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Do Justice: The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops (1945-1986)

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colonizing patterns." "The feminists envisage the Christian concept of service not as servitude but as the process of empowerment in community."

What is ministry? "Ministry does not refer to the work of clergy but to the activity of all Christians as they live out their sense of vocation. Ministry is what enables people to live their commitments and express their understanding of the source of their identity and meaning."

Rhodes is listening carefully—and has let us enter the process—to what an experienced and committed group of feminists have learned through their journeys as ordained clergy and parish pastors. For me, the basic strength and contribution to ministry and theology of this book is that it is a forthright and deeply reflective discourse by women about their own experiences-in-relationship as pertains to the four designated themes: authority, salvation, mission and vocation.

This text deserves to be on the reading lists of seminary courses in pastoral theology, especially those dealing with contextual ministry. Given its affirming and challenging style, it is also a book that needs to be read, digested and discussed by clergy and theologians serving in the field of ministry.

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Do Justice! The Social Teaching of the Canadian Catholic Bishops

Edited by E. F. Sheridan, S.J.

Sherbrooke, Quebec: Éditions Paulines, 1987

459 pp. \$15.00

Fr. Sheridan's recently published volume, *Do Justice*, is a welcome edition for those interested in social justice. In this one volume Sheridan has brought together the social statements of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Together, they provide a perspective of the recent social vision of Canada's Roman Catholic Bishops.

With the release of the Bishops' statement, "Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis" in December 1982, many people were surprised that the Canadian Roman Catholic hierarchy should be commenting on such complex subjects. What role does religion have in the world of economics and politics? In fact, there were many who strongly recommended that the Bishops stick to more "religious matters". In *Do Justice*, Fr. Sheridan effectively documents that such a concern for the world of economics and politics and the ensuing effect it has upon people is not something "new" for the Bishops, nor the Roman Catholic community, nor the broader Christian community for that matter.

Do Justice, in bringing together the various significant social statements, briefs, and public letters, has done a great service to Roman Catholics and those interested in social justice. Being able to read many of the significant documents together helps the reader see the evolution and continuity of Catholic social teaching in Canada. "Ethical Reflections" was not a radical departure by uninformed bishops. Rather it was the fruit of years of observing Canadian and global reality.

Sheridan has captured the essence of these years of observation in a wonderful Introduction. These thirty-five pages offer a concise yet thorough summary of the major events in Roman Catholic social teaching. Beginning with *Rerum Novarum* (1891), Sheridan traces the evolution of Catholic social teaching through the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Latin American Bishops Conference in Medellin, Colombia (1968) and in Puebla, Mexico (1979). This global backdrop sets the stage for the social teaching of Canadian Bishops. The Introduction goes on to provide a brief history of the Canadian experience since the inception of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in 1943, the basic principles that run through the Bishops' teachings, and lastly a section on the structure of the CCCB in order to understand better the source of the various statements. The Introduction is truly a gem within the book and a key to understanding the various entries that follow.

Do Justice offers a helpful example of the role that consistent and committed theological reflection can play in shaping the worldview of a Christian community. While one may not share all the Bishops' views, one certainly has to respect their social witness which probes beneath the surface of their tradition and searches out the theological depths of their faith for important truths appropriate for our own time. As Sheridan aptly observes about the current climate:

For many religion has become so privatized, so exclusively a matter between the individual and God, that the church should concern itself with public worship, limiting its moral catechesis at most to an individualistic ethics, as though the areas of public policy, of the common good, of the economy, politics and justice were beyond the judgement of the Gospel or the concern of church leaders... (32).

The result of such a "religion" is a certain shallowness and lack of sophistication. The work of the Bishops points to a deeper theological reality that must be tapped by those pursuing social justice if a credible witness is to be made in the corridors of legislature, the marketplace of business, and the broader social arena.

Do Justice is also a helpful resource in the continuing ecumenical partnership for social justice. When the Canadian Council of Churches was formed in 1944, a principal reason was to consider the impact of "industrialism" on Canadian society. Likewise it is interesting to note that with the formation of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, one of the first units established was the "Social Action Department". This is evidence of a uniquely Canadian approach to "ecumenism" which begins with

working together for justice and then "dialogue" on the distinctive theological characteristics of each tradition. Sheridan recognizes this by including as an appendix a list of the many ecumenical coalitions and inter-church agencies. Admittedly there has not been as much discussion about the theological basis for "action(s)" as there has been about the strategies or actions themselves. *Do Justice* will certainly make a valuable contribution to those discussions and will be a valuable resource for those who want to understand better Roman Catholic positions.

No single volume can be all things to all readers. While *Do Justice* does include within many of the footnotes the social context that precipitated a particular focus, it would have been helpful to have had each document include a brief introductory note. Where these occur, they are most helpful. As well, it would have been helpful if some closing chapter, similar to the introduction, would have been included. Such a section might have endeavoured to project the future directions of Roman Catholic social teaching. Given many of the emerging issues such as in the area of bioengineering and reproductive technologies, it would be interesting to speculate as to what questions will face our society.

Lastly, it would have been interesting and helpful to include a bit of critical reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of the Bishops' social teaching. I realize this may not be appropriate within the context of the current volume. However, each Christian tradition has brought a variety of gifts and insights to the pursuit of justice and our common understanding of God's world. As we sharpen our awareness of our own limitations, we also sharpen our awareness of our important contribution to the work of sanctification and solidarity.

Do Justice is not light reading. It will best serve as a good reference to be called upon in considering particular social questions. It will not provide a lot of specific answers, but it will help in developing a fuller religious-historical perspective on the political and economic questions that should be considered in shaping our future. As Sheridan aptly observes, "... statements will not make Canada a just society" However, as he goes on to say in quoting the Bishops themselves, "Our primary role is to be moral teachers in society ... we have a responsibility to stimulate ethical reflections on the values, priorities and structures of this country's socio-economic order" (43-44). Simply stated, *Do Justice* may not give us neat little answers, but it may help us get the *question* right!

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