

'Controversial' book offers loving critique

In the Eye of the Catholic Storm: The Church Since Vatican II, by Mary Jo Leddy, Bishop Remi De Roo and Douglas Roche; edited and introduced by Michael Creal; Harper Collins (Toronto, 1992); 195 pages; \$14.95.

By E. Leo McMannus
Guest contributor

Now, gentle reader, at the moment of ominous and deceptive calm that precedes the final force of the hurricane, brace yourself for a controversial book.

Controversial, that is, say two editors of Canadian diocesan newspapers. One faulted its "tone" and some of its content; the other blamed "the three people involved" for themselves creating a "storm." As a result, both editors refused to accept advertisements for the book.

The trio creating such a "storm" is none other than three respectful and respectable Canadian Catholics: Bishop Remi J. De Roo, Victoria's bishop for almost 30 years; Sister Mary Jo Leddy, founding editor of *Catholic New Times* of Toronto in 1976 and — in the words of the book's Anglican editor — "one of the most articulate Catholic women in North America;" and Douglas Roche, journalist and founding editor of the Edmonton archdiocese's *Western Catholic Reporter*, (he's also a former member of Parliament and Canadian ambassador for disarmament at the United Nations.)

Roche, in recent months, has been involved with the unenviable task of negotiating compensation for some of the victims of Canada's sad spate of pedophilia cases.

A year ago, for one snowbound week in Victoria that left them housebound in the episcopal residence, the three authors — with editor Michael Creal serving as facilitator — discussed questions suggested by the Second Vatican Council's (1962-65) opening up to what was valuable in the modern world.

In 10 interesting chapters — from Chapter 1, "Vatican II: Fading Dream or Enduring Hope?," to Chapter X, "The Way Through and the Way Beyond" — the authors consider, with distinctive approaches, the challenges raised by the council and how they have been met in the years since 1965.

Not surprisingly, they come up with some some positives and negatives.

Pertinent topics such as the role of women in the church, sex, the cry of the poor, the hunger for spirituality, militarism, consumerism and ecumenism are examined openly, honest-

ly, critically and lovingly.

"Remain in communion with one another," counsels Bishop De Roo. "Keep talking to one another, and not demand that the condition of dialogue be that other people compromise and come around to our perspective."

Accordingly, the bishop stresses the importance of a synod such as the one now taking place in Rochester. Bishop De Roo urges "a more limited form of a 'Council' — not the juridical type of synod seen too frequently in the past, which is primarily a legislative model, but a truly pastoral synod."

The book is replete with perceptive and stimulating observations and comments.

For Roche, this century's four great movements are those for political liberation, civil rights, environmental protection and women's rights. To these Bishop De Roo adds a fifth: the awakening to historical consciousness of the

native peoples of the world.

Says the piquant Sister Mary Jo Leddy, "I venture to suggest that more people have learned about the Catholic understanding of peace from reading Thomas Merton than from reading papal encyclicals."

Bishop De Roo, as the host and overseer, appropriately concluded the discussion: "What I learned from Vatican II was to respect the totality of human experience and to be open to new ways of understanding reality."

An excellent thought, and hardly a toxic one in today's world. It is typical of what you will find in this amazingly topical and mature book.

For all its "controversial" character, this book confirms that the church needs loving critics — and three of them are here — as well as uncritical lovers.

McMannus, a professor emeritus of English, lives in Venice, Fla.

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