

Home / Most Popular

Search National Post...

Search

Quebecers asked to forgive Church

Catholic bishop issues unsolicited apology for 'harm'

Graeme Hamilton, National Post

Published: Friday, November 23, 2007

MONTREAL - In an effort to bring Quebecers back to Catholicism, the Church's top bishop in the province has issued a sweeping apology for historical wrongs committed by clergy.

"As archbishop of Quebec City and Primate of Canada, I recognize that narrow attitudes of certain Catholics, before 1960, favoured anti-Semitism, racism, indifference toward the First Nations and discrimination toward women and homosexuals," Marc Cardinal Ouellet wrote in an open letter published in newspapers across Quebec yesterday.

He dwelled on the Church's opposition to increased rights for women, including the right to vote and to work outside the home.

Such "abuses of power" tarnished the image of the clergy and undermined its moral authority, he said: "Mothers were rebuffed by priests with no consideration for the family obligations they had already assumed; youth suffered sexual assaults by priests, causing serious damage and trauma that ruined their lives! These scandals shook people's confidence in religious authorities, and we understand! Forgive us for all this harm!"

To some, the appeal might seem late, coming nearly 50 years after the Quiet Revolution began to shake the Catholic Church's grip on society and close a period of Quebec history now referred to as the Grande noirceur (Great Darkness).

But the place of religion is once again a hot issue in Quebec, as a travelling commission created by Premier Jean Charest examines the issues of Quebec identity and the accommodation of minority religious practices.

Cardinal Ouellet created a stir three weeks ago when he appeared before the commission and argued for a continuation of denominational religious instruction in Quebec schools, which is scheduled to be eliminated next September.

In his open letter, he said his position before the commission was misinterpreted as nostalgia for the past. "Let's be clear. I am in no way asking Quebec society to return to 1950."

"From a sociological point of view, pluralism and secularism are here to stay in Quebec, and there is reason to be proud of the gains made in the domains of the economy, health, culture, social services, education, politics and the dynamism of Quebec

Story Tools

[Change font size](#)

[Print this story](#)

[E-Mail this story](#)

Share This Story

[Facebook](#)

[Digg](#)

[Del.icio.us](#)

[More](#)



society," Cardinal Ouellet wrote.

Still, he has not abandoned his fight to keep religion in the province's schools. "As pastor to a people who are in a large majority Catholic, you will understand that the transmission of our cultural and religious heritage is very near to my heart," he wrote.

He added that past abuses have obscured the positive work of men and women within the Church who have made important contributions to Quebec's development. The "bad memories," he said, "are blocking access to the wellsprings of its soul and religious identity. The time has come to evaluate the situation and make a new start."

Gilles Routhier, a professor of theology at Universite Laval, said no Quebec Church authority has ever issued such a broad apology. He said it is an effort by the archbishop to clean the slate in anticipation of an international eucharistic congress that will bring Catholics from around the world to Quebec City next June.

"He thinks we are starting a new phase in the life of the Church ... so the outstanding questions need to be resolved," Mr. Routhier said.

Louis Rousseau, a professor of religious studies at the Universite du Quebec a Montreal, said the letter came out of the blue. "Nobody was expecting this because nobody was asking for an apology from the Church," he said. He said he doubts it will be received favourably.

That was certainly the case with the spokesman for a group known as

the Duplessis orphans, who suffered abuse when placed in Church-run asylums in the 1940s and 1950s. "It seems like a step in the right direction, but it has no credibility," Bruno Roy said of Cardinal Ouellet's letter, which makes no specific mention of the Duplessis orphans. "My opinion is that the lies continue."

Even the politicians in Quebec City were dubious.

"There is still work to be done within the Catholic Church to fully welcome women and to ensure the equality of men and women is respected," said Christine Saint-Pierre, the Minister for the Status of Women.

IN HIS WORDS

Translated excerpts from the open letter Cardinal Ouellet wrote to Quebecers, which was printed in newspapers yesterday:

ON CATHOLICS' HISTORICAL BEHAVIOUR

"I recognize that the narrow attitudes of certain Catholics, prior to 1960, favoured anti-Semitism, racism, indifference toward First Nations and discrimination against women and homosexuals."

ON THE CHURCH'S POSITIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

"Much more attention is given to the Church's negative side than to its contribution to active Quebec history and culture. A just and enlightened exam of our past would help, I think, recognize our limits but also nourish Quebecers' pride and confidence in their future."

ON MAKING AMENDS

"Quebec society drags a wounded history whose bad memories block access to the sources of its soul and religious identity. The time has come to take stock and make a new start. Errors were committed which have tarnished the image of the Church and for which we must humbly ask for forgiveness. I am inviting pastors and the faithful to help me seek the manner with which to recognize our mistakes and deficiencies."

More From National Post

[Immigrants no threat, hearing told](#)
National Post - Tuesday, Nov. 27, 2007

[But where's the 'je ne sais quoi'?](#)
National Post - Thursday, Nov. 29, 2007

[Debates opening wounds](#)
National Post - Friday, Nov. 23, 2007

[Anglican Church offshoot launched](#)
National Post - Friday, Nov. 23, 2007

[Afghans vs. Canada at UN](#)
National Post - Thursday, Nov. 22, 2007

More From the Web

[Father Raymond J. De Souza: 400 years of forgotten history](#)
National Post - Thursday, Jan. 24, 2008

Ads by Google**History of God's Church**

Here is the Astonishing true story of The Church of God.

www.thercg.org

Cardinal Siri and

the truth about the Catholic Church after Vatican II, prophecy, videos

www.mostholymfamilymonastery.com

Catholic Church

Your Catholicism guide on the web. Visit Beliefnet.com and learn more

www.Beliefnet.com

Services: [Privacy](#) | [Terms](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Advertise with us](#) | [FAQ](#) | [Copyright and permissions](#) | [Today's paper](#) | [Digital paper](#) | [Newsletter](#) | [YourPost](#) | [RSS](#) | [Subscription services](#) | [Site map](#)

National Post: [Home](#) | [News](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Life](#) | [Sports](#) | [Multimedia](#) | [NP Network Blogs](#)

Financial Post: [Home](#) | [Analysis](#) | [Trading Desk](#) | [Markets](#) | [Money](#) | [Small Business](#) | [Working](#) | [Reports](#) | [FP Magazine](#)

National Post and Financial Post are **Part of the**

Network [Browse the Canada.com Network](#)

© 2008 Canwest Interactive, a division of Canwest Publishing Inc. All rights reserved. Unauthorized distribution, transmission or republication strictly prohibited.