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# Behind the mitre: the moral leadership crisis in the Canadian Catholic Church

Oscar Cole-Arnal

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## Behind the Mitre: The Moral Leadership Crisis in the Canadian Catholic Church

Tony Clarke

Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers, Ltd., 1995

216 pp.

Tony Clarke has been a Christian social activist since the mid-1960s when he was pursuing graduate studies in Chicago. For about fifteen years he served as co-director for the social affairs department of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Consequently he is well-positioned to give us a narrative analysis of Catholic episcopal evolution from prophetic outrage of the early 1980s to the chilling silence experienced on the contemporary scene. His book *Behind the Mitre* is at once a descriptive narrative, a sociotheological analysis, a personal testimony and a prophetic appeal. Given the multiple context out of which it was written this book is a most excellent and timely work.

Its narrative description is terse and clear, following a chronological pattern from the famous episcopal statement of 1983, *Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis*, to the more recent disarray within Canada's Catholic episcopal community. I can remember quite vividly the impact of this earlier document upon the progressive forces in this country. It galvanized protest against the government and corporate agenda and infused hope into those groups organized to resist the business-government alliance. Not only does Clarke help us relive this moment but also he adds detail to our more general knowledge. His book documents just how wide and furious was the opposition to the bishops, from the outrage of Trudeau and his cabinet to Thomas D'Aquino, the leader of the Business Council on National Issues (BCNI). Clarke describes as well the voices of support for the bishops, from other churches and from wider movements like labour.

The richness of his sociotheological analysis is at its best when blended with the personal experience that can be found only from an insider. Clarke's own activist faith led him to accept the position with the Canadian Catholic Church, and that job, combined with the impact of Vatican II and Latin American liberation theology, brought him from Anglicanism to Catholicism. Within this faith and vocational context the author portrays openly the divisions among the bishops themselves and how they responded to external pressure. We are treated to inspiring profiles of the radicals in the episcopal camp, notably Remi De Roo of Victoria and Adolphe Proulx of Gatineau-Hull. Especially gratifying is the latter portrayal. After all, most anglophone Christian liberationists have heard of De Roo, but we can thank Tony Clarke for bringing to life in English the saintly radical bishop of Hull's creative diocese. There is an element of exposé as well. The links of Archbishop Emmett Carter of Toronto to the "good life" and corporate friends such as Conrad Black are highlighted, as are the machinations of the more conservative bishops to marginalize De Roo and his allies. Clarke

realizes the potential weaknesses of the testimony of an insider, but this has not stopped him from speaking out. We are the richer for it.

Above all, *Behind the Mitre* is both "a lament" and a prophetic appeal. Clarke's radical actions against NAFTA had embarrassed the bishops to the point that they fired him from his ecclesiastical position. However, there is no spirit of vengeance in this book. Rather it is "a lament for the loss of moral leadership on the national stage at a time when the gap between rich and poor is rapidly expanding" (p. xiv). But that is not all. *Behind the Mitre* is also a ringing prophetic appeal for Christians to rekindle hope by organizing and pursuing justice from the "grass-roots". The book's concluding chapter and appendix inspire and guide us in that direction. *Behind the Mitre* may describe Catholic episcopal evolution in a sorry direction, but the book is ecumenical in its analysis and appeal. Clarke's own words confirm that fact: "Finally, it is my fervent hope that telling this story will encourage all people of faith, not only Christians but also those from other religious traditions, to deepen their spirituality by becoming more actively engaged in the struggles for justice and the transformation of the world. For the 'cries of the victims are the voice of God' in our midst" (p. xv).

Oscar Cole Arnal  
Waterloo Lutheran Seminary  
Waterloo, Ontario

## **There's Got to be More! Connecting Churches & Canadians**

Reginald W. Bibby  
Winfield, B.C.: Wood Lake Books Inc., 1995  
153 pp.

I must admit that I approached Bibby's latest book, *There's Got to be More* with a degree of scepticism. When I am confronted with statistics and surveys I'm reminded of Winston Churchill's comments on Gallup Polls during the Second World War. Early in the war, September 30, 1941, a member of the opposition asked the Prime Minister how England could live with the gloomy results of the latest polls.

Churchill replied: "Nothing is more dangerous in war-time than to live in the temperamental atmosphere of a Gallup Poll, always feeling one's pulse and taking one's temperature."

I believe the same reply needs to be given by the church to the many pessimistic surveys of our day. Our call to be faithful disciples in this generation cannot be compromised by statistics that talk the language of gloom and doom.

Reading this work by the now famous-within-Canada religious sociologist at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta was, nonetheless, both