



Bishop F. B. Henry



“For God and for Canada”

Several years ago at a Catholic Women’s League Convention, I told the story about the president of a successful multi-million dollar oil company and his wife who were driving down the highway when they noticed that their car was running low on gas. So they pulled off at the first exit and came to a dumpy little gas station with a single pump. The lone attendant came out and filled the tank, checked under the hood and added a quart of oil. While his wife remained in the car, the husband went to the restroom. When he returned, he saw his wife and the attendant talking and smiling. The husband paid their bill and they drove off. Meanwhile, the attendant walked away as if nothing happened. As they drove off, the husband asked his wife if she knew the attendant. She said, *“Yes, rather well, as a matter of fact.”* She explained that they had dated seriously during their last year of high school. The husband rather smugly said: *“Well, are you ever lucky that I came along.”* Unable to resist the temptation, he added: *“Because if you had married him, you’d be the wife of a gas station attendant instead of the wife of a chief executive officer of a major oil company.”* His wife replied: *“Dear, if I had married him, he’d be the chief executive officer and you’d be the gas station attendant.”*

Building on the story, half-jokingly, I added that “Based on my experience and study, Jesus only made one mistake during his public ministry, namely, he chose 12 men as his apostles. I think that he should have chosen 12 women instead.” As support, I noted that women have been and are at the heart of the church and that this involvement was most visibly and effectively expressed through the ministries of the various communities of religious women and the CWL.

The Catholic Women’s League is not a “tea-and-sandwich-serving” group of women but rather a group of Catholic women of all ages seeking to follow and imitate Jesus Christ, by embracing the beatitudes, by listening to and meditating on the word of God, in conscious and active participation in the liturgical and sacramental life of the church, in personal prayer, in family life and community, in the hunger and thirst for justice, in the practice of the commandment of love

in all circumstances of life and service to their brothers and sisters, especially the poor and the suffering.

The CWL is a national organization rooted in gospel values calling its members to holiness through service to the people of God. To realize its mission the League sees itself as having these principal ministries:

- **to plan, develop and coordinate programs directed towards the individual and collective spiritual development of members**
- **to provide a vehicle for communication and the development of Christian companionship among Catholic women everywhere**
- **to represent Catholic women and their views on topics of national interest and importance; to communicate those views to church, government and society at large**
- **to plan, direct and coordinate the work of Catholic women in support of religious, charitable and community activities**
- **to encourage and support the development of Christian values in the family and throughout the society**

The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World urges us to forgo two opposing temptations: an uncritical acceptance of the prevailing culture, and an outright condemnation of the culture.

“At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task. In language intelligible to every generation, she should be able to answer the ever recurring questions people ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other. We must be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings, and the often-dramatic features of the world in which we live.” [# 4] To read the signs of the times and penetrate the culture is to enter into honest dialogue with it, to become familiar with its language and symbols, to be able to name and assess its virtues and vices, its areas of insight and oversight. Above all, such engagement requires learning how to exploit our culture’s life-giving potential in the light of the Gospel.

This past year the CWL has studied and dealt with such questions as: Affordable Housing for Low-income Canadians; Increasing the Guaranteed Income Supplement; Use of Antimicrobials and their Impact; Healthy Living for Life; Type 2 Diabetes; Health Danger from Exposure to Lead in Consumer Products; Education on Marijuana; National Strategy to Eliminate Computer-based Child Pornography; Age of Consent for Sexual Activity; and Tax Deductions for Postsecondary School Textbooks. Some people go where the action is and make things happen. To follow and imitate Christ requires openness to the discernment of God’s self-revelation in the here and now, in the values, virtues, and stories that shape today’s individuals and peoples. At the same time, this openness also demands a critical distance, in which there is room for God’s spirit to become a real felt presence, questioning our assumptions, unmasking our illusions, breaking our idols and asking us to shift our perceptions and frames of reference. Contemplative discernment asks us to discern within our culture emerging patterns of progress and decline, brokenness and healing, sin and virtue.

In the diocese we have 57 CWL Councils. I sincerely hope and pray that many more women of all ages will become actively involved in their parish CWL Council. As a diocesan family we need to broaden the base of membership and establish an active council in all of our parishes – “For God and Canada.”

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