

**Nuevo Mundo
Mundos Nuevos**

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Nouveaux mondes mondes nouveaux - Novo Mundo

Mundos Novos - New world New worlds

2008

Coloquios | 2016

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Publisher

Mondes Américains

Electronic version

URL: <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/69612>

ISSN: 1626-0252

Brought to you by École des hautes études
en sciences sociales



Electronic reference

Daniela Saresella, « Canadian English-speaking Catholics, Latin America and the Refugee issue under Trudeau », *Nuevo Mundo Mundos Nuevos* [Online], Workshops, Online since 10 October 2016, connection on 19 December 2016. URL : <http://nuevomundo.revues.org/69612>

This text was automatically generated on 19 décembre 2016.



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Canadian English-speaking Catholics, Latin America and the Refugee issue under Trudeau

Daniela Saresella

- 1 Historically, English-speaking Catholics who arrived from Ireland and settled in Protestant-dominated societies were a small minority. During the twentieth century, Toronto saw the arrival of many immigrants mostly from Italy, Ukraine and other Catholic countries. Since they did not have much social and political weight, English-speaking Catholics organized a network of institutions in the fields of education, health and welfare to support their community. English-speaking Catholics gained recognition in 1945, when James McGuigan, archbishop of Toronto, became the first prelate outside Québec to receive the cardinal's hat.¹
- 2 After WWII a period of revitalization was inaugurated: the return to peace brought renewed optimism as ordinary Canadians looked forward to leading normal lives. Bright economic and social prospects opened up new hopes and attracted a considerable number of immigrants: between 1951 and 1961 Canada's population grew by 30 per cent. Cities and suburbs grew rapidly and traditional customs and values declined, while consumerist lifestyle took over. By the end of 1950s, therefore, the influence of religion on Canadian culture was waning.² Society experienced massive secularization and a decline in religious practice. The percentage of Roman Catholics attending mass dropped from 88 per cent in 1957 to 41 per cent in 1975, and religious vocations also suffered a massive decline. Such a trend was evident in all Canadian provinces, without exception.³
- 3 During the pre-conciliar period, the Canadian Church was very conservative. Both English-speaking and French-speaking bishops had not really been dealing with the demands of modernity.⁴ Strongly influenced by Cold War divisions, the Church's conservative culture was profoundly anti-communist, though Canadian Christian culture had also produced bold prophets, people who condemned oppressors for their injustice.

In particular some believers, inspired by the social doctrine of the Church, proposed principles of social justice and promoted the cooperative movement.⁵

The Canadian Catholic Church between Council and post Council

- 4 It was in this context that Pope John XXIII convened the Second Vatican Council to allow the Church to respond creatively to the issues and challenges of the modern world. The image used to describe the Council is that of windows opening to let fresh air into the Church. Douglas Roche – founding editor of the *Western Catholic Reporter* – wrote : “But of course it was more than that, it was a rediscovery of what the Church really is. The affirmation of the equality of all Christians in baptism gave profound new dimensions to our understanding of the Church. To recognize our equality was a major break with the past. The old triumphalism of the hierarchical Church was to be replaced with a more open and listening response to the world around it.”⁶ The Church was conceived as a community of people awaiting the coming of the Kingdom of God, all the while accepting responsibility for its fulfillment in the present.
- 5 A considerable number of Canadian bishops took part in an ecumenical council, and some of them played a very important role in the debates. Bishop Paul Bernier of Gaspé was appointed a member of the central co-ordinating committee ; Archbishop Maurice Roy of Quebec City (was named) to the Theology Commission ; Winnipeg Archbishop George Flahiff sat on the Commission for Religious Life ; Bishop Alexander Carter, president of the Canadian conference of Catholic Bishops, was a consultant for the lay apostolate. An important role was also reserved for the Ukrainian Archeparch Maxim Heemaniuk, of Winnipeg, and Eparch Isidore Borecki, of Toronto.
- 6 Cardinal Paul-Emile Lèger, archbishop of Montreal, was among the many cardinals on the Central preparatory commission of the Council. The Montréal cardinal was involved in several working stages of the draft, and subsequently took active part in the Revelation Debate during the Council.⁷ Not to be forgotten is also Toronto Auxiliary Bishop Philip Pocock (who would become Toronto’s archbishop in 1971), appointed during the Council to the Commission for Clergy and Lay People. In 1964 he was one of the first Catholic bishops to enter the public debate over artificial birth control. In this context Pocock played a very important role at the August 1968 meeting of the Canadian Catholic Conference, which produced the Winnipeg Statement. After Paul VI’s decision to condemn all the so-called artificial means of contraception (*Humanae Vitae* encyclical), against the advice of the study commission appointed by him and without consulting the world episcopate, the Canadian bishops meeting in Winnipeg published a pastoral statement that expressed respect for the conscience of Catholics unconvinced by papal teaching.⁸
- 7 The most important exponent of the Canadian delegation, however, was theologian Gregory Baum, who played a central role in drafting the first text on the relationship between Christians and Jews. He was involved in the preparation of a statement on the Church's relation to the Jewish people, to correct the anti-Jewish current in Christian teaching and promote friendship and cooperation between Christians and Jews. In 1962 (until 1991) Gregory Baum published the journal *The Ecumenist*, aimed at the promotion of Christian unity ; it was printed by the Paulist Press, in collaboration with the Centre for

Ecumenical Studies of St. Michael College at the University of Toronto.⁹ The Editorial in the journal's first issue argued: "Since the ecumenical movement is constantly expanding in the Christian world, it is of greatest importance to follow the significant events and the theological developments associated with them".¹⁰ The journal focused on discussions about disarmament, refugees, women in the church, ecumenical approaches to decolonization and abortion.¹¹

- 8 The Second Vatican was held at a time when Canadian society was beginning to experience a period of profound change.¹² But secularization did not necessarily mean relegating religion to the private sphere: the tradition of prophetic faith urged people to experience their faith in God through actions aimed at social justice. The Canadian church therefore became more spiritual, and less engaged in political affairs, but more involved in social issues and interested in the World development. Accepting the pluralistic character of Canadian society, the Roman Church had redefined its role, raising its voice and taking a position on economic justice, world peace and Third World issues. The Church had been particularly keen in supporting the fight for the rights of the poor, living in First- and in Third-World countries. The Canadian Roman Church expressed its intention to influence public policies in the area of human rights and social justice in collaboration with other Christian confessions.¹³
- 9 Vatican II was important for the episcopal conference of Canadian Catholic bishops. The conference was established in 1943, but the bishops had not yet had opportunities to meet often, to work together, or to share their vision of the future on Catholicism in Canada for that matter.¹⁴ The importance of the new course was clear when the episcopal conference of Canada assumed its collegial responsibility in the late Sixties and in the early Seventies through public statements on the burning issues of social sin and social justice.¹⁵
- 10 Nothing could have better prepared the Roman Church to interpret the emerging trends of Third World theology than this new interest in social issues. When, in 1959, John XXIII emphasized Latin America's needs, the Canadian episcopate established a national program of pastoral action and help for those people: thousands of Canadian bishops, priests, religious and lay people visited Latin America and became engaged in pastoral and social work in the ensuing years to come. These missionaries became participants in the struggles for justice and the new concept of liberation theology.
- 11 In 1964 Bob Ogle – ordained as a cleric in 1953 – was sent to Brazil. Of his experience he wrote: "The Church had traditionally been one of the pillars of Brazilian society. Other pillars were political and military. [...] It had to teach the Gospel and work with lay people to develop Christian leaders. Today, that doesn't sound revolutionary, but it was then. The preferential option for the poor – the idea that the poor were the heart of the church – had not received the attention it was to get, after its endorsement in 1968 by the Latin American bishops at the first conference in Medellin".¹⁶ The Brazilian pastoral plan was very similar to the planning already underway at the Second Vatican Council. From that experience he came back with three key concepts: the necessity of a decent standard of living, the importance of a Christian base community and the necessity of preaching the Gospel clearly, so that it would have actual impact on people's lives.¹⁷ Ogle founded "base communities" in Brazil, was in touch with liberation theologians and considered Dom Helder Camara as a model leader.¹⁸ For these reasons he was expelled from Brazil in 1970.

- 12 The Canadian Catholic Church criticized the rigid barriers separating it from the rest of society in the 1960s. This gave rise to closer working relations with non-Catholics at an institutional level :¹⁹ a connection was established with other churches in 1964. In 1967 the bishops created the Canadian Churches Organization for Development and Peace with the aim of providing financial support for economic and social development in the Third World and of informing Canadians about the actual situation of global inequality and injustice and on its causes. In 1968 the Canadian Catholic Conference and the Canadian Council of Churches co-sponsored a national conference on poverty in both Canada and the Third World.²⁰
- 13 The Canadian Church invested considerable human, material and financial capital in missions abroad, and the missionaries transformed their vision of Christianity and of the Church through daily contact with people living in Latin America. These experiences influenced their relationship with local churches in mission areas, with other cultures and with other religions : after the Council, the conception of mission as dialogue became dominant in Catholic Missiology.²¹
- 14 When a new conception of the church closer to the needs of the poor, the liberation theology, emerged during the Medellin conference, it recalled the journey of the pedagogue, envisioning an alternative and a better future. It was considered an indigenous political theology.²² This type of experience generated considerable interest in the Canadian context because, as Mary Jo Leddy underlined, Canadians had had “a colonial existence.” She added : “We have been a colony of France, then of England, and now of United States.” It was necessary to develop a “Canadian liberation theology” not so different from the Latin American one.²³
- 15 In 1968, at the Medellin Conference, Latin American bishops looked at the modern world and tried to define the role of Christian communities within it. Brazilian bishops were well prepared : they spoke about "new forces of imperialism" and the "sinful social structures" that were the cause of increasing poverty and dependency in their region. They were influenced by the major social encyclical *Populorum Progressio* – issued in 1967 – which focused on the growing development gap between rich and poor nations. The third Synod of bishops held in Rome in 1971 was a turning point for Catholic social teaching. In a document entitled *Justice in the World*, the bishops adopted positions that went far beyond Vatican II, introducing the notion of "social sin" : they claimed that the Gospel of Jesus Christ redeems us from sin, including "social sin". At the Rome World Synod, Cardinal George Flahiff of Winnipeg presented the paper *Education for Justice*, with which he contributed to the final document *Justice in the World*. In his keynote address, Cardinal Flahiff argued that Catholic social teaching would continue to be irrelevant unless it were combined with direct participation in the people's struggle for justice. Bishop Alexander Carter of Sault Ste. Marie, president of the CCC at that time, urged the Synod to become critically aware of the excessive power exercised by rich sovereign nation states and by multinational corporations.²⁴ Canadian bishops played a pivotal role in shaping this new social mandate and were prominent in the deliberations, so that the statement was widely publicized in Canada.²⁵
- 16 Throughout the Seventies a significant number of religious orders – including Jesuits, Redemptorists, Ursulines, Sisters of St Joseph, Sisters of Notre Dame, Oblates – chose to devote themselves to the poor. Most of these religious communities had experience in supporting mission work in Third World countries, especially in the formation of Christian base communities in Latin America. In the spirit of Vatican II, Canadian bishops

made the principle of the ecumenical collaboration a priority. Through the Seventies they organized a series of Interchurch coalitions, supported by the Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian and United Churches. It was in this context that the Interchurch Committee on Refugees was formed.²⁶ The rise of military regimes and the escalating human rights abuses in Latin America also demanded an intervention by Catholic bishops. In the mid-Seventies a human rights committee was established, with Adolphe Proulx as its head. Proulx was responsible for organizing a series of missions in Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru. When, in the late Seventies, military oppression intensified in Central America, Proulx took a strong position, denouncing the support provided by the U.S. military to dictatorial governments. In protesting against the violation of human rights in Central America, Proulx did not hesitate to address the Vatican representatives' lack of initiative in the region.

The Trudeau era and Latin America issues

- 17 In 1968 Pierre Trudeau was elected Canada's fifteenth prime minister. He began a revision of Canadian foreign policy and devoted more time to the international scene, so that the Trudeau years were considered a watershed for Canada's role in the world.²⁷ They were characterized by a significantly reduced threat from international Communism and coincided with an atmosphere in which Canadian people were critical of U.S. foreign policy, especially regarding Vietnam.²⁸
- 18 The late Sixties and the early Seventies saw the end of the Pax Americana. U.S. weapons of mass destruction were confronted by Soviet military parity as well as by new security concerns in the Third World. The early Seventies saw the collapse of Bretton Woods and marked the retreat of U.S. leadership in the global economy. It was during the Trudeau era that Latin America was first considered as truly significant for Canada.²⁹ Canada and Latin American countries found themselves sharing strikingly similar views as to the need for the US role in the hemisphere to be critically reconsidered; nationalism therefore became an important bond between Canada and Latin America in the 1970s and early 1980s.³⁰
- 19 Trudeau's idea was that if Latin America developed economically, a process that could be assisted through the initiation of bilateral development assistance, there would be more demand for Canadian products. Between October and November 1968 five Canadian ministers took part in a mission in Latin American (Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Chile): the aim was to expand trade in telecommunications, resource extraction equipment, transportation equipment and nuclear reactors. In 1974 the export trade to Latin America grew by 83 % from the previous year, with imports rising by 105 %.³¹
- 20 At the same time, the Canadian government also had to tackle political issues. In 1971 Salvador Allende invited Trudeau to visit the country: the latter, however, decided to decline the invitation for fear of alienating right-wing elements in Chile and elsewhere. With the coup of September 11, the first democratically elected Marxist government in Latin America was overthrown. A few days after Allende's assassination, the Canadian prime minister decided to recognize the new government. Most Canadians (about 80 %) were critical of the move and the *Montreal Gazette* and *Toronto Star* explicitly condemned it; in Parliament the New Democratic Party fought against the recognition of the Chilean junta. Members of the NDP pressured the government to accept the recommendation of the moderator of the United Church, the primate of the Anglican Church and Bishops of

Canadian Catholic Conference to withhold recognition of the Chilean military regime until the new Chilean government declared that it would respect human rights. Yet, Trudeau argued that Canadian government had quite routinely recognized other Latin American military regimes, so there was no reason why it should not do so in this case.³²

- 21 At the end of a long standoff with Canadian progressive groups, Trudeau's government granted asylum to 7000 Chileans. Churches have played an important role in refugee matters, from encouraging governments to adopt more liberal admission policies to providing material assistance in refugee settlement. Christians were motivated by human compassion and were supported by their Church members, financially and organizationally.³³ Some organizations, like the Inter-Church Committee for Human Rights, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Chile-Canada Solidarity Committee, the Canadian Association of University Teachers and the Association of Colleges and University of Canada voiced their support for displaced Chileans. The admission of persecuted Chileans had an effect on Canadian immigrant and refugee policy, establishing a precedent for the admission of left-wing Argentines after the coup d'état of 1976, as well as Salvadorans and Guatemalans fleeing right-wing regimes in the early 1980s.³⁴
- 22 After the 1976 coup in Argentina, the Trudeau government also wished to promote trade with the country and was interested in the sale of nuclear reactors, so it could not take up a critical position on Argentine human rights abuses. Ottawa decided to work within the U.N. Commission on Human Rights in an effort to implement a special investigation in countries where disappearances were occurring, without mentioning Argentina and Chile: the government was reluctant to initiate policies which could have a detrimental impact upon Canadian economic interests. At the U. N., therefore, Canada spoke against human rights violations but Ottawa maintained that sanctions against Chile and Argentina would harm Canadian economic interests and also have little impact on Chilean policies.
- 23 Canadian interests in Latin America were indeed considerable; in 1978, 54 % of Canadian aid to the southern Continent was still devolved to Central America (where only 6 % of the population was concentrated). This coincided with mounting revolutionary tension in El Salvador, and with the imminence of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. On July 19, 1979, the Sandinista National Liberation Front became the official government of Nicaragua, and was recognized by the U.S. shortly afterwards. The Canadian government followed suit on July 24. After the Nicaraguan revolution, Ottawa assigned an ambassador to the region (R. Douglas Sirrs, certainly no fan of Nicaragua's socialist experiment).
- 24 1979 saw the beginning of the Reagan presidency, which introduced the ultra-liberal State, characterized by attempts to dismantle welfare; as to foreign policy, Reagan was elected in the hope of reasserting U.S. hegemony. The changes in state-society and social relations in the U.S. had an international impact, since the country was the most powerful state in the world. Reagan's main problem was the worldwide spread of communism, and above all in Central America. This was why, in 1983, U.S. intervention in Nicaragua intensified, with the presence of U.S. directed Contra forces. The Canadian government took up a different position, convinced that regional turmoil was caused by North-South disparity. Trudeau's opinion was that "when a country chooses a socialist or even a Marxist path, it does not necessarily buy a package which automatically injects it into the Soviet orbit". He argued that every state has the right "to follow whatever ideological path their peoples decide".³⁵

- 25 In the spring of 1984, the Secretary of State for External Affairs, Allan MacEachen, decided to visit Managua, but the government did not come out against U.S. intervention in that country. El Salvador was the scene of a terrible civil war between Left and Right but the Canadian government similarly remained largely silent until the early 1980s. Canadian organizations like the Inter-Church Committee for Human Rights, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Chile-Canada Solidarity Committee, the Canadian Association of University Teachers, and the Association of Colleges and University of Canada expressed their displeasure with aspects of Canada's diplomatic relations with Central America. Their positions clashed with U.S. policy in the Central America as well as with the interests of Canadian business.

"Catholic New Times" and Latin America

- 26 Mary Jo Leddy, a theologian and social activist who joined the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion, completed a doctorate at the University of Toronto in Philosophy between the Seventies and the Eighties. Studying the Holocaust and Hannah Arendt's political philosophy, Leddy discovered her theoretical and passionate basis for social engagement and came to the conclusion that what had happened during the Holocaust was the result of the passivity of good people. Influenced by Liberation theology and events in Latin America, Leddy also became engaged in the peace movement. Since then, she has participated in numerous peace campaigns, including pilgrimages to the Honduran-Nicaraguan border and to the south of Lebanon.
- 27 In 1976, with Fr. Jim Webb SJ, Fr. Tom McKillip, Fr. Bud Smith SFM, Sr. Margaret Ordway IBVM, and a collective of twelve people, Leddy was a founding editor of the *Catholic New Times*, a national, independent Canadian newspaper that soon grew into an award-winning publication with a wide readership. *Catholic New Times* was founded by Catholics for whom the link between "faith and justice had become inseparable from the hope and love to which all are called by the Gospel of Jesus". The newspaper's founders "had been deeply affected by the Second Vatican Council, rejoicing in its understanding of the church as the People of God, its biblical and ecumenical orientations, and its insistence that we be alert to the action of God's Spirit in our own time."³⁶
- 28 Mary Jo Leddy described the goal of the project in these terms : "We started it because we began to feel the chill, the conservative chill, in the Church. And that's when I began to struggle for Vatican II. Then we began to see that many people weren't taking it for granted. It was through the newspaper that I came into contact not with the 'traditional' Church but with the institutional, bureaucratic power structure that was defending itself mightily against change. I was shocked at the coercive power trips that were going on, all in the name of defending 'the Church'."³⁷ The last years of Paul VI's pontificate were characterized by a fear of the radical ideas spreading in the Catholic world and by the attempt to bring back the "people of God" to more moderate positions.
- 29 In the editorial of the first issue of *Catholic New Times* the reference to the Second Vatican Council and to progressive changes in the Catholic world was clear : "Over 10 years ago the Vatican Council articulated a genuinely new understanding of the Church and its relationship to the world. [...] During the '60s and the early '70s there was a time of real ferment. It was a time of change, a time of hope and of fear."³⁸

- 30 The Catholic New Times was also interested in the civil rights, discrimination, racism, homosexuality,³⁹ native cultures, and priesthood for woman.⁴⁰ A group of Catholic women wrote “An Open Letter on the Ordination of Women”, and the newspaper published it.⁴¹ This position went against the prescriptions of Paul VI, who was against the ordination of women. In October 1977 a meeting of divorced Catholics was organized in Toronto : the participants expressed their “awareness, directed to the official Church as well as to the theologians and laity”, and the newspaper gave space to the initiative.⁴²
- 31 Another important focus in the newspaper was poverty in the world, in the wake of the new sensibility that was rooted in the Catholic world and in Canadian society. “The sign of the times today compels us as Christians to think about our social responsibility and to put our words into actions. We live in the world that oppressed at least half of the human race. But it is not enough to see injustice, disorder, and violence at home and abroad and to worry about the future. These conditions will not improve on their own. We have the responsibility to change them.”⁴³ Poverty was not only a First World problem, in fact, it concerned above all the Third World. So Mary Jo Leddy argued : “in America Latin theologians who are trying to restate the mission of the Church in terms of the option for the poor. They have been silenced because they are challenging the structure and the status quo. Only recently, Jesuit theologians were killed in El Salvador. Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff was censured by the Vatican. So here is a real question : how does the Church deal with the prophetic element ? I keep thinking that one of the reasons Vatican II has been so fragile is that prophetic voices were not welcomed earlier and listened to in greater depth.”⁴⁴
- 32 Yet, at the same time she criticized the Council and wrote that “the experience of women in our time, at least of women in the Western world, was not understood at Vatican II.”⁴⁵ She continued : “I have heard the liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez speak very movingly about how his mother was the one who put him through theology and worked as a cleaning woman without a husband. No one in Latin America has written more powerfully about the oppression of the poor, but he also knew in his skin what the oppression of women was about. So I think we shouldn’t engage in disparaging the concerns of women.”⁴⁶
- 33 Showing a definite interest in his theological ideas, the *Catholic New Times* advertised Gutierrez’s lecture at St. Joseph College School, Toronto, in December 1976.⁴⁷ Shortly thereafter, Paulo Krischke, a sociologist who in the late Sixties had been conducting research for the Brazilian Catholic Conference, wrote about Helder Camara, a very influential thinker of the theology of liberation and bishop of Recife : “He had been one of the most important influences on the ideas of Vatican II for the renewal of the Church”. While many have labelled his positions too extreme, “I came to realize that Camara’s struggle is a direct expression of the people’s resistance to oppression.”⁴⁸
- 34 In August 1978, 160 Canadian Catholics wrote an “Open letter to Latin Americans” on occasion of Celam III. In their opinion the Puebla meeting should become “a sign of conversion to the struggle of the poor and oppressed and express the Canadian solidarity in social action on issues such as resource development ;”⁴⁹ on that occasion, in fact, some priests and theologians emphasized the values of social and political emancipation in the Christian message. A letter expressing these concepts was sent to Episcopal Conferences of Latin American nations and individual Bishops who would be attending the Puebla conference. The *Catholic New Times* group promoted the open letter and Mary Boyd, Director of the Social Action Commission, Diocese of Charlottetown, wrote a letter

congratulating Leddy for a "very good initiative which will hopefully increase our solidarity with our fellow Christians in Latin America".⁵⁰

- 35 The *Catholic New Times* voiced its hopes about Puebla, because Latin America had witnessed the emergence of "some of the most vibrant movements in the Church."⁵¹ Yet, the socio-economic and political situation had deteriorated, with development failing to benefit the vast majority of the population and more repressive national security governments in place in most countries. In the Church there had been reactions against the positions expressed at Medellin and the secretariat of the episcopal conference had become more conservative.
- 36 The assembly of the Latin American bishops should have been held in Puebla in October 1978, but because of Paul VI's death the meeting was postponed to January 1979, awaiting the election of the new pope. The election of Karol Wojtyla had not been foreseen and the *Catholic New Times* titled its article: "Cardinals surprise World with Polish Pope."⁵² John Paul II's conservative turn was clear to everyone: the article underlined that the new pope was a "theological conservative", though it mentioned that during the Council "he strongly opposed a conservative effort to draft a harsh condemnation of atheism."⁵³
- 37 The Canadian Catholic Conference, very sensitive to Latin American influences, sent two bishops to Puebla: Archbishop Joseph MacNeil of Edmonton, and Archbishop Gilles Ouellet of Rimouski, both with significant experience in Latin America.⁵⁴ In an interview released at the beginning of the conference, Ouellet argued: "we can't go backwards from Medellin, it has been an important turning point for the Church". He continued: "The Medellin statements came right after the publication of the *Populorum progressio*, and these two documents focused in the minds of the Bishops of Canada and the great many Canadian citizens that a great deal of social action must be done here."⁵⁵
- 38 John Paul II's speech in Puebla raised concerns and questions. Rev. Robert Carty SJ wrote in the *Catholic New Times*: "Conservative in tone, general in message, his early talks upset and disturbed those Christians who believe the faith in Latin America must challenge a status quo of oppression". The international press had the impression that the pope was against liberation theology and the Church's involvement in politics". Carty confirmed: "We are convinced that Christians engaged in the struggle and guided by the spirit of Medellin have given more testimony to the Gospel than all the words that have been or will be written."⁵⁶
- 39 The Jesuit Michael Czerny, in the same newspaper, underlined that the Pope's remarks were causing "a great problem," because in El Salvador and in other countries several campesinos and their priests had become martyrs in a government attempt to eliminate all rural organizations.⁵⁷ It was clear that the Polish pope had a different conception of social issues, and that he could not support father Arrupe's idea – also endorsed by the *Catholic New Times* – that "some elements of Marxist social analysis are acceptable to Christians."⁵⁸
- 40 In 1978 the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Cuba invited the Canadian Council of Churches to visit the country, and the invitation was accepted. In October 1978 four priests (Richard Johns, Director of Resources for Ministry of the Anglican Church ; Garth Legge, Secretary of the Division of World Outreach of the United Church ; Lois Wilson, President of the Canadian Council of Churches and United Church clergywoman ; and John Zimmerman, Executive Secretary of the Lutheran Church in American-Canadian) went to visit the Central American country. In an interview released after their return,

they claimed that Cuban society had more respect than North American society for Christian values : "no one is unemployed or hungry, medical care and education are free for all ; billboards do not promote consumerism but rather conservation, ethical responsibility for community welfare."⁵⁹

- 41 Michael Czerny voiced his opinion on Somoza's regime. In 1978, in an open letter to Flora McDonald (Secretary of State for External Affairs), Czerny expressed "the concern of the Canadian Churches about human rights violations throughout the world", and above all he wished "raise the question of the urgent situation in Nicaragua." In that country there was "an intolerable level of persecution and atrocities" suffered by the Nicaraguan civilian population at the hands of the National Guard.⁶⁰ In 1979 the *Catholic New Times* considered the Sandinist revolution with favor, and highlighted the fact that in the Junta of National Reconstruction there were two priests : Miguel D'Escoto e Ernesto Cardenal.⁶¹ Further Gary MacEoin wrote : "The Sandinist Front, that enjoys the overwhelming support of the people, has brought not only political but also religious liberation to Nicaragua. In doing this, it has triumphed over an unholy alliance of the United States and reactionary church elements both in Latin America and in the Vatican."⁶²
- 42 The Social Affairs Commission of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops planned a meeting with representatives of the Ministry of External Affairs to discuss Canadian aid and trade agreements with Nicaragua. The Church Committee proposed closer economic relations with the Central American country, to support it politically.⁶³ Therefore, when, at the beginning of 1982, Fr. Xabier Gorostiaga, theologian and consultant to the Sandinista government, went to Canada, invited to attend conferences on the Nicaraguan situation, the *Catholic New Times* suggested that its readers attend his lectures.⁶⁴
- 43 John Paul II was very critical of the Sandinist government. During his visit to Nicaragua in February 1983 the Pope prohibited members of the Catholic Church from participating in the government of Nicaragua. The *Catholic New Times* sided, instead, with the position of "the five priests who have been asked to resign from their Government posts", but decided to resist to pressure from the Vatican.⁶⁵
- 44 Moreover, there is once again clear proof of the journal's attention to the situation in Nicaragua in the interest shown at the arrival in Toronto in October 1981 of Olga Aviles, head of solidarity for the FSLN of Nicaragua, who was invited to come and speak by the Latin American Working Group : the event was organized to contrast the news published by newspapers like "Globe and Mail", accusing the government of Nicaragua of "curtailing civil liberties" ".⁶⁶
- 45 In El Salvador attention was focused on Archbishop Oscar Romero, an outspoken critic of the military government and defender of the oppressed of his country.⁶⁷ After his death in 1980 Archbishop Joseph MacNeil, President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, said that he "condemn[ed] the assassination of so great a defender of human rights and devoted disciple of Christ."⁶⁸ After a few months a delegation of Canadian Catholics visited El Salvador and they confirmed "the persecution of the Catholic Church and violent attacks on political opposition."⁶⁹
- 46 The inter-Church Committee for Human Rights asked Prime Minister Trudeau to take an active part against the US military aid and intervention in El Salvador. In its opinion it was the urgent duty of the Canadian Government to act "in support of human rights in the Central American country and for the end of military intervention in El Salvador."⁷⁰

- 47 During John Paul II's papacy, the climate of opinion changed and in 1981 Leonardo Boff's book *Charisma and Power* was strongly criticized by the Vatican hierarchy, in particular by cardinal Cardinal Eugenio Sale of Rio de Janeiro, who accused the theologian of envisaging "a grassroots Church separated from the hierarchical Church." In an interview published in the *Catholic New Times* Boff responded to these charges : "The popular church does not create division : rather it creates a new vision of church. And this vision is characterized by a working relationship between faith in the Gospel and action in society. It is a different model of church and creates tensions with the other model of church, which is more sacramental, more devotional, more linked to the dominant social classes. I think that this tension can exist within the same church."⁷¹
- 48 The progressive Latin American church – Penny Lernoux noted in the *Catholic New Times* – "appears to be under pressure from Rome" and Gutierrez is "under investigation by his country's bishops" : the words of Cardinal Ratzinger, uttered during the meeting in Bogota in early May 1984, were clear in this sense. Ratzinger had in fact questioned "homegrown theology reflecting the Latin America reality of poverty and repression". The newspaper, highly critical of the positions of Rome, wrote : "Like the White House thinks that the United States has a proprietary right over the 'brown people' of Central America, Rome has always looked askance at the developing countries' attempts at innovations in such topics as liturgy, theology, and canon law". The *Catholic New Times* added : "But Rome's problem is that of any empire : the natives are becoming restless. And because the natives compose the majority of the world's Catholics, the challenge cannot go unheeded."⁷²
- 49 The *Catholic New Times* was also involved in the mobilization in favor of Latin American refugees. Great attention was devoted to Chile, although the newspaper, founded in 1976, did not experience the first episodes of that tragic political exodus from the South American country. The newspaper, together with the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America, made put strong pressure on the Canadian government to have it accept political refugees from Chile, Uruguay and Argentina.⁷³ The *Catholic New Times* wrote about the case of Ignacio Muñoz, a Chilean refugee, who had been tortured in his home country ; he was now being deported "not because his claim was invalid, but because Canadian procedure for determining refugee claims were unsatisfactory."⁷⁴ The newspaper organized "Project Chile", an initiative of the ecumenical task-force on the Church, which included the Inter-Church Committee for Human Rights, the Canadian Labour Congress, the Chile-Canada Solidarity Committee, the Canadian Association of University Teachers, and the Association of Colleges and University of Canada.⁷⁵ Robert Carty emphasized that project Chile was "an initiative of Canadian Churches in cooperation with the Canadian Labour Congress and the Latin American Working Group. The Objective of the campaign is to stop Canadian investments, loans and governmental support to the military regime of Chile until such time as human rights and democratic freedoms are restored".⁷⁶ With the support of the newspaper, the Canadian Churches criticized the economic development plan of the Chilean Government, which was "good for the rich and foreign interests, but a disaster for the majority of Chileans. Reports from Chile indicate that the rich have never had it better. But the Chileans refugees arriving in Canada and sources within the Chilean Catholic Church say that the poor have never suffered so greatly in remembered history."⁷⁷
- 50 The *Catholic New Times* supported the fight of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, aiming to challenge Noranda Mines, one of Canada's largest multinational

corporations and the Federal Government's Export Development Corporation on the issue of investing Canadian Dollars in Chile. The president of the association, Derry Byrne, in a letter to Alfred Powis, President of Noranda, suggested that "the proposed Chilean investment be postponed until such time as a labor policy is adopted which conforms to internationally recognized and accepted principles of freedom of association and human rights."⁷⁸

- 51 The newspaper also devoted attention to political refugees from Argentina. In May 1977, the Brazilian government under pressure from the United Nations set up an office to help refugees who coming mainly from Argentina. The Canadian government was not particularly active in helping these refugees, because the Immigration Department had no a permanent representatives in Brazil. Refugee matters were therefore dealt with only once every three months when Canadian Immigration officials visited Brazil to conduct interviews ; the Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America asked them to speed up procedures.⁷⁹
- 52 The Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice, founded in 1973 under the name of GATT-Fly, was also interested in Third World problems. It put pressure on the government and embraced the mandate for research, education and action on trade and economic issues affecting the Third World. In 1990 the GATT-Fly changed its name into Ecumenical Coalition for Economic Justice.⁸⁰ In 1979 the Toronto Jesuit Centre for Social Faith was also founded, one of the nation's most highly respected clearing houses for information and for liberation, at both global and national level. It was established by Michael Czerny, S.J. and Jim Webb, S.J., to promote methodologies for the analysis of social justice. In Toronto Czerny also founded the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), an organization that aimed to aid refugees, forcibly displaced peoples, and asylum seekers.⁸¹ Leddy also worked on problems of refugees and in 1992 founded Romero House, a Toronto-based community home for refugees. It was (and still is) a charitable organization conceived to provide assistance in resettling refugees. Romero House was run by staff and interns who lived with refugees in the four houses that constituted the heart of the organization. Although Romero House was rooted in the Christian tradition, it welcomed and respected all faiths.

Conclusions

- 53 In the debate on the Second Vatican Council, some scholars have emphasized the Council's novel elements, while others have stressed the continuity with the past, in order to play down its radical drive. The investigation of Canadian Catholicism that I have carried out so far confirms that Vatican II represented a turning point in that context, too, in that it represented an opportunity for reviving both the Church and the catholic world.
- 54 With the Council, a new social sensibility emerged in matters related both to faith and to domestic and foreign issues. Catholics were not the only ones to be aware of the contradictions of contemporary society : this awareness was shared by followers of other denominations with whom they collaborated closely thanks to the revival of a more receptive current within the Church. The believers' interest in Latin and Central America was in keeping with Trudeau's interest in those countries, even though there were frictions between the Inter-Church Committee for Human Rights and the prime minister over the exceedingly cautious positions on the questions of Central and South American

dictatorships and on the reception of refugees: the catholic world advocated incisive action for the safeguarding of human rights.

- 55 The Canadian Church was therefore able to capture the new aspiration to justice that characterized conciliar and post-conciliar Catholicism, even though, through the Eighties, it conformed itself progressively to the Polish pope's agenda. Not everybody, though: believers such as Mary Jo Leddy and Gregory Baum chose to carry on their quest for a faith in keeping with their ethical principles, persevering until very recently in the fight for human rights and for the rights of the poor.

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ABSTRACTS

During the period of the Council Vatican II, the Catholic world in Canada underwent profound transformations. From the Sixties onwards, English-speaking Canadian Catholics began to take an interest in social problems and, in particular, the contradictions existing in the South American part of the continent. The new climate of inter-religious dialogue encouraged collaboration between the various Christian groups all committed to non-violence and opponents of war and in favor of social justice in the poorer countries. From 1973 onwards, Canadian society, and the Catholic communities as well, had to face the problem of political refugees coming mostly from Chile and Argentina and take up a position regarding the violence against the civilian population in San Salvador and the new socialist and Christian political experiment in Nicaragua. Thanks to the pages of the Toronto newspaper *Catholic New Times* it is possible to reconstruct the spirit of that age and, most important, verify the close relationship between the progressive North American Catholic world and the new religious and political projects emerging in Latin America.

INDEX

Keywords: English-speaking Catholics, Vatican II, Liberation Theology, Refugee, Social justice

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