

Canadian Participation in Episcopal Synods, 1967-1985

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On the tenth of February, 1986, Bernard Hubert, President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), released a twelve-page summary report of the Canadian delegation's role at the Extraordinary Synod convened in Rome by John Paul II late in 1985. The penultimate paragraph of that statement articulates our sentiments as media observers at that Synod; it also confirms the assessment of Council father and frequent synod delegate Gerald Emmett Carter,¹ as well as echoing the expressed accolades of the majority of the non-U.S. delegates with whom we became acquainted during the 1985 Extraordinary Synod. Hubert concludes:

Until now, the Canadian delegates to various Synods honoured the CCCB because they clearly expressed the Canadian experience on the subject presented. They were not afraid to bring to light the questions, remarks and suggestions from the Christian communities at home. They did so with confidence and openness. They were ready to accept criticisms and decisions formulated by the whole Synod to which they participated. I believe we have reason to be proud of the contribution of the Canadian delegates to past Synods. In its delegates, the CCCB provides the universal Church with a rich and loyal contribution for the benefit of all.²

In this paper we have accepted Hubert's implicit invitation to examine the historical breadth mentioned in his observation, to weigh his thesis of the Canadian delegation's historical tradition of forthrightness in relating the Canadian experience, and we intend also to test the thesis that Canadian delegates have made a "rich and loyal contribution."

To appreciate the role the Canadians have played, one must first recall the tenor of the documents from which the synod takes its origin. The con-

¹ Reference to discussions with Gerald Emmett Carter is to an interview with the Cardinal conducted by the authors in his office on March 12, 1987

² "Canadian Participation in the 1985 Extraordinary Synod," CCCB bulletin number 1178.

cept of the synod is first articulated implicitly in “The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” *Lumen gentium*, issued by Paul VI on November 21, 1964. Discussion of the relationship of the episcopacy to the papacy spells out very clearly that “the college or body of bishops has no authority unless it is simultaneously conceived of in terms of its head, the Roman Pontiff, Peter’s successor, and without any lessening of his power of primacy over all, pastors as well as the general faithful” (item 22).³³ Nonetheless, collegiate activity of the bishops is encouraged by Vatican II as a means of exercising their authority “for the good of their own faithful, and indeed of the whole church.” It is a power most fully evidenced in an ecumenical council, and it is a power “which can be exercised in union with the Pope by the bishops living in all parts of the world, provided that the head of the college [the Pope] calls them to collegiate action, or at least so approves or freely accepts the united action of the dispersed bishops.” A subsequent document, “Decree on the Bishops’ Pastoral Office in the Church” (*Christus dominus*) issued on October 28, 1965 picks up this question of shared responsibility (items 5 and 6) and relates the matter directly to the concept of the synod. The synod is a means of catholic consultation and joint action, a gathering which, as successor to the teaching authority of the “college of the apostles,” enjoys “supreme and full power over the universal Church.” “But,” the document adds, “this power can be exercised only with the consent of the Roman Pontiff” (item 22).

The concept of the synod is clear in these two documents, and the Council no doubt would have had more to say on the matter had it not transpired that between the issuing of the first and second text Paul provided his own statement on the nature, purpose, and form of the synod. Paul’s *motu proprio*, *Apostolica sollicitudo*, was delivered on September 15, 1965. The synod, he said, was to encourage unity and assistance, to provide information on the state of the church in its various world-wide episcopacies, and to establish a forum in which joint agreement could be achieved. At the same time, the synod was “to inform and give advice. It may also have deliberate power, when such power is conferred on it by the Sovereign Pontiff, who will in such cases confirm the decisions of the Synod” (article II).⁴

³ All direct references to conciliar documents are taken from *The Documents of Vatican II*, Walter S. Abbott, s.j., ed.. (Piscataway, N.J.: New Century Publishers, 1966).

⁴ For a useful examination of the nature of the synod and synodal questions, see Anthony Tonnos, “Synod Introduction: Definitions and Directions,” *Grail*, 2 (March, 1986), 6979. For a compendium of material on the 1985 Extraordinary Synod and some brief historical information, see *Twenty Years Later: Study texts from the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops 1985*, issued by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (Ottawa: Conacan, Inc., 1986).

Given the evolution of the concept of the synod and the way in which that concept was ultimately to be realized it is little wonder that twenty years after Paul called the first synod in 1967 there is still pointed debate as to its structure and function, a debate highlighted in the 1985 Extraordinary Synod by Archbishop Maxim Hermaniuk of Winnipeg.⁵ Indeed, that first synod in 1967 began with the confusion typical of fledgling undertakings.⁶ The synod fathers were asked to discuss topics as diverse as canon law, seminaries, liturgy, faith, and mixed marriages. The upstart nature of that early synod is reflected too in the CCCB's archives: Ottawa has no records of the Canadian interventions or of the role played by Archbishops Pocock, Flahiff, or Levesque. Symptomatically, two years later, in 1969, Paul convened the first Extraordinary Synod to investigate questions of synodal logistics: the result was the establishing of a Synod Council charged with the responsibility of overseeing the preparations for future synods.

Things then began to run more smoothly, there being general synods in 1971 to examine questions of ministerial priesthood and justice in the world; 1974, evangelization in the world; 1977, catechetics in our time; 1980, the role of the Christian family in the modern world; and 1983, reconciliation; then, in 1985, there was the Extraordinary Synod to review the implementation of Vatican II, a synod which forced the postponement until October 1987 of the next general synod whose focus would be on the role of the laity.

It is clear from the evidence of the earliest records that the participation of the Canadian delegation has been consistent, thoughtful, forceful, and influential. Canadian delegates have time and again called for shared

⁵ In his intervention of November 25, "'Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,' *Lumen gentium*, twenty years after Vatican II," Hermaniuk, Metropolitan for the Ukrainian Catholics of Canada, called for the "real and true collegial government of the Church by the entire college of bishops with the Holy Father under his authority."

Both forthright in argument and consistent with the Uniate tradition he represents, Hermaniuk called for the creation of a *permanent synod of bishops* which would have the legislative power, with and under the authority of the pontiff, to decide all the questions in the life of the church. The Curia in Rome would, however, retain its executive power.

Hermaniuk argued that a recognition of the synod's legislative power is not only both theologically and canonically possible, but is also a creative and faithful realization of Paul VI's suggestion in *Apostolica sollicitudo* that "the Synod could also have legislative power, where such power would be given to it by the Roman Pontiff, who in his case would have to approve decisions of the Synod." Such legislative power, in Hermaniuk's estimation, would guarantee the "real and true collegial government of the Church."

⁶ For a sense of the guess-work preceding the 1967 synod, see, for example, Francis X. Murphy, "a preview of the synod of bishops," *Homiletic and Pastoral Review*, 67 (1967), 1011-1014.

responsibility rather than mere consultation – for unity in diversity; they have argued for action, for a doing of theology rather than a simple mouthing of abstract phrases – for action based practically on experience, rather than exclusively on ratiocination; they have argued for a real social role, for a lived Christianity, not mere “pie in the sky by and by” – to use Cardinal Carter’s words from another context.⁷ These principles are echoed in discussions of priesthood, of family, of reconciliation . . . principles, Gerald Emmett Cardinal Carter assures us, that evolve from the Canadian delegates’ deliberate decision to be honest, to be helpful, to be representative. Principles evolved through research and consultation at home. The Canadian delegates, he tells us, have always gone to Rome with their homework done and with the ability, therefore, to react spontaneously but consistently with the dynamics of the synod hall.

Extraordinary Synod of 1969

The CCCB archives for the 1969 Synod contain only Alexander Carter’s intervention. It is a clear and forceful plea for the synods to move beyond the merely consultative. His (and therefore the Canadian delegation’s) position argues an anti-hierarchical position, a collegial vision of the People of God, a vision which theorizes that the “Church is in its structure and government necessarily collegial.” Collegiality, he insists, is to be equated with co-responsibility – it is a moving beyond the strict reserve of power as it is delineated in *Lumen gentium*, *Christus dominus*, and *Apostolica sollicitudo* to a schema involving “the active participation of the college of bishops in the exercise of supreme power in such a way that it is not a mere matter of consultation.” It is a theme often repeated by Canadian delegations in various contexts, extending even to the role of the laity. It is also a position consistent with Hubert’s thesis of “rich and loyal” Canadian contributions. Hence, Alexander Carter concludes his argument:

Venerable Brothers, history will probably show that those who are really convinced of the need to confirm the collegial nature of the Church are actually doing more to preserve the authority of the Pontiff. An authentic primacy is not threatened so much by an attempt to diminish centralization as by an attempt to impose a rigorous, strong control over all. In our times, a central power which is exercised beyond a reasonable degree could easily cause more fragmentation and alienation than a wise and prudent change of the structures by which authority is expressed and exercised in the Church.

⁷ See M. W. Higgins and D. R. Letson, *Portraits of Canadian Catholicism* (Toronto: Griffin House, 1986), p. 48.

These are sentiments clearly flowing from the “Canadian experience” of shared responsibility, sensitivity to lay participation, and a history of democratic traditions.

General Synod of 1971

Canadian attitudes presented in the 1971 Synod on the ministerial priesthood and justice in the world flow directly from the tone and tenor of 1969.

George Flahiff’s October 1 intervention begins by noting that much has been learned about synods in their short four-year history; he then returns to familiar themes. “It is changes that are wanted, changes at the level of concrete action and lived experience.” “Let us remember,” Flahiff exhorts, “that discipline has often to be determined in the light of actual conditions as well as of doctrines.” And “lived experience,” he reasons, means not simply preaching social justice, but acting it out. And so he calls for “a new vision of what ‘vocation’ is, and the possibility of discerning vocations in all walks of life.” Maurice Roy goes so far as to argue that “it is necessary also to humbly accept the fact that a lay person may at times be superior to a priest or a bishop in knowledge, prudence or holiness” (intervention of October 14). It is a time of change, a time for change – Flahiff warns the synod fathers that “we shall readily see the futility of simply reaffirming the ‘status quo’ at a time when salvation history is so rapidly accelerated.” Flahiff’s stress is, therefore, on lived experience, on reading the signs of the times, and on action: “let us see,” he urges, “what can be done to adapt the teaching of the Gospel and of the Church to the actual life of today.”

Flahiff’s October 11 intervention develops his theme more particularly; in it he notes that “no one has raised the question of the possibility of a ministry of women.” It is an issue historically consonant with the Canadians’ philosophy (J.A. Plourde and Maurice Roy also raise the matter at this same synod) – and it is an issue the Canadians were “not afraid to bring to light” when it had been ignored by others. Discounting Biblical and Pauline arguments as “sociological, not doctrinal,” Flahiff concludes, courageously, “As far as I know, therefore, there is no dogmatic objection to reconsidering the whole question today.” To this thesis, Maxim Hermaniuk reminds the Synod of the Orthodox and Oriental Catholic tradition of married priesthood, noting that the initial *relatio* “says absolutely nothing about the affinity of marriage and ministry.” There are two possibilities, he posits, “a vocation to the priesthood in the celibate state and . . . a vocation to the priesthood in the married state.” It is a notion seconded by Alexander Carter, who adds that the “Canadian Bishops are nearly unanimously in favour of ordaining mature

married men where there is need”; Carter carries the matter one step farther, calling for the reinstatement of dispensed priests who have married.

The Canadian delegation raises a unanimous voice calling for service, not power; for communion, not uniformity; for “unity in diversity and creativity”; for “a genuine application of the principle of subsidiarity” even in the church (J. A. Plourde); for the priest’s role in the world to extend even to a legitimate “pursu[ing of] temporal objectives”; for “the transformation of the concept of charity into justice”; for the preaching of the nature of social rather than merely private justice; for the training of seminarians in matters of social justice; for the need to live the Gospel teachings of justice so that “the life style of priests and the image of the Church be not a counter witness to their concerns for justice”; for moving beyond the apparent philosophical restriction of serious sin as sexual to include the social (Paul Gregoire). Significantly, J. A. Plourde’s intervention of October 19 is entitled “Orientation of the Synod Towards Action.” He envisions a life of action which sees “charity” as “justice”, which commits the church to “this practice of justice at home,” and which envisions a waning of narcissistic nationalism in favour of an enlightened “world community” – themes reiterated by Alexander Carter, who extends the thesis into “The Problems which Super-States and Multi-National Corporations Present to the Building of a World Community.”

They are bold statements, these, presented “with confidence and openness.” These themes would reappear in the 1974 Synod on evangelization in the modern world.

General Synod of 1974

In the eyes of the Canadian delegation to the 1974 Synod, questions of evangelization are closely related to questions of ministry and justice. As a result, familiar themes re-emerge: the living of the gospel message (Gerald Emmett Carter introduces the word “praxis” into the debate); the need to find new models for the church which vitalize the traditionally passive laity; the need to move beyond uniformity to an understanding of unity in diversity; the necessity of just distributions of the world’s resources, placing food before munitions. Jean-Marie Fortier introduces the philosophical rationale for these positions when, in his intervention of October 1, he reasons that “Tradition is not a dogmatism frozen in the language of a given culture, even if it is the most influential one, but a living force which nourishes the seed already given in full in Revelation.” New modes, new expressions are possible, he insists. Indeed, the argument for unity in plurality eloquently developed by Gerald Emmett Carter concludes that such a view is inherent in the “Canadian experience,” in the nature of a relatively young country

fighting colonial status and seeking to provide a single home “for two major cultures and many smaller groups in our own midst.”

General Synod of 1977

Questions of catechetics initiated a series of new Canadian interventions, new interventions with familiar themes. W. Emmett Doyle sets the practical stage with the thesis that the “method used by Christ was that of experience.” Our catechesis must also move from experience, a witness to conversion. Gerald Emmett Carter develops the theme. Looking at the modern world of media and materialism, he sees also a growing sense of fraternity, of social responsibility. His conclusion sounds a distinctly Canadian ring: “In this age of technical know-how we see the will to put words into action. We are no longer satisfied to look at the world, we wish to transform it.” We must be ready, therefore, to use the media, to be open and co-operative, to be willing to learn, and “We must be concerned with a constant striving to integrate our teaching and our celebration with a clear involvement in action; a deep understanding of its nature followed by concrete practice.”

Bernard Hubert combines the drive for new forms and practical action with a personalist, anti-individualistic philosophical principle and dreams a new vision of church, one in which the church “will see herself mainly as working in the heart of man, supportive of a faith reality, rather than as paternalistic and quasi-administrative dispensing help from above.” He concludes that “The Lord calls the Christian community, in the contemporary world, to identify and spell out the values and dynamics of man, and to support man in his journey toward liberty.” It is a task to be performed “with love, confidence, audacity, realism and critical sense,” characteristics which summarize rather succinctly the history of Canada’s participation in the synodal experience.

General Synod of 1980

The 1980 Synod, on the role of the Christian family in the modern world, was the first synodal gathering during the pontificate of John Paul II. It was, no doubt, characterized by the customary “fraternal candour.” But it also proved fractious to a degree not previously experienced. The rather pessimistic tone that accompanied its conclusion can be attributed, in no small part, to the decision *not* to publish the 43 propositions prepared by the synod fathers.

The mind of the synod can be discovered in the apostolic exhortation, *Familiaris consortio*, John Paul’s authoritative pronouncement on marriage and the family.

But it is important to underscore the particular contributions made at the synod by the Canadian delegates, contributions vigorously consistent with their previous representations. The bishops affirm their belief in the validity of human experience, and of the theological worth of an existentialist framework. In his intervention of September 30, the Vice-President of the CCCB, Henri Legare, observes that a theology “must be encouraged that would start courageously with today’s experiences without, however, neglecting the riches of the past.” For Legare a sacred truth need not be undermined by modern understanding, and an ancient institution need not be sundered by contemporary experience.

The essentialist philosophy within which the theology of the sacrament of marriage evolved can lead one to think that the Church is already in a state of perfection, that it has in some sense arrived at its end. But that approach forgets that the Church is truly in a pilgrim state, that it is constructed in history. Therefore, should we not rethink the theology of marriage in a more existentialist and personalist framework? Such an approach obliges us to take reality into account as it is historically presented to us, while still affirming (but in a different way) the indissolubility of marriage.

By respecting the value of individual experience, the role of private conscience, and the historicity of the church, the magisterium is faced with the demanding task of discerning between those moral and social developments that are in accord with Christian faith from those that are not. The magisterium must be attentive to the sense of the faithful; it must value the immediate, concrete experience of all the baptized. As Cardinal Carter notes in his September 30 intervention:

The mode of expression of moral guidance given by the magisterium of the Church as a whole must also go beyond the present and the past, beyond the conventional mode of expressing guidance in an authoritarian form to forming a new consensus for concrete pastoral prescription both on the universal and on the regional and national levels.

In articulating a doctrine of the Christian family, it is essential to learn from the experience of Christian families. Like the national episcopal conferences of the United States and of England and Wales, the Canadian bishops sought to overcome the negative and generally prohibitive tenor of church pronouncements regarding sexual behaviour. It is, they insist, simply time for a new and credible moral theology. The necessity of such a theology is highlighted in Archbishop Joseph MacNeil’s aptly named October 16th paper, “Toward a Theology of Sexuality and the Family”:

During the period of incertitude and questioning which characterizes our times, it seems important to emphasize ... that the prime challenge confronting this Synod is precisely the construction of a theology which, in intelligible language, can light the path of today's families.

This episcopal concern for a theology of the family that is both intelligible and nurtured by the primary experience of the family is a constant feature to be found in Canadian synodal documents. The bishops affirm again and again that the principal responsibility for Christian family life rests with the family itself. The autonomy, integrity, and freedom of the family must be respected, for the family is "the basic school of doctrine, spirituality and the apostolate" (MacNeil, October 14).

If this is truly so, then it is incumbent upon the highest authority in the church to attend with a ready ear to those questions being asked by the laity that pertain directly to their Christian lives. These issues are continually raised by the Canadian delegation, raised with the proper tone of loyal inquiry and honest searching. The bishops choose the interrogative mode; their phrasing is respectful but probing, tentative but firm. Calling for a renewed theology of sexuality, marriage, and the family the bishops do not shy away from asking even the most delicate of questions in the October 30 intervention of the Canadian Delegation:

Would this not be the place to reflect upon a theology which integrates human sciences taking advantage of the new insights into human sexuality – the Wednesday talks of the Holy Father provide an admirable example. Is this not the place to reflect upon a theology which affirms the total significance of human love, of responsible parenthood in relation to fecundity, and the mastery of human fertility which in itself represents a turning point in history?

The Canadian strategy appears to consist simply in articulating the troublesome questions, although, admittedly, this is no mean effort. The bishops, however, don't raise the questions in order to convince their critics that they will speak with unambiguous forthrightness. Rather, they raise questions because of their commitment to the conciliar, if not ancient, principles of collegiality and subsidiarity. By highlighting the particular responsibilities of the family, by reminding the synod fathers of the rights and obligations that pertain specifically to parents, on October 3, the Canadian bishops also underscore the importance of local and national episcopal leadership.

One overarching question is the greater discretion or autonomy of regional or national Episcopal Conferences in some matters touching marriage and family life. Whether it be with regard to cultural adaptation of sacramental

rites to indigenous customs, or prudential judgements in the pastoral care of difficult marriages, there are pastoral situations that can be best handled close to the families involved. The synod should study how efficacious decentralization can be realized in these matters, according to the principle of subsidiarity and without jeopardy to the universal teaching of the Church.

Keeping in mind the high importance attached to unity in the Catholic tradition, never placing in jeopardy the universal teaching of the church, the Canadian bishops have displayed a rather stunning temerity when it comes to the issue of women and ministry. The 1971 intervention by Cardinal George Flahiff merely paved the way for what was to come. It was not the last word. It wasn't intended to be.

In his September 30 interventions, Archbishop MacNeil spoke approvingly of the movement to be found almost everywhere in the world that labours to bring women full social and personal dignity and recognition. He wonders aloud how the synod fathers and all pastoral leaders can do more in order "to bring this movement to full realization in the institutional Church." Bishop Robert Lebel of Valleyfield is even more direct when he urges that the church must act

in fidelity to the word of God, [and] recognize the modern feminist movement as a positive reality. We are dealing, on the whole, with an advance in civilization; and it is a forward step in the establishment of the kingdom.

General Synod of 1983

Since they were convinced that the modern feminist movement is a positive reality, at the 1983 Synod on reconciliation the Canadian bishops made a special plea for male-female reconciliation in the church. As we work for an egalitarian partnership between women and men and for the coming of the kingdom, the bishops remind us of the cardinal necessity for a public admission of our faults as individuals and as an institution, and of our need for forgiveness. The Primate of Canada, Louis-Albert Vachon, spoke with unnerving bluntness in his October 3 intervention:

As for us, let us recognize the ravages of sexism, and our own male appropriation of Church institutions and numerous aspects of the Christian life. Need I mention the example of the masculine language of our official – and even liturgical – texts? . . . Our recognition, as Church, of our own cultural deformation will allow us to overcome the archaic concepts of womanhood which have been inculcated in us for centuries.

The painful but profoundly rich process of reconciliation will be affected only if an atmosphere of dialogue and mutual trust obtains. If the church is to truly be a sign of reconciliation to the world, it must itself be seen as a reconciling and reconciled community of believers, the perfect sign of the “new humanity being realized in Jesus Christ.”

In his October 5 intervention, Vachon reminds the synod fathers that the church must encourage the values of Christian humanism as a simple consequence of obeying the Incarnation imperative. Dialogue itself becomes a path to reconciliation when the church struggles to humanize the dehumanizing elements of culture and finds herself enriched by the positive values of modernity. “It is through such mediation that the Church will respond to the expectations of humanity and will find points of anchorage for faith in Christ, Centre of the Cosmos and of History.”

According to *Lumen gentium* (item 1):

The Church is, in Christ, a type of sacrament: that is to say, the sign and instrument of intimate union with God and the unity of the entire human race.

Within this large sacramental economy can be found specific realizations or sacraments, such as the sacrament of penance, now called the sacrament of reconciliation. The rite of this sacrament has undergone some adaptations over the centuries, and most pointedly since the Council. In two very important interventions given on the same day, October 5, Bishops Marcel Gervais and Bertrand Blanchet argue for the theological and pastoral value of the communal form of reconciliation with general confession and absolution. Although they acknowledge the necessity for careful preparation and catechesis, and see the personal form as irreplaceable, they also see the theological and pastoral desirability of the communal form with general absolution as a sensitive and constructive response to the spiritual needs of Canadian Catholics.

Recent Roman directives would seem to indicate that the Canadian bishops’ pastoral initiatives were misguided. Rather than increasing the opportunities for the communal celebration of penance with general absolution, the present trend seems to strongly discourage its celebration in favour of the revitalization of the personal form. But nothing can gainsay the Canadian bishops’ intelligent exercise of pastoral leadership, a leadership collegial, flexible, and open to honest dialogue.

Extraordinary Synod of 1985

Convoked by John Paul II to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, the 1985 Extraordinary Synod had, little time to celebrate. The two weeks were deemed insufficient by quite a few delegates; many of the synod fathers, and most especially the pope, called for extensive consultation and preparation for the twenty-fifth anniversary in 1990. However, given the constraints of time, both by way of preparation and deliberation, the Extraordinary Synod was not without value.

There were six Canadian interventions at the synod, the majority of them by Bishop Bernard Hubert and Archbishop James Hayes, the President and Vice-President respectively of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Of special importance is Hubert's November 29 intervention in which he outlines the existing plurality of ministries in the Canadian Catholic church and how he sees these ministries in a church that is a communion. Here again we have the Canadian concern for diversity mingled with a healthy respect for tradition. Once again we see the national experience treasured and not undervalued, probed and not dismissed. To be *ekklesia* has much broader implications than serving as a branch plant. The local church can, perhaps, teach the church universal and help build communion (*koinonia*). The movement away from a solely, or even principally, clerical model of the church to a model characterized by collegiality, co-responsibility, and subsidiarity must be a movement in sharp continuity with the past and yet faithful to the new historical and cultural exigencies of the post-conciliar age.

For Bishop Hubert, the new pastoral agents in the church in no way devalue the ministerial priesthood, for it is the priests "who will make it possible for the Church to become what it really is, that is, a communion of persons living the mystery of God in the person of Jesus Christ and in His Spirit" (November 29). But the new, emerging ministries must also be seen as building communion, and not as rival structures seeking the usurpation of the priesthood. Yet, as Hubert rightly notes, there is much need for clarification and direction. The question is raised, the new challenge duly noted.

Archbishop Hayes, particularly in his November 27 intervention, reminds the synod of the riches of the Council, riches like collegiality ("a privileged expression of communion") and co-responsibility (a mark of fully mature lay membership).

As a composite statement of the many concerns and themes that the Canadian bishops have articulated since the extraordinary synod of '69, we could not do better than attend to the concluding paragraph of Hayes' December 4 intervention at the Extraordinary Synod, an intervention wherein matters like women's dignity, meaningful dialogue, effective ministry, co-responsibility, et cetera are addressed:

The members of women's communities have been particularly concerned and helpful in sensitizing people in the Church to the role, place and rights of women in modern society. They rightly raise questions about a situation where too often decisions in the orientation and life of their Congregations are taken exclusively by men. More generally, they believe that the Church could be enriched by joint reflection between men and women. Could the Church in today's world not provide, on a regular basis, a place for experimenting with such joint reflection between men and women at the service of the Gospel?

The Canadian bishops have consistently sought, through their synod interventions, "a place for experimenting with such joint reflection." In our estimation, they have found such a place: the synod itself.