dream to fail. To that end, we want to caution our leaders never to build the success or failure of [an African] recovery plan on the support they receive from the donor countries. We call on them to do their homework at home amongst African people first. They must assess what they can generate from their people, poor as they may be. They must take their people seriously, sell the concept amongst them before they travel the capitals of the world parading project proposals for their dream. We are saying to our African leaders, the recovery of Africa is an African business. Work with us. We will determine when and how the donors will get involved. To that end, the New Partnership for Africa's Recovery, NEPAD, is premature. It is a partnership with African leaders without African people.

The South African Churches conclude their assessment of NEPAD by issuing a challenge both to the North as well as to the church: "The skewed power relations between rich and poor limit the possibility of transforming global structures into just and caring systems. This remains the biggest challenge to Africa's reconstruction and development. The church must proclaim the good news that a better life is possible for Africa's people." (*Unblurring the Vision,* 27)

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1 South African Catholic Bishops' Conference and the South African Council of Churches, "Unblurring the Vision: An Assessment of the New Partnership for Africa's Development by South African Churches," Johannesburg, 2002, 9.

2 Final Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS of the 26th United Nations General Assembly Special Session, 27 June 2001.

3 Rural Poverty Report 2001, United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development; see www.un.org.

4 *Africa Recovery*, Vol.16, no.1, April 2002.

5 For over fifteen years the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have attached conditions to the granting of loans and, more recently, debt relief. In the past, these conditions consisted of packages of reforms known as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which required countries to focus on two things: reducing government spending and increasing export earnings.

6 United Nations Development Programme; see www.un.org.

7 *The Vicious Circle: AIDS & Third World Debt,* World Development Movement, June 2001; see www.wdm.org.uk .

8 "Between 1957 and 1995 the US provided $22 bn of aid to sub-Saharan Africa, of which $5 bn went to Zaire under Mobutu, Somalia under Siad Barre, Sudan under Numeiry, and Liberia, mostly under Doe. That aid was lost. But the US was not alone, There had been problems with Swedish aid in Tanzania, Belgian aid in Zaire, Italian aid in Somalia and many other examples." Carol Lancaster on the critical role of donors as decision makers on the purposes of aid, and as the designers, implementers and evaluators of that aid. Carol Lancaster is a former Deputy Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and currently a professor at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Quoted in *Africa Recovery*, Vol. 13, no.2-3, September 1999 – part of special feature on UN Economic Commission for Africa conference "Financing for Development"; see www.un.org.

9 New Partnership for African Development, 2001, see www.nepad.org.

10 Government of Canada, "Securing Progress for Africa and the World: Canadian Priorities for the 2002 G8 Summit," (Government Response to the Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade), Ottawa, 2002, Foreword.

11 "Securing Progress," 7.

12 For more information on the SAPRIN process see www.saprin.org.

Power and Peril

On March 21, 2002, Douglas R. Letson, co-author (with Michael Higgins) of Power and Peril: The Catholic Church at the Crossroads *(HarperCollins, 2002), gave a lecture on the topic of his book at the Centre for Catholic Experience of St. Jerome's College in Waterloo, Ontario. His presentation brought out the complex reality of the Catholic Church doing good and, alas, also doing evil in today's world. The following text is an excerpt from his lecture.*

Power and Peril springs from a mutually held conviction that the well-being of the church as Catholic and Christian has a vital role to play in a society which is increasingly skeptical about the power of institutionalized religion, suspicious of authority and perilously individualistic. We argue that the church has a tremendous potential to be a power for good, if only it will exercise that power in a manner consistent with the best of its own traditions and gospel values. It is worth noting here that during their deliberations at the Second Vatican Council the Council Fathers recognized that the church is an imperfect institution that needs always to be engaged in a process of reformation. *Ecclesia semper reformanda* is the exhortatory phrase that appears in the Council's Decree on Ecumenism, *Nostra aetate*. These men also urged the laity to contribute to that process according to their gifts and their expertise.

Writing about the power of the church can be a perilous undertaking for a number of reasons: in the first instance, there is the possibility that our opinions may be identified with St. Jerome's University as institution rather than with Higgins and me as individual scholars; secondly, we may be misunderstood, misrepresented, or possibly quoted out of context – our critics may do a text-proofing on our arguments by judiciously extracting phrases or sentences in an effort to support their personal agenda. *Power and Peril* needs to be read as a whole, including the introduction which outlines our qualifications and our intentions. Thirdly, there is always the danger that, for some of our readers, we may be a source of scandal rather than of service – of course, even documents emanating from the Vatican have at times become a cause for scandal for some of their readers; fourth, by reflecting on and writing about the perils of power, we may inevitably emerge with our own radically altered opinions about the life of the church and about life itself – but that, of course, is the object of honest research and ought, in fact, to be a by-product of all our lives lived as creatures endowed with reason.

In our quest to understand who we are as Catholics and where our church is headed, Higgins and I have been privileged to go where few have been able to go before us and we have had the enviable opportunity to converse formally with literally hundreds of impressive and challenging individuals in 25 or 30 different countries. One cannot go where we have gone and meet those whom we have met without having one's own views challenged, refined and matured. We have seen the power of the church exercised in all its variant forms, from the inner sanctum to the inner city. At times, we have been (or I at least have been) scandalized by the thrones of ecclesiastical influence and, as Jesuit Father Dean Brackley of the University of Central America in San Salvador cautioned one would, I have had my heart broken by the poor in Central America and in the Caribbean. As a result, a brief sharing of some of these encounters may well be instructive insofar as they pertain to the question of ecclesial power.

Power and Peril in Central America

Undoubtedly the most formative experiences for me flow from my research in Central America and the Caribbean, especially in Nicaragua, San Salvador and Jamaica, where I was able to experience first-hand the impact of power, political and ecclesiastical.

I have been to Managua twice, the first time in 1985 and the second in 1992. In 1985 I made the trip with Father Norm Choate who was then the president of St. Jerome's and a citizen of the United States. Choate was shocked by the level of poverty in Nicaragua and depressed at the thought that a government from so wealthy a country as the United States, his government, was engaged in a subversive war against a people most of whom were living in depressingly desperate straits. He was also dismayed to hear the constant reports of the alleged alliance between Pope John Paul II and President Ronald Reagan in their purported joint effort to topple what had been declared by Western propaganda to be

a communist (and therefore a repressive) government. Yet all around us were signs of the corruption of the Somoza regime which the U.S. had supported and the Sandinistas had overthrown; all around us too were signs of a Sandinista-inspired social reconstruction which was underway in an effort to improve the lot of the poor.

One of the many interviews in which I was involved in 1985 was with Fernando Cardenal, Jesuit priest, one-time university professor of philosophy, Minister of Education in the Sandinista Government, and mastermind behind the Crusade for Literacy, the Sandinista literacy program which had worked miracles to educate the illiterate campesino population so they might participate meaningfully in a democratic Nicaragua, a project that was so successful that it became a template for programs of its sort in other Third World countries. For Fernando the Crusade for Literacy was a response to the gospel imperative to teach the uninformed as well as to Ignatius Loyola's directive to the Jesuits to educate the *rudi*, the ignorant. Fernando, like his brother priest/poet Ernesto who was the Minister for Culture for Nicaragua, lived under the threat of assassination. Like his brother Ernesto, like Jesuit economist Xabier Gorostiaga who was helping to shape the economic recovery of Nicaragua, like Maryknoll priest and Minister of Foreign Affairs Miguel d'Escoto, Fernando was under heavy pressure from Pope John Paul to withdraw from active participation in the government.

One hint of at least a common interest between pope and president is implied in a CIA briefing document, "Psychological Operations in Guerrilla Warfare," which was presented to the Security Council of the United Nations on October 22, 1984, and which was designed to undermine the Sandinista government. Outlining the means guerrilla propagandists might use in the process of destabilization, the authors counsel fostering "Indignation ... over the participation of priests such as Escoto and Cardenal in the Sandinista government, against the explicit orders of his Holiness, the Pope." (p. 20) One might well ask why United States interests would want to foster such indignation. And if the CIA felt that d'Escoto and Cardenal were troublesome members of the Nicaraguan government it should not be surprising that all four clerics saw their roles as essential contributions to the promotion of "the preferential option for the poor," knowing that there simply was no one in Nicaragua who was trained to replace them. As a result, they refused to step down. Rome reacted. Fernando found himself dismissed from the Society of Jesus, d'Escoto's priestly faculties were suspended by the Vatican, and Ernesto was publicly scolded with the menacing wave of a finger by Pope John Paul as Ernesto knelt before him on the tarmac in Managua during the pope's 1983 visit to Nicaragua.

Parenthetically, the CIA directive against 'Cardenal' is not specific and could also have had Ernesto in mind since the Minister of Culture had his own troublesome history. During the dark days of the Somoza regime, Ernesto had formed a base community on the island of Solentiname in Lake Nicaragua to conscientize the campesinos as to the power of the Bible as a voice for liberation, but, recognizing the inherent dangers posed by liberation theology, Somoza had ordered his Nicaraguan National Guard to ravage Solentiname in October of 1977, some twenty months before he was forced to flee his country.

But I meant my example to centre on Fernando Cardenal. When I returned to Managua with Higgins in 1992 for research on *The Jesuit Mystique*, we asked about Fernando and were told that when Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, the Jesuit superior general, informed Fernando that he had to dismiss him from the Order, Kolvenbach asked Fernando if there was anything he could do to soften the blow. Fernando replied: "Please tell my mother that I am not a bad priest." The story has more the air of the hagiographic than the factual; as a result, when Higgins and I interviewed Kolvenbach at Canisius College in Buffalo the following spring we asked him if the report was accurate, and he assured us that it was.

The power of Rome. The same power that is widely acclaimed as the impetus for good in the rise of Solidarity in Poland and the ultimate dismantling of the Communist bloc in Eastern Europe.

One other comment on Nicaragua. The cathedral in downtown Managua (and I use the word downtown non-descriptively since there is no downtown) was destroyed in a punishing earthquake which hit the city in 1972. Money from all over the world poured into the country to deal with the devastating aftermath. Somoza pocketed a good bit of the aid. The ruins, including those of the cathedral, still stand as a silent witness to the corruption of the past. Several Jesuits in Nicaragua assured us that when, during the 1980s, the then Archbishop and now Cardinal Obando y Bravo decided to replace the damaged cathedral, the Jesuits offered one of their large churches in Managua to the archbishop for $1. Y Bravo refused, and when I was there in 1992 a huge fortress-

like block stone cathedral was rising incongruously in the midst of the desperately poor barrios whose clapboard and rubber-tire dwellings constitute perhaps 90 per cent of Managua. An uncomfortable symbol of power amongst a powerless people.

When Choate and I first arrived in Managua we were booked into a hotel in the midst of the slums. We took one look at our surroundings and begged the cab driver to find us a place more in tune with our North American expectations. It was an experience Higgins and I were to repeat at Santa Tecla, a Jesuit seminary just outside San Salvador and virtually adjacent to a military encampment – or at least that was the impression we received from the presence of so many military with automatic weapons. Our accommodations had been arranged for us by a Jesuit whom I had met in Nicaragua, Dean Brackley, who had joined the faculty at the University of Central America in San Salvador after government troops had murdered six of the Jesuit faculty at the University, their housekeeper, and the housekeeper's daughter on November 16, 1989. Unable to breathe in the sweltering heat of our modest room, I walked the night in the courtyard and sat for hours in the chapel. We moved out in the morning, shamefaced. Yet there are priests and nuns from the First World who are living in similar conditions on an ongoing daily basis.

At the University of Central America where we conducted a number of interviews we were invited to view the memorial book of the six Jesuits martyred for working on behalf of the poor, and the housekeeper and her daughter who had sought refuge with the priests during a night of aggressive military activity. Their heads had been partly blown away. I couldn't look at the pictures. Later that day the husband of the murdered housekeeper showed us the rose bushes he had planted at the site where the blood of the eight victims had soaked into the ground.

In San Salvador we had a first-hand view of the power of the church for good, not just at the university but in the chapel where conservative priest turned social activist Archbishop Oscar Romero was murdered as he celebrated mass, and at various sites throughout the city where the innocent had given up their lives. Our interview with our interpreter in San Salvador, Sister Laetitia Bordes, was conducted in a garden where we were unlikely to be overheard or our conversation intercepted: she was an activist working with the campesinos in the hills, and she too had received telephoned death threats. Higgins and I also stayed several nights in Kingston, Jamaica, where we received a warm welcome from the Jesuits at St. Peter Claver church located in the midst of an oppressive slum. The pastor and a graduate of St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Jesuit Jim Webb, gave up his bed for me and slept instead somewhere in the church. For most of the night I lay awake listening to the barking of dogs. The following day, Webb walked us through his parish of ramshackle houses and persistent scenes of punishing poverty. As part of their outreach to the poor, the Jesuits were taking Pius XI's concept of the self-help cooperative out into the countryside and outlying towns both as a means of generating employment as well as instilling a sense of hope into a people sadly in need of hope. One of their number was Martin Royackers, a Canadian Jesuit who was murdered last June while helping to establish just such a co-operative.

The power of the church for good.

Douglas R. Letson

Douglas R. Letson is a professor of English Literature and past President at St. Jerome's University in the University of Waterloo, ON, the author of numerous articles and interviews, and the co-author of several books.

Women's Religious Communities in Quebec

Could a report on the current situation of women's religious communities be anything but a posthumous homage? Like the title of the recent documentary, a new *Adieu mes soeurs*?[1] In recent times, the sale of convents and even mother houses to real estate developers has been making the headlines. Could this be a portent of the general collapse of communities? It would be a mistake to think so. I have met with religious, and in the language of sociologists, I went back over the same ground. Twenty years ago, I had travelled from one mother house to another throughout Quebec seeking documents and statements to piece together the great era of women's communities from 1900 to 1970.[2] That time is long past.

A New Era

It is common knowledge that communities have changed since 1970. They have turned over to the laity a large part of the educational, social and health care services for which they traditionally assumed responsibility. The post-conciliar Church wished it thus. In any case, the new Quebec society born of the Quiet Revolution demanded it. What is more, community numbers had declined, departures having multiplied over the preceding decade. For the first time, the sisters turned to new types of employment. Some became salaried employees, others changed jobs, many acquired new training. New works were born in fields of action not supported by the state or Church services. A new era was beginning, but vocations did not follow, and since then, the communities have grown old, terribly old.

Statistics from the Canadian Religious Conference provide a picture of the demographic situation.[3] Currently, there are approximately 15,000 women religious in Quebec. This is a significant number, exactly the same as in 1911.[4] At that time, Quebec communities were beginning the ascending phase of their development, which reached its peak in the 1960s with a population of 40,000 members. However, in 1911, over half the sisters were under the age of 40, whereas today, the average age is close to 74. Barely 1,000 religious are under the age of 55. Furthermore, recruitment is very low but available data cannot provide an exact assessment. In January 2000 for example, there were between 60 and 70 postulants and novices in Quebec communities. However, very few persevere to the end and pronounce their vows. And hundreds of religious die each year. The decline therefore appears irreversible. A study conducted by the firm of Samson Bélair predicts that if the demographic trend continues, communities will be completely extinct by 2035.[5]

In an ordinary organization, a large company, a federation of trade unions or a university, such conditions would lead to a series of resignations, questioning of authority and decreased productivity. An atmosphere of moroseness and pessimism would prevail, and morale would be at its lowest point. Although I knew that sisters were resolute and courageous, I certainly did not expect them to talk to me as they did, with enthusiasm about the present and even the future. I was unable to hide my astonishment. "What did you think," one of them asked me, not without a hint of irony, "that we would sit idly by, with our arms crossed waiting for death?" The year 2035 has not yet arrived; it is still far in the future. The message is clear: religious have no intention of retiring, communities have no intention of dying.

The advertising slogan "freedom at 55" is not greatly in evidence in convents. Depending on their capacities, religious work to an advanced age and statistics show that only one-third are actually retired. Active religious, therefore, represent two-thirds of the numbers. However, a significant proportion of these active religious work within their communities where they are needed for administrative duties or services the community provides to its members. Only a quarter of religious work outside their communities. It is they who are the most directly involved in the "mission," although all the others are involved and contribute in their own way. It is clear however that the mission cannot survive without the help of the laity.

Redefining the Mission

The mission represents the work that is characteristic of a community, work that is inspired by the spirit of its foundation, i.e., its "charism." In this respect, a second retraining has taken place over the past ten years. Communities have redefined their mission by prioritizing actions and statements that contribute to justice and soli-

darity. This approach is in keeping with the progressive movement within the Church inspired by liberation theology, and to a larger extent, by the "option for the poor." A number of communities have become radically committed to this course. It is convincingly reflected in their "mission statements" and the declarations of the associations that represent them, such as the Quebec section of the Canadian Religious Conference. Its web site is particularly eloquent on this issue.[6] The vocabulary of communities has changed. Astonishingly, it resembles that of the left. The agenda includes participating in the transformation of society, acting on behalf of those who are excluded and oppressed, contributing to the resolution of Third World problems and preservation of the ecosystem. How can these positions of principle be put into practice? I was told that in each community, the sisters have reflected on these issues and discussed them, and as a result, various responses have taken root.

A number of communities have rediscovered their mission with women whose action for liberation they felt compelled to support, in their own way. Thus, safe houses for women in difficulty or victims of violence, day centres and organizations providing support for single mothers have opened their doors. The same holds true for the educational mission. Some career teachers have designed creative projects for working-class children such as after-school programs, help with homework, spiritual initiation for younger children, reflection workshops on violence in society, as well as support for adolescents experiencing problems at school. Work with the disadvantaged takes several forms, from large undertakings such as soup kitchens and shelters to the simple presence of a few religious in the core of an underprivileged neighbourhood, in a low-cost housing project or a small regional community. This presence may extend to volunteer service in parishes or community organizations. The mission to the sick and the elderly remains relevant: pastoral ministry in hospitals, visits to homes or drop-in centres, support for "deinstitutionalized" psychiatric patients, etc. The work of Quebec communities in developing countries should not be overlooked. I was told that missionary action nowadays finds its inspiration in a new perspective, focused on witnessing instead of proselytizing, and strives to contribute actively to development efforts.

The recent participation by communities and their members in citizen action is undoubtedly one of their more surprising initiatives. The struggle to change the living conditions of women, disadvantaged people, individuals in difficulty and people in developing countries will also be carried out in the political arena from now on. Indeed, in recent years, sisters have been involved in all demonstrations, signed all petitions, participated in all consultation committees and all coalitions dealing with issues related to justice and social progress. "Among 1,000 demonstrators," a religious told me, "you will always find 100 sisters." Who would have believed it? Ten thousand sisters signed the petition promoting the anti-poverty bill. A large number took part in the World March of Women. The Quebec section of the Canadian Religious Conference conducted studies and presented position papers on various social interest topics, most recently on forests. To maximize the impact of their analyses and recommendations, communities often choose to join forces with national and international groups and networks that campaign in favour of change. "What is happening at the present time is important for the fate of humanity," affirms one religious, "and our communities can no longer remain on the sidelines."

The example comes from the top: participants at the meeting of the International Union of Women Superiors General in Rome last May placed particular emphasis on issues such as Third World debt, the planetary ecosystem, and the sexual slavery of women and children. This all-out commitment leaves me somewhat perplexed. It is obvious that the reputation of religious for conservatism has undergone a change, but is it really a priority for communities to become involved in every economic and political debate? Yet they understand their mission as a contemporary form of discipleship.

Co-operation with Lay Women

The harvest is abundant, as shown, but the labourers are too few. To offset this problem, communities are resorting to a salaried or volunteer workforce that is female for the most part. On the one hand, managers and employees of several charitable institutions are paid by the community, which has majority representation on a board of directors. This type of organization is increasingly common. I was assured, however, that "although the charities will be managed differently, the spirit will remain the same." On the other hand, a large number of volunteers are working with religious, as colleagues or associates. To some extent, they represent a reserve army on which certain hopes are pinned at present. They include former pupils of the sisters (sometimes with their spouses), former novices, individuals seeking a form of spiritual support from the community, retired

persons, young people who are occasionally remunerated. Some communities have designed a "mission training" program for these individuals. Other communities experiment with new social or pastoral projects that are carried out entirely or partially by colleagues or associates at home or abroad. The problem of ageing, however, could result in the failure of these initiatives, since the majority of laypersons involved are roughly the same age as the active sisters.

To ensure continuation of the mission, communities wish to associate with groups at the grass-roots level that are working outside the usual field of activity of religious. Sisters spoke passionately about this new direction. According to some, these community groups are "sources of life" where "new voices are being heard," where "new initiatives are formulated." [...] "Here in Quebec, solidarity, social justice and peace are happening outside the Church. These are the groups that are now caring for the excluded and looking out for the needs of the community; so this is where we should invest our efforts." [...] "People (from working-class environments) no longer go to church, so we have to be where the institutional Church is no longer reaching its people." They do not appear to distrust the state, which certainly reaches its people, and whose predatory shadow hovers over the community movement. It is nevertheless true that the stakes in this new policy of the communities could very well be the sharing, between Church and state, of a certain influence over these sectors. Will community groups thus become the legitimate heirs of Quebec communities?

Making and Donating Money

They affirm that they wish to transmit a dual heritage: money and "values." Communities have already been redistributing part of their financial capital for a number of years. During 2000–2001, Quebec community organizations received the sum of $2.5 million in donations to help carry out various projects. Created by the Quebec section of the Canadian Religious Conference, the committee that sets priorities for donations analyzes requests sent to the communities (approximately 500 annually) and makes recommendations for their acceptance or rejection, based on explicit criteria: the groups must not be financed by the state; they must work in the service of the underprivileged and defend their rights; their approach must be based on the participation of these individuals in striving to make them independent; the donation must also be used in a perspective of social transformation and have an impact on the community. It seems to me that most of these conditions do not appear to differ significantly from those imposed by the various government or non-governmental assistance agencies. People (and even countries) are now expected to change their mentality, improve their situation and, especially, make themselves independent of assistance. What happens, however, to those who are unable to do so for all sorts of reasons? Who will bear the responsibility for failure? Some projects selected by the communities require a financial partnership. For example, a dozen communities have joined together to buy the Maison Parent-Roback in Old Montreal. These premises will house 12 to 16 national women's associations and networks. At the instigation of the communities, the Mouvement Desjardins joined in this transaction by agreeing to a 20-year loan.

Everyone requests money from the communities and they donate a considerable amount. On the one hand, they make significant international donations. On the other, their support for many types of organizations and projects within the Church represents a very sizeable amount of money. They generously support the Missionary Benefit Society and the national secretariats of Catholic Action and World Youth Days, to name just a few. Religious education alone, in the context created by the new educational secularity, requires that the Church implement a large number of projects in which communities are preparing to invest $19 million, as requested by the bishops. Each community also supports its own works and inter-community projects that benefit from common funding. For example, a network consisting of volunteers and salaried employees is currently being formed to make home visits to the sick in several regions. For this project, 10 to 12 communities will join in providing $5 million in start-up capital. In a single year, in Quebec alone, communities distributed as much as $40 to $50 million. What is the source of this money?

It has its own history. When the communities withdrew from their institutions after 1960, many religious continued to be employed by these same institutions. The salaries they earned for their communities generated considerable savings. It costs very little to meet the needs of religious since they have long practised what is now called voluntary simplicity. As well, a number of communities sold buildings they owned (colleges, hospitals, hospices, orphanages, etc.) to the state or public agencies, at prices below their real value, but which nevertheless represented significant amounts. They invested

the proceeds of these transactions during the 1970s and 1980s, at relatively high interest rates, taking care to diversify their portfolios and protect their funds. In addition, the communities have received, and still receive, donations from individuals, private companies, non-governmental agencies such as Share Life and others. They also conduct fundraising for some of their works that are popular with the public.

Most communities are legally recognized charities to which the three levels of government grant tax exemption. In other words, they do not pay property taxes. On the other hand, they are financially independent; they support their members and assume full responsibility for elderly, sick or disabled sisters. Their infirmaries and residences for short- or long-term care are not subsidized by the state, although the cost of the salaries and infrastructures required is very high. The provincial government has considered an offer of help in this area but the sisters prefer to do without. For a number of years, some communities, at their own expense, have taken in several, very small communities without resources whose members are too old to support themselves.

An increasing number of communities will be forced to sell their houses because they are too vast and costly to maintain. These sales could be precipitated by a recent provincial government decision to impose on religious buildings the same safety standards that apply to public buildings. The changes required are very costly. In several cases they involve buildings that had just been renovated to conform to previous standards. Some communities will make the necessary changes; many others will have to give up their properties. Real estate developers or the province will merely need to buy the buildings.

It is not rare these days to see small communities that are obliged to disperse. One example among many others is that of a group of cloistered sisters who sold their very old and only monastery to start up a modest foundation at the end of a deserted concession road in a remote area of the Beauce. The most elderly of their sisters had been taken in by another community, in Charlevoix. As for large communities, they are obliged to restructure and organize themselves on a new base. These decisions are taken, I am assured, after careful consideration and of a common accord. But they are painful nonetheless. "Dealing with ageing while remaining faithful to the mission" as one religious said, is a heavy responsibility for those who are in charge of their communities.

Quebec's women religious are brilliant managers, and they have passed on this know-how from one generation to the next. In the days when women were excluded from the world of business, they built an empire to successfully pursue their charitable works. They achieved this by investing and borrowing on the financial markets (even issuing their own shares), by mortgaging buildings to build others; by receiving legacies and donations; by using profits taken from the rich in the service of the poor; by wresting grants, fees and subsidies from a state that was miserly with social policies. The situation has changed, as have the communities, but not as much as one might think. The machine is still running at full speed.

The place of communities in the financial world is therefore not marginal. Outside this context, certain terms religious use could shock – investment, profitability, marketing, financial partnership, exportable project, and so on. They contrast with the humanitarian terminology of the mission statements. An example is the avant-garde role of the communities in the recent movement for the social accountability of companies. This is a militant assembly whose members refuse to invest in businesses that do not respect the dignity of persons or the environment. As shareholders, they are also striving to impose recognition of the social purposes of investment, particularly in developing countries.

Future Expectations

What are the values that are part of the heritage? Those of the gospel, affirm my spokespersons. "The gospel values are held by many people, but they do not name or identify them as such." The same would hold true for justice, dignity of the person, solidarity. However, they do not mention charity and love of neighbour, perhaps out of modesty. Intrigued by this silence, I ask them if there is a specific way, peculiar to religious, to approach those who are suffering, a way to turn one's attention to misery. They hesitate, having difficulty defining what undoubtedly concerns private life: "It is an integral part of what we are," "It is part of giving our lives." Are there any today who are prepared to give their lives? For whom, and how? This is the major problem of vocations the communities are facing – in Northern countries, it should be noted, for in the South, in the former countries of the mission, recruitment is not a problem.

Multinationals well before their time, Quebec communities now have novices and young professed sisters in a large number of countries, on all continents. The succession is assured, but it is elsewhere: in Brazil, Cameroon, Japan, Vietnam, etc. In some cases, these

sisters from outside Quebec will soon form the majority, a situation which could change the face of their communities. One thing seems certain: the future of the communities is not in Quebec, at least for the time being. A number of reasons are cited to explain the absence of vocations, which is more marked here than in France, for example, or in the United States.

Women have won new freedom and independence. In the current social context, long-term commitment raises fears, and rupture with the dominant lifestyle is difficult. Indeed, as one religious explains, "To enter a community is to enroll in a tradition, an ecosystem; it is a whole, you cannot remove pieces. You have to acquire a new identity." She adds that it is necessary "to reconcile freedom with the force of a tradition," a challenge that is difficult to face. In addition, young women have a very critical perception of the Church as an institution, and in particular, the status of women in the Church, which is corroborated by the greater number of male vocations. The communities are perceived as a cog in the ecclesial machine. For some women religious, the Church therefore seems, paradoxically, to be an obstacle to vocations.

In their current form, the communities themselves would not hold any attraction for women 20, 30 or 40 years old. "In former times, if women were generous, if they wished to devote their lives to others, they committed themselves through the vows. Today, like-minded young women would be militants in a progressive organization," says one religious. It should be remembered that in these age groups, practising Catholics are in the minority. However, according to the sisters, young women who associate with sisters in the mission are happy to work with them. They would nevertheless be very reluctant to share the lives of religious, to enter into an "old people's" world. "What we are proposing to them today is our way of life. They are not interested."

Some religious have no hesitation in doing so, like the sister who proposes, as an example, "gathering together young women who wish to work with us, who share our vision, so that they can develop their own way of making community," as "a shoot develops beside the tree." Making community could mean living alone or within small, related groups "in the world" or "in close proximity to the world." It would be a "life full of risk, a life on the fringes, in the desert, on the frontiers of protest," affirmed another religious, who added, "The institution would not be the centre." Priority would be given to the needs of people, to those who have no one to speak for them, those who are defenceless. Is this utopia, or a return to the origins of the communities? Many of them have their origins in small groups of women who joined together simply to help their neighbours. Frequently, against their will, Church representatives imposed on them a canonical organization with vows, rules, constitutions, etc. These foundresses left their mark on more than three centuries of the country's history. Will there be anyone to emulate them in the twenty-first century? From what source will the new generation draw its inspiration?

Nicole Laurin

Dr. Nicole Laurin, professor of sociology at the Université de Montréal, is the co-author of the study *À la recherche d'un monde oublié. Les communautés religieuses de femmes au Québec de 1900 à 1970* (Montreal: Le Jour, 1991). The French original of this article, which was published in *Relations* (June 2002), has been translated into English by Mme Ursula des Marteau.

1 *Adieu mes soeurs*, scenario by Denise Bombardier, directed by Paul Bourgault. Les productions Avanti. Telefilm Canada, 2000.

2 See Nicole Laurin, Danielle Juteau and Lorraine Duchesne, *À la recherche d'un monde oublié. Les communautés religieuses de femmes au Québec de 1900 à 1970* (Montreal: Le Jour, 1991).

3 "Statistics from the Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Canada to January 1, 2000." Document from the Canadian Religious Conference, Ottawa. These statistics group all Canadian data. Quebec statistics should be calculated by approximation.

4 Demographic data from 1911 to 1960 are from *À la recherche d'un monde oublié. Les communautés religieuses de femmes au Québec de 1900 à 1970.*

5 Samson, Bélair, Deloitte & Touche, *Projections démographiques, rapport sommaire*. Document from the Canadian Religious Conference, Ottawa, January 26, 2001.

6 Canadian Religious Conference, Quebec Region: www.crcq.qc.ca.

On the Crisis in the Catholic Church

Preparing this talk on the crisis in the Church over the sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy has been a troubling experience. I found the topic depressing. At this particular time, I am rather proud of the Catholic hierarchy and the Vatican for criticizing President Bush's military policies and pronouncing an undisguised No to a pre-emptive strike against Iraq. The pope and the bishops have defended Islam as a religion of peace and advocated "the dialogue of civilizations" against the right-wing theory widely held in the U.S.A. of "the clash of civilizations." I am unhappy that the sexual abuse scandals have distracted Catholics from the Church's bold teaching and have reduced the Church's credibility in society.

In Boston: Protest Against Clericalism

My gloom was influenced in part by my encounter with Catholics in Boston who were very angry with their archbishops. Two weeks ago, on October 11, 2002, after a lecture I gave at Boston College commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Vatican Council II, members of the audience discussed at length the sexual abuse of children in the Boston diocese and the irresponsible attitude taken by Cardinal Archbishop Law. It would appear that he had moved pedophile priests from one parish to another, in the vain hope that they would behave themselves, and when these and other scandals became public, he refused to meet with the concerned laity.

Reacting to his silence, a group of angry Catholics formed the association, "Voice of the Faithful," which held a public meeting on July 20, 2002, attended by more than 4000 concerned Catholics. One aim of this association is to persuade the Archbishop to resign. In response to this, the Archbishop told his priests not to allow "Voice of the Faithful" to hold their meetings in Catholic buildings.[1]

One of the accusations voiced in this discussion was against the clericalism present in the Catholic Church. It is, alas, quite true that the Catholic Church has no institution that obliges members of the hierarchy to engage in dialogue with the laity. There are no obligatory diocesan assemblies, nor has the Church created independent courts authorized to judge whether popes or bishops have acted in accordance with canon law. In other words, there is no division of powers in the Catholic Church: legislator, executive and judge are rolled into a single person. It is therefore no exaggeration to say that the organizational culture of the Catholic Church does not correspond to the expectations of Catholics living in modern society.

Another example of this failure is the ecclesiastical policy of secrecy. The process of decision-making and policy development remains hidden. Part of this secrecy is the practice of closed books. In modern society, organizations financed by voluntary donations are expected to open their books: justice demands that the people who contribute their money have the right to see how it is spent. The Church's present practice does not correspond to the contemporary understanding of justice. I am not suggesting that the Church should become a democracy. But as a voluntary organization in modern society, the style of its organization is at odds with today's ethos of governance. Some of its institutional practices appear unethical.

Let me add that other voices at the Boston College conference were less angry. They recognized that the sexual abuse of children is a terrible thing that in many cases produces lasting damage. People's lives have been destroyed by sexual abuse inflicted upon them in childhood. Sexual transgressions of this kind committed by priests have an added dimension: they are an abuse of confidence and hence have a certain resemblance with incest. We were told that public opinion is not aware how widely incest is spread in society. Contemporary research has demonstrated that incest is in fact practised in all classes of society: it is a major social evil. Yet families tend to be silent about it. To protect the perpetrator and the family's good name, they prefer to keep it a secret. Should we be surprised, one person asked, if, for the same reason, the Church kept child abuse by priests a secret? While this is wrong in the light of justice as we understand it today, it does correspond to the way people acted in the past.

Is it fair, one person asked, to get so angry with bishops over their silence? What is important is that bishops now change their attitude, refuse to hide child abuse committed by priests, offer their sympathy to the victims, and take appropriate measures that the immoral behaviour will stop.

Meta Reid, a religious sister from Ireland present at the Boston College conference, had just finished a doctorate at Harvard University dealing with the changing attitudes in the Church. She mentioned information made available by the Wellesley Center for Women[2] and other agencies, according to which strict silence is observed regarding the sexual abuse of minors in schools across the United States. Again, the question arises whether it is fair to the bishops to be so angry at their silence. Their silence corresponded to a bad, but commonly held cultural attitude.

The Need for Healing

The bishops are deeply embarrassed about the sex scandals: they wish to keep matters as secret as possible, hesitate to meet lay people and refuse to encounter the victims of abuse. The best policy the U.S. bishops have come up with is "zero tolerance," where a priest accused of having made sexual advances toward minors is to be dismissed. Even Rome thought that this was too harsh. In Canada, the bishops adopted better policies ten years ago. Yet stirred up by the scandals in the U.S. Church, the Canadian victims of clergy abuse have created an organization seeking dialogue with the bishops. There may be hundreds of men in this group.

A courageous effort has been made by some Canadian churches and religious congregations to respond creatively to the abuse and the cultural oppression in the residential schools. They have set up tables of reconciliation where their representatives would listen to the Aboriginal people who had suffered abuse and then offer their apologies. There was the hope that such personal encounters would facilitate repentance among the church people and the readiness to forgive among Aboriginals. Yet, if I am rightly informed, these efforts were interrupted when lawyers persuaded the Aboriginal people that they would do better if they went to court. This is in keeping with the preference for litigation characteristic of our times. Yet since litigation does not lead to reconciliation, I wonder how useful the courts will be in honouring the Aboriginal peoples and creating new relations of justice and respect between them and the church organizations. It is a sad irony that in some cases churches and religious congregations that were forced by the courts to pay very large sums of money have suffered near bankruptcy and were thus obliged to reduce their services to Aboriginal communities.

What should the bishops do in the present crisis? One proposal is that the bishops of Canada and the U.S. allow themselves to be inspired by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and set up an ecclesiastical truth and reconciliation commission to which they invite the victims of sexual abuse and at which they will listen to the stories told by these wounded men and women. Such a step would lift the process out of the arena of secrecy, give satisfaction to the victims and humanize the bishops' attitude. Such a truth commission would honour the victims and could lead to their reconciliation with the Church.

Yet I remained depressed by my preoccupation with the clerical scandals. Then, last Sunday, I went to mass in a Montreal parish where the pastor is a good friend of mine. Father John Walsh is a keen thinker and an imaginative actor. When we talked over lunch after his last mass, I discovered that John Walsh refused to be gloomy: he had a hopeful attitude; he thought that the present crisis revealed something important in the life of the Church and could lead to the creation of a new Catholic culture.

A New Catholic Culture

The present crisis, John Walsh suggested, may be a turning point in the life of the Church where we pass from one Catholic culture to another. In the past the spiritual culture promoted by the Church put the main emphasis on obedience. We were to obey the laws and rules formulated by the ecclesiastical authorities. We were not encouraged to be critical and follow the lead of our own conscience. The hierarchy tended to treat us as children: they were not interested in what we had to say; they talked down to us and made decisions affecting our lives, like good parents acting on behalf of their children. Today many Catholics still believe that their faith has to do with their personal relationship to God, and to assure that this relationship is good, they must follow obediently all rules and regulations. They still hold that faith, hope and love have nothing to do with their place in the world, their attitude towards society and their responsible action.

At the present, the regime of obedience has revealed itself as a failure. In the cultural and ethical pluralism of modern society, religion will survive only if firmly grounded in personal consciousness. Obedience to rules does not produce self-motivated adult Catholics capable of discerning the destructive and creative potential of their social world. In the past, the emphasis on obedience has led Catholics to do many wonderful things and perform great sacrifices, but it has failed to make them

into critical Christians assuming adult responsibility for their attitudes and actions.

An alternative spiritual culture, not based on obedience, was promoted by several twentieth-century Catholics, most influential among them the Belgian priest, later a cardinal, Joseph Cardijn, a leader of the Catholic Action movement. His motto was "see, judge and act." Here people of faith were asked to look at the reality before them, evaluate it in the light of the gospel, and intervene responsibly to make society conform to God's will. Since this motto did not assign a high priority to ecclesiastical obedience, participants in Catholic Action often found themselves at odds with their bishop. "See, judge and act" meant that Catholics, guided by faith in the gospel, were to develop a critical conscience and assume responsibility for their actions in society.

After Vatican Council II, followed by the return of authoritarian papal rule, an ever-growing number of Catholics are adopting the spiritual culture of see, judge and act. Their lives are defined by faith, discernment and responsibility. At certain moments, obedience to authorities is indeed necessary: this is true in all organizations. But obedience is not the guide of life. What guides these Catholics is faith, hope and love; the critical evaluation of society and culture, including the Church; and the taking of personal responsibility for their actions. Catholics do not want their bishops to speak to them like children. They are unhappy with clericalism. Still, they are eager to hear the teaching of popes and the bishops; they want to learn what the authoritative church leaders believe about the meaning and power of the Catholic faith in today's culture. But then they feel free to reflect on these messages, compare them with their own understanding of the gospel, and then make up their mind and assume personal responsibility for their actions. That this new freedom has taken place in regard to Catholic sexual ethics is widely acknowledged.

My friend Father John Walsh believes that the present crisis in the Church is an occasion for the rapid spread of the new Catholic culture. Even bishops recognize that the present troubles cannot be repaired by a renewed emphasis on obedience. Demanding that the angry Catholic laity shut up and that seminaries enforce ever stricter rules will not solve the Church's present problem. If seminary education simply represses the young men's awareness of their sexual energies, they will begin their ministry with little self-knowledge and thus be vulnerable to the power of unexpected impulses. Greater repression will makes things worse. This present crisis is a special moment for acknowledging the need for a new Catholic culture in which fidelity is not to a set of rules, but to profound personal convictions, tested again and again by the gospel. Sociological studies, reports in the Catholic press and books on contemporary spirituality reveal that the spirituality of see, judge and act is in fact widely spread in the Catholic Church.

The Church and Human Sexuality

The recent revelations of sexual abuse committed by priests raise the wider question of the Church's relation to contemporary culture and its teaching on human sexuality. When I was at Boston College, I learned that its president, Jesuit Father William Leahy, has created an interdisciplinary commission to study the hidden causes of the present crisis in the Church, in which no topic is taboo. Not to raise the deeper question would be irresponsible.

It is impossible not to raise the question whether there is a relationship between the sexual abuse committed by priests and the institution of clerical celibacy. There can be no doubt, it seems to me, that many young men enter the seminary with the desire to deal with their sexual desires by denying them. Some young men prefer not to come to self-knowledge: they do not want to know what their deep wishes are. And since seminary education aims at looking away from sexual desire, seminarians become confirmed in their lack of self-knowledge. Later on their ignorance will make them vulnerable to unexpected outbursts.

Yet I am convinced that some men and women are called to the celibate life. Since grace builds upon nature, such an inclination exists even among secular men and women. Some people committed to a single cause or a single passion feel that married life would be a hindrance to them. Such an inclination is found among scientists, philosophers, politicians, artists, labour organizers and missionaries of various causes. Jesus recognized that some of his dedicated followers will be of this kind, and Paul felt that serving the gospel was such a fulfilling undertaking that he had no space for intimate love in his life. In the Catholic Church, there have always been men and women whose desire to serve God was so strong that they looked upon marriage as an obstacle. One need not exclude the possibility that such a total dedication is related to a lack of personal talent for intimacy. In any case, there is no reason to think that the celibate option is against nature.

At the same time, celibacy is a happy condition only if one is called, only if it corresponds to a deep inclination. What has happened in the history of the Church is that celibacy was made mandatory for priests, even though there is no hint suggesting this in the New Testament. In 1 Timothy 3:2, we are told that bishops should be men married only once. There were good institutional reasons why the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages introduced obligatory celibacy for the clergy. Yet mandatory celibacy is at odds with contemporary culture for two reasons. First, there has emerged in today's culture a special appreciation of sexual love. Even in the Catholic Church, married couples – and couples that think of themselves as married – have learned to celebrate their sexual intimacy without guilt feelings. This high appreciation of sexual love, already celebrated in the Song of Songs, casts a new light on mandatory celibacy. Secondly, contemporary culture has paid a high price for the freer approach to sexual love. In capitalist societies sexuality has become commodity and entertainment; it has produced a multi-million dollar industry that in various ways invades people's feelings and imagination. In this absurdly over-heated culture, eliminating sexual activity from one's life seems a strange undertaking. The word "chastity" has come to be rarely used.

Because priesthood is presently tied to celibacy, fewer young men present themselves as candidates. What is more troubling is that many priests who entered years ago without reflecting on their sexuality have made the painful discovery that in today's culture they are unable to keep their promises. (In a more disciplined culture, pedophile priests may well have been able to practice chastity.) I think it is no secret to say that thanks to this cultural evolution, many good priests have become discretely involved in hetero- or homosexual love relations without feeling that they are compromising their ministry.

A well-respected spiritual guide, the Franciscan priest Richard Rohr, has published an article in *Sojourners*, arguing that "the myth of celibacy" has died in the consciousness of priests. Celibacy has become for them simply an external demand, no longer accompanied by the inner conviction that it represents a divine call and serves a redemptive purpose. The majority of priests obey the rule, but they do this simply as an act of obedience, no longer out of an inner desire. In this situation, Richard Rohr argues, re-enforcing the external pressure in seminaries will not offer a solution. The present crisis reveals that the nimbus of priestly celibacy has collapsed. According to Father Rohr, it would be better for priests and the people if the institutional link between priesthood and celibacy were discontinued. The future of the celibate life in the name of Christ will be in religious orders.

See, Judge and Act

Can the present crisis be the occasion for a more rapid spread of what I have described as a new Catholic culture? Catholics are developing a new relationship to the hierarchy and define their moral life in terms of faith, discernment and responsibility. Vatican Council II has emphasized the responsibility of humans for their personal and collective existence. *Gaudium et spes* acknowledges "the emergence of a new humanism, one in which human beings are defined first of all by their responsibility towards their brothers (and sisters) and towards history" (n. 55). Pope John Paul II has created his own vocabulary for this new self-understanding, new at least in the Catholic Church. He insists that people are "subjects" or historical agents, bearing responsibility for their own lives and the institutions to which they belong. The pope speaks here of people's "subjectivity," and demands that institutions respect the "subjectivity" of their members. He formulated this teaching especially as a critique of Poland's communist government.[3] This word "subjectivity" is the pope's vocabulary for the watchword of Catholic Action, "see, judge and act." With his emphasis on human "subjectivity," John Paul II supports what Father John Walsh has called the new Catholic culture.

John Paul II demands that all institutions respect the subjectivity of their members. It is puzzling that the pope does not apply his teaching to the Church itself. The present crisis reveals that obedience is not enough. The Holy Spirit alive in the Church is generating a new Catholic culture, one that makes us conscious of being subjects, of being graced by God to become free and critical agents bearing responsibility for who we are, as persons and as community.

Gregory Baum

This talk was given in Edmonton, Alberta, on Oct. 26, 2002.

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[1] See www.votf.org.

[2] Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02481 www.wcwonline.org

[3] See John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socials* (1987), no. 15.

An Open Letter to the Minister

December 19, 2002

The Hon. Bill Graham, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade
Room 418-North, Centre Block
House of Commons
Ottawa

Dear Bill,

It is sad beyond description that, in this Season of Peace, I should be writing to you to give you whatever strength and courage I can to continue to stand up for Canadian values and resist the drums of war.

It is now abundantly clear that the Bush Administration will override Hans Blix and the U.N. inspection team at the first opportunity and declare war on Iraq. How can the U.S. explain this war fought, at least on the surface, for nuclear disarmament when the U.S. itself is a country with 10,000 nuclear weapons? Iraq is a country with no demonstrated nuclear weapons. Saddam Hussein is a dictator, but the economic sanctions imposed by the West have resulted in far more deaths of innocent people in Iraq than he is guilty of. Now the Iraqi people will suffer immeasurably as their food, water and health infrastructure is destroyed by war.

The U.S. has also made official the deployment of a missile defence system, which experts, including you, recognize will involve putting weapons in space. The Canadian government has always opposed weapons in space. A renewed nuclear arms race is now certain, judging by the protests coming from Russia and China, among others.

What about Canada? I believe that the majority of Canadians want the U.N. Security Council, not the U.S. unilaterally, to decide if Iraq is in compliance with Resolution 1441 concerning whether Iraq has weapons of mass destruction. Canadians want to keep space free from weapons to head off future wars. But will the Canadian government finally make a more forceful stand on these two issues, or will it be pressured into support for the U.S.?

That pressure is already apparent from the U.S. It also exists within our own country from those who mistakenly insist that Canada must follow the U.S. lead on all security questions. The stakes in the Canada–U.S. relationship are getting much higher because the world has reached a defining moment: will we let one nation, however powerful, bypass the rule of law or will Canadians stand up for the values of peace through the application of international law? The voice of peace can no longer be heard amid the cry for war.

You are in a leadership position. I am speaking for many Canadians in asking you to clearly stand up against those who want war. We want to encourage your voice in Cabinet and to support you in your efforts. I send you this letter in the true meaning of peace at Christmas.

With best wishes, I remain,
Yours sincerely,

Douglas Roche, O.C.
Senator

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