

# **The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Vatican II**

**By Hon. Douglas Roche, O.C.**

**Address to Newman Theological College Luncheon**

**(On receiving Kevin Carr Christian Leadership Award)**

**Edmonton, November 13, 2007**

To receive the Kevin Carr award, in the presence of the namesake, from an institution bearing the name of John Henry Cardinal Newman, whose spiritual presence suffuses this gathering, is a cherished honour.

I thank Newman College and my nominators for your graciousness in selecting me, a poor standard-bearer for the cause of our life-time: peace through the abolition of nuclear weapons and public policies that advance social justice.

At this moment, my thoughts and my love are with Archbishop Anthony Jordan, who led the Edmonton Archdiocese from 1964 to 1973. Archbishop Jordan, a devoted Newman scholar, participated in, and was deeply affected by, the Second Vatican Council. He resolved to make the teachings of the council a living reality in this archdiocese. To that end, he founded the Western Catholic Reporter and Newman Theological College.

Archbishop Jordan invited me to come to Edmonton to be the first editor of the WCR. He reposed a confidence in me that was probably unmerited but which nonetheless challenged me to grow in faith and dedication to the full meaning of Vatican II. All 16 of the Vatican II documents are important, but the Seminal Council teaching is contained in the two greatest: the Constitution on the Church and the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

Newman's concept of the "sense of the faithful" and emphasis on the full participation of the laity in the life of the Church permeated those documents. His influence can be found as well in other Council documents on revelation, priestly formation, ecumenism and education. His biographies attribute the outgoing, optimistic and inclusive approach that was so characteristic of Vatican II and of Pope John XXIII to Newman's influence. In fact, said Pope Paul VI, Vatican II was "Newman's Council."

Both the Western Catholic Reporter and Newman College have done much through the years to extend knowledge and deepen understanding of what it means to be the People of God following Christ, the light of all nations. In their own ways, each is a repository for these sacred teachings. Newman Theological College has become a beacon across Canada for the extension of Newman's religious thought.

In a short while, we will be observing the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Second Vatican Council. Actually, January 25, 2009 will mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Pope John's surprise announcement of his plan to convoke the Twenty-first Ecumenical Council, the first since Vatican I of 1869-70. With that announcement, Pope John, the "smiling pope," threw open the windows of the Church.

I believe that this historic date should be commemorated. Who better to put a spotlight, 50 years later, on this transformation moment than Newman Theological College? I would like to propose that Newman – perhaps in association with the Western Catholic Reporter – mark this anniversary with a series of seminars and workshops.

What has Vatican II meant for the Church? How has Catholic life changed, liturgically, culturally ecumenically? What does the Council continue to say today about the conditions needed to build peace in the world.

These are only a few of the questions that should be focused on to illuminate, once gain, that “the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age ... are too the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.” Our whole community would benefit from renewed attention to the teachings of the Council.

And so we come full circle. John Henry Newman, Pope John, the Vatican Council, Archbishop Jordan, the Western Catholic Reporter, Newman Theological College. The spirit of Vatican II infuses us still.

I know that I have been blessed by this spirit. It is a blessing that, with the deepest gratitude, I share with you all.