

## **REPORT TO THE DEANERY PASTORAL FORUMS ON WHAT HAPPENED IN ROME – NOVEMBER–DECEMBER 1998**

**Bishop P J Cullinane**

The following is from Bishop Peter's report to his diocese. He says his reflections attempt to honour people's increasing sense of the Church being **their** Church.

Our visit combined two main events – the *Ad Limina* visit that bishops make every five years, and the special Synod for all the bishops of Oceania, which was an historic first. We also managed to include a meeting of the Federation of the four Bishops' Conferences of Oceania (Australia, Papua New Guinea-Solomon Islands, Pacific Islands, and New Zealand.)

### **PART 1 – THE AD LIMINA**

The purpose of the *Ad Limina* visit is to connect with the Apostolic See by celebrating Mass at the tombs of Peter and Paul, and by celebrating Mass with today's successor of Peter. We were able to involve priests and lay people from New Zealand in these memorable experiences. At the tomb of Paul we were led by Bishop M T Mariu, and at the tomb of Peter by Cardinal T S Williams. Fr Trevor Murray (Hamilton) had prepared the liturgies.

The *Ad Limina* visit is also the time for meetings with the Pope, each bishop and the NZ Conference of Bishops. Because the Pope depends on various Vatican departments ("dicasteries") for more detailed business, we also met with them.

We were courteously received by each department and the discussions were positive, though of limited value. Real discussion is difficult when everything has to be translated from English into Italian and from Italian into English, and when even the meeting rooms are not arranged for natural dialogue.

#### **Cultural barriers**

A more serious difficulty arises from the fact that we all live and think within particular cultures and subcultures, and our own way of thinking tends to become the standard by which we judge others. When that subculture is the bureaucracy which is at the service of the Pope, then it is easy for those who staff it to measure everything else by the way they think. Such assumptions can co-exist with the utmost sincerity, graciousness and goodness. In fact, well-meaning people often don't perceive the problem. A Roman official might be inclined to think: "Why don't you do it our way?" as easily as a Pakeha might say "Why don't the Maori do it our way?"

#### **Other problems**

It can also take time for the teachings of the Second Vatican Council to be properly internalised and lived out in practice. The collegiality of bishops is acknowledged, but paternalism dies hard. The Second Vatican Council described bishops as vicars of Christ and the Pope as the successor of Peter. Yet in his Synod address, Cardinal Williams struck a chord when he pointed out that sometimes bishops on their *Ad Limina*

visits are treated more like branch managers reporting to head office. Bishops from many parts of the world have been asking that the pastoral judgements of bishops and Bishops' Conferences be more genuinely trusted.

### **Three issues**

Occasional failure by Roman departments to consult bishops on matters that affect their ministry was one of the matters raised by the NZCBC in our Ad Limina address to the Holy Father. We felt that better consultation of Bishops' Conferences by Roman departments would be more consistent with the Pope's courageous consultation of other Christian churches concerning the exercise of his own ministry.

We also asked whether it was appropriate to hold the threat of Church penalties over Catholics who struggle with positions that the Church itself does not teach definitively. (There are different "levels" of Church teachings, which call for different kinds of adherence, and there are different kinds of penalties for non-adherence. Non-definitive teachings are those which may yet become definitive – or change.)

Thirdly, we suggested that making it difficult for Eastern Rite Catholics to ordain their priests or to practice priestly ministry in Latin Rite dioceses was hardly consistent with the Church's commitment to respect their own "spirituality, disciplines and rites" (cf UR 4). (This matter was also taken up at the Synod by two Eastern rite bishops.)

We also urged the Holy See to admit women to all roles which do not require ordination.

The issues we raised were carefully nuanced, verifiable, and courteously expressed. They are all of a pastoral nature and do not involve doctrine, except in so far as we want the Church's practices to be consistent with its teachings. They are the kind of issues that it is appropriate for bishops to raise, because all bishops share responsibility with and under the Pope for the universal Church.

### **How the Curia feels**

The publication of our address in the official Vatican newspaper resulted in our concerns being taken more seriously. (Our comments had been passed on to the *Osservatore Romano* by someone in the Pope's own household – not by us.)

I can understand the feelings of officials of the Roman departments when they find themselves being criticised. Which of us likes to be criticised when we believe we are doing what is right and doing our best? That is precisely how the Roman departments see themselves. And so, as the head of one department explained, criticisms of the curia seemed unfair. It was obvious that our comments were not alone.

But the head of another department (Cardinal J Ratzinger) simply asked us for examples of what we had in mind. We provided examples and discussed them. Our discussion included the 1998 document on lay and ordained ministries. This document had led to mistaken interpretations by some Catholics, and to assurances by bishops in some countries that the document's criticisms did not apply to their countries. Cardinal Ratzinger acknowledged the difficulty of writing documents that would be read throughout the Church when the problems they describe have arisen in only a few places.

### **Roman documents**

He explained that documents like this need to be “mediated” by the local Bishops’ Conferences. This important term means that the local Church takes to heart what is being said, and then adapts and applies it to local circumstances. Catholics need to remember this when such documents are being quoted directly in the media. The Roman document does not always apply to the local Church in a direct, un-mediated way.

### **Other issues**

During our visit to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, we wondered whether the blanket disapproval of Father de Mello’s writings was a bit excessive: even unfair both to de Mello and his publishers. The need for some intervention, and the need to take seriously the doctrinal observations, were explained. But common sense was also meant to apply: Archbishop Bertone told us that in answer to the head of the Pauline Sisters who had asked him what she was supposed to do with 30,000 books in stock, he had said: sell them, of course, and just make known the concerns we have expressed.

We also discussed the claims of the Society of St Pius X, and of the Ecclesia Dei Society.

In our visit to the Congregation for Divine Worship and Sacraments we raised questions about procedures for endorsing liturgical translations. The existing norms reflect an appropriate partnership between the Holy See and the Bishops’ Conferences, and need to be interpreted in the light of the role proper to each. This is easier in theory than in practice because it does not involve a clear division of labour; it involves shared responsibility for the same things.

### **Liturgical translations**

We urged that the endorsement of the new English translation of the Missal not be unduly delayed. The NZ Bishops want to use it as the basis for a national catechesis on the Eucharist. And NZ Catholics, and publishers, do not want to have to buy or reprint a translation that is going to be superseded. We are not hopeful that endorsement will come soon, but it would be nice to be wrong.

Our visit to the Congregation for Worship and Sacraments also gave us an opportunity to explain the NZ Catholic Bishops’ approval of authorised scripture translations pending the availability of suitable new lectionaries. Because we do not publish lectionaries in New Zealand, we depend on countries that do. Eventually, we shall choose between approved lectionaries that will be published in the British Isles, Canada and USA, and then seek endorsement for what we approve.

### **Other departments**

At the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, we discussed the decision made by the NZ Bishops following consultations throughout NZ and discussions with the other member churches, to withdraw from the CCANZ. Our commitment to promoting Christian unity obliges us all to evaluate from time to time the various means that we use to do that.

We had discussions with other “dicasteries” too, including the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and the Pontifical Council for Refugees and Migrants.

### **What difference?**

What is achieved in all these discussions? What difference can we make? These are fair questions, and we are under no illusions. But not to raise questions can sometimes be a form of acquiescing in practices that need evaluation or renewal. It would be to default on our duty as members of the universal episcopate if we said only the things people prefer to hear. Little by little, things actually do change.

### **The Pope’s challenge to us**

The issues we had raised were mainly domestic issues that nevertheless impinge on the Church’s effectiveness and credibility. The Pope’s address to us related more directly to the Church’s mission in the world.

The Pope has a very positive appreciation of many aspects of modern life. But he is not fooled by the world’s glitter. His emphasis was on the need for the Church, and for each of us who represent the Church in various ways, to be living signs of what the world cannot give itself. In the midst of its secularism, individualism and consumerism, the Church needs to stand for something **different**. If the salt loses its flavour, what has it got to offer? What Christians have to offer is from God, is unique and is wonderful.

The difference that makes the difference is holiness of life. It can cost us something to be different – perhaps even cost us much. I believe the Pope’s reminders are prophetic, and timely for us who live in what is arguably the most secularised society in the world.

He applied this need to be different to “*the distinctly Catholic identity*” of our schools, which he expects to pass on a “*true Christian humanism which springs from the knowledge and love of Christ*” (n.4).

He applied it to inculturation and to what it means to live in a secular culture:

*No human culture can fully accommodate the cross of Jesus Christ, which is always there to remind us that the distinction between the Church and the world is, paradoxically, the essential premise for dialogue with culture....” (cf n.2).*

He also highlighted the importance of lay Christian lives, through which the gospel is meant to transform the world. In this context he emphasised the importance between ordained ministry and lay vocations, and the need not to diminish either by blurring the difference.

He concluded by encouraging us

*...to make a systematic effort in your dioceses and parishes to open new doors to the experience of Christian prayer and contemplation: all the baptised are called to be holy as God is holy (n.7).*

This is the Pope's challenge to us; it goes to the very heart of the matter. Owen and I bring this challenge back to the diocese, - to all of you, priests, religious and laity - and we look forward to discussing it with you at the next Deanery Pastoral Forums. A "systematic effort in the diocese and the parishes" will require goodwill and good planning.

## **PART II - THE SYNOD**

The first week of the Synod was given over to what individual bishops wanted to say. A much commented-on characteristic of these addresses was their direct language. Those who were not used to such directness soon realised that it does not imply lack of charity or respect.

### **What "raising issues" means**

When bishops in this situation raise pastoral issues, it is not that they are challenging or querying the Church's faith. As pastors they are searching for ways of applying the Church's teachings according to their intended purpose: the well-being and salvation of people. Each bishop speaks in his own name only unless by prior agreement he speaks for others as well. (For the record, only the Ad Limina address to the Holy Father and my address to the Synod were given in the name of the NZ Bishops' Conference.) Many bishops, including ours, wanted the Church's practices to more clearly manifest the Church's mission, i.e. to be the sign of God's compassion and Christ's reconciling power.

### **Weeks two and three**

The second and third weeks were given over to small group discussions and to formulating and amending propositions to be voted on at the end. The processes used for this are an admirable attempt to combine maximum opportunity for each bishop with consensus among the whole group. But the process is flawed. For example, after the propositions have been edited by a small appointed group, the bishops can only vote either for or against them (or abstain). There is no scope for partial agreement.

This resulted in some propositions being voted against for opposite reasons. Some bishops voted "against" particular propositions because they didn't like them. Some others also voted "against" because they liked the proposition but felt it didn't go far enough. And some voted "against" because they disliked only one or other aspect of a proposition. Obviously, these votes "against" actually mean different things. The trouble is they are assumed to mean the same thing, namely disapproval, and their sum total is put over against the number of affirmative votes.

The editing process itself also allows for a certain filtering out on grounds that are *a priori* and extrinsic to the consensus process itself.

One can only hope that one day the value of professional facilitation will be recognised. Some will need to be persuaded that good facilitation does not involve someone “leading” the bishops, but simply helping them to say what they themselves most want to say collectively.

In his farewell address of thanks to the Pope on behalf of the Synod, Cardinal Williams asked the Pope to ensure that when he goes back over all the material of the Synod he look not so much at the propositions as at the addresses the individual bishops gave during the first week.

### **Listening Pope**

He also said that the abiding memory all the bishops would take home with them was the image of a listening Pope. The Pope clearly believes that the Holy Spirit speaks “to the churches”, and that the bishops are spokespersons for the local churches. And so he wants to hear them.

Some of the curia Cardinals appointed by the Pope to participate in the Synod managed to attend most sessions. Their participation was appreciated. There were others who turned up to vote on the propositions even though they had not participated in the processes that formed them.

### **Confidentiality**

Synod rules provide for confidentiality to help ensure that bishops can speak freely and to help the Pope consider the propositions without outside pressure. However, the media representatives reminded us of the Pope’s expressed wish that the Church’s work become more transparent. Furthermore, the bishops were able to include any parts of their addresses in their own media statements, and talk about them. So even by the Synod’s own rules, the confidentiality has limited significance.

### **The propositions**

The propositions included recommendations concerning the pastoral care of refugees, migrants and seafarers; evangelisation and inculturation; communications; Catholic schools and tertiary education; diocesan pastoral planning; ecumenism; justice and development aid issues; human rights and indigenous peoples; care for the environment; marriage and family life; young people; the role of women in the Church; vocations; religious life; the permanent diaconate; the support of priests and ongoing formation; seminaries; the sacrament of reconciliation; the appointment of bishops; liturgy; etc.

Some of our own concerns are represented in the propositions, including our request for a simplification of marriage nullity processes.

The “Synod message” had to avoid anticipating what the Pope may or may not say in his post-synodal document based on what he heard and his own reflections. And so the message, which some have felt was disappointing, is really only an extended form of greetings from the Synod to the local churches.

**Other moments**

The real value of the Synod is not limited to documents. The Pope knows well the value of living contact between one another. At times we were listening to stories of sacrifice and heroism as the bishops of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and CEPAC praised the women of Bougainville, the lay catechists, priests and religious of their regions.

It was a moving and historic moment when an Australian Aboriginal women addressed the Synod. And while Bishop Max's illness saddened us all, the way his address was introduced and read by Bishop Browne was also moving and gathered the attention of all.

It was a nice touch when the ecumenical representatives, who included Bishop George Connor of New Zealand, were invited to address the Synod, not from "the pews" as we had done, but from the top table alongside the Pope.

The Masses at the opening and closing of the Synod seemed to symbolise the Synod experience: the songs and dances of Polynesia, Melanesia and Micronesia added a striking note of joy to the solemnity and sobriety of the Roman rite. And even though the purists made their displeasure known, the Pope had also made his position clear: the peoples and cultures of Oceania belong as much as those of Europe. The Basilica, built over the tomb of Peter, seemed a massive monument to Christian antiquity and continuity in the midst of change. And the newer churches of Oceania were claiming their place at the heart of the Catholic tradition.