



Message From the Regionary

Since June 9, 2003, when the new General Episcopal Synod was formed, under the presidency of the Rt. Rev. Tom Degenaaers, the energy behind the new movement has become more and more apparent. The source of the change is not a difference of opinion between bishops or the clergy, or an irreconcilable doctrinal opposition, but the genuine desire from the congregations to adjust the practices of their Church to the requirements of our present society, without altering the true values of the Liberal Catholic Tradition.

An increasing number of Liberal Catholics have decided to join the movement because they can remain in the Church wherein they have been baptized, confirmed or received, and therefore are and will remain members of the Liberal Catholic Church, until they resign or die. There is not a single provision in the Liberal Catholic Canon Law permitting to expel anyone from this Church.

Some people may claim that we have left the Church, because we no longer recognize the General Episcopal Synod presided by the Rev. Ian Hooker. But is such claim valid? If we consider the Synod of the Bishops is the governing body, as it is said in Canon Law, the matter becomes quite clear. We all know that a change of government in the United States, for example, doesn't change the nationality of its citizens.

One may say that things are different when churches are involved. But we know that nobody ever questions the unity of the Church Catholic, Apostolic and Roman, although, at one point of its history, there were three Popes ruling simultaneously. The unity of that church was never questioned because the government of a church is NOT the Church, the people are. As Liberal Catholics, we are the Church and as long as we choose to remain in it, we will be a part of it.

Fortunately, Liberalism allows the freedom of opinions in religious matters, and we claim such freedom. Our movement respects the opinions of other Liberal Catholics, and expects a same tolerance from any other member of our Church.

Brief History of our Movement.

It may seem presumptuous to speak of history in a movement that has nine months of existence, but as so much happened in so little time, it may be useful to record the events before they are fading from our memory.

1. Events leading to the creation of our Movement.

From the foundation of the Liberal Catholic Church, Liberalism or freedom of beliefs and opinions has been the central idea supported by its government. The Bishops always took great care to include in Canon Law only those rules absolutely necessary to manage the Church, leaving latitude to the Regional Bishops to adapt the government of their provinces to the local cultures and customs. When modern society began to evolve, especially after world war II, and with the emergence of global communications, differences of opinion among Liberal Catholics, became apparent, especially in the field of social development.

While certain nations are still struggling with decolonization, and others try to resolve the issues of racial or gender discrimination, some others have already achieved social equality, and their achievements are reflected in their legislation. Most of these more socially aware countries are located in Northern continental Europe.

Following the meeting of the General Synod of the Liberal Catholic Church in St Albans (2000), the Bishops began to introduce more and more restrictions in Canon Law, in an attempt to slow the process of adaptation of the Church to the changing modern society. Although the discussions were focussed mostly on the position of women in the Church, this issue was only a symptom of the deep social differences existing in the various parts of the Liberal Catholic Church.

By the end of the year 2002, Bp. Philip Draaisma, then Regional Bishop for the Netherlands, decided that the best interest of his province required the ordination of women to Minor Order, and a number of female candidates were ordained in the Order of Cleric, in October of that year. A special session of the GES was called to Camberley, United Kingdom, with the purpose to expel Bp Draaisma from the Church. In the process, Bp. Frank den Outer was forced to resign, and Bp Hooker became automatically the acting Regional Bishop for the Dutch Province.

Bp. Hooker and his wife remained in the Netherlands for three months, and left the Dutch province after attempting to take control over all the assets of the Church by dismissing the elected lay members in charge of their management positions, and suspending the clergy of the three major congregations of the Province.

Such actions had a strong impact on the Dutch congregations, and during their annual meeting on June 9, 2003, by the lay members of the province decided to ignore Bp. Hooker's actions, and to consider their Bishops and their clergy as active and suitable to minister them..

2. The development of the new Movement.

The immediate reaction of Bp. Hooker to this declaration of independence was to declare the exclusion of the entire Dutch Province (with the exception of two priests and a dozen of members) from the Church. By that time, Bp. Draaisma had become too ill to continue to work in the Church. He resigned soon after and appointed Bp. Frank den Outer as his successor. Bp. Tom Degenaaars, the Regional Bishop Emeritus of Norway and Denmark, was elected Presiding Bishop of the newly created movement. From the very beginning, the decision was made by all to comply with all the Official Documents of the Liberal Catholic Church as the new movement remained an integral part of that Church.

A few months later, in July 2003, an attempt was made to keep the dialog open between the GES presided by Bp. Hooker and the Dutch Province. I met in Denmark, with Bp. Sten-Bertil Jakobson, the Regional Bishop of Sweden, and we prepared a declaration of inter-communion between the Swedish and Belgian Provinces with the Church in the Netherlands. Although perfectly in accordance with Canon Law (Canon 77), the Interim Committee decided to reject this agreement, and announced that any member in the Church keeping any form of contact with the Dutch Liberal Catholics would become the target of Canonical sanctions.

As any discrimination based on gender became illegal in Belgium by the 1st of January of this year under the penalty of losing incorporation, the members of the Church in Belgium decided to separate themselves from the GES presided by Bp. Hooker, which now had rules against the ordination of women and was not prepared to allow any variance. I was placed before the choice to remain as a member of the GES, to abandon the members of the Church, or to resign. I therefore decided to resign from the GES, [but not from the Liberal Catholic Church], and to join the Synod presided by Bp. Degenaaars, with the unanimous assent of the Belgian Liberal Catholics. The majority of the clergy and the members of the Canadian Province asked me to remain their bishop, and they also decided to join the new movement. The two recognized the General Episcopal Synod presided by Bp. Degenaaars on December 1st, 2003.

As I am residing in the United States, the new GES appointed me as the Regional Bishop of Canada (my former title was Bishop Commissary) and of the United States of America. The new movement began to operate immediately under the denomination of "The Liberal Catholic Church in the United States of America

Very soon, Liberal Catholics from different congregations contacted me mainly to obtain information about the situation in the Netherlands, as very little was published in the United States. Many rumors were circulating, and misconceptions resulted from ignorance. More and more, it became apparent that a large number of the Liberal Catholics in the United States of America were concerned with the direction taken by the members of the GES presided by Bp. Hooker. Attempts were made by the Regional of the American Province, to take control over the assets of congregations managed by lay members, and to suspend or dismiss clergy and officers who were not in agreement with the opinion and policies of the GES. Letter from the American

episcopate were sent to forbid the discussion of certain topics in Church members' meetings. Within a few months, the representatives of several congregations began to consider our new movement as a valid Liberal Catholic alternative presenting a much larger view on the freedom of thoughts and in the operations of the Church.

3. The response in the United States of America.

The first congregation to join the movement was the congregation of Our Lady, Mother of the World which had been expelled from the American province in February 2003, with the Rev. Michel Warnon as Rector. This small congregation had its first Eucharist on Christmasday in 1979 and has been in operation since. Located in the mid-Hudson Valley, in a very rural environment, the chapel can only host twenty people, but is fully equipped for the Liberal Catholic Rite. The Holy Eucharist is celebrated every Sunday. The members are very dedicated and regularly travel long distances to participate to the Services.

The congregation of Saint Francis, in Minneapolis, Minnessota, was submitted last Fall by Bp. Downey, their Regionary, to the same tactics used by Bp. Hooker in the Netherlands, namely the arbitrary replacement of clergy, the dismissal of the elected lay management, and the attempt to take control over the assets of the Parish. These actions provoked the decision of the members to declare their independance from the American Province. I was invited in January to visit St. Francis for a celebration of the Holy Eucharist, and to present the position of our movement.

I traveled to Minneapolis on March 5, 21 004 for a four days visit. The reception by the congregation was extraordinarily friendly and warm. During a meeting with the members of the congregation, presided by the Rev. Richard Curney, Rector, many questions were addressed. The Saturday was dedicated to a visit in Stockholm, Wisconsin, where a new Church is being restored and a congregation assembled by the Rev. Wallace Zick, Deacon. On Sunday, I was invited to celebrate the Holy Eucharist.

The Church of Saint Francis has a long history. It was founded around 1926, and for many years served as the pro-cathedral Church of the Province of the United States. It lost the denomination when the new cathedral church of Our Lady in Ojai, California was build. At least four Bishop consecrations took place in Saint Francis, and its congregation is very dedicated to the work of the Liberal Catholic Church