

A REPORT ON THE ST. BASIL SYMPOSIUM

The St. Basil Symposium, after a preparation stretching over five years and four months, began on Sunday afternoon, June 10, 1979, with Mass in St. Basil's Church, Toronto, at 4.30. The celebrant was Cardinal Jan Willebrands, Archbishop of Utrecht, Primate of Holland, President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and representative of Pope John Paul II at the Symposium. Cardinal - Elect Gerald Emmett Carter, Archbishop of Toronto, gave the homily. Assisting in the sanctuary were: Cardinal Flahiff; His Grace Sotirios, Greek Orthodox Bishop of Toronto, and representative of His Holiness, Demetrios I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople; Archbishop Tawil, Melkite Archbishop of the United States; and Bishop Rusnak, Auxiliary Bishop of the Eparchy of Toronto. The music was provided by the St. Michael's Cathedral Choir School.

The first plenary session of the Symposium assembled the same evening at 8.00 in Brennan Hall. Father Hanrahan, speaking for the Basilian Fathers, who, with the Pontifical Institute, co-hosted the Symposium, welcomed the participants and briefly recounted the genesis of the Symposium and its purpose. As he began to speak a violent thunderstorm broke. Even his usual strong voice was drowned from time to time by tremendous claps of thunder. He then asked Cardinal Willebrands to read the message from the Pope. About half way through this reading the lights went out and the sound went off. Flashlights were brought and the reading resumed in the atmosphere of moving shadows. The effect of the letter was rather enhanced than spoiled. The message from the Patriarch was read by Bishop Sotirios, also by flashlight. Again the effect was more solemn and concentrated than it might otherwise have been. The lights came on after some three quarters of an hour, while the first paper was being given.

The Symposium gathered some 150 scholars from Europe and North America. The countries represented were as follows: Poland, Sweden, West Germany, Greece, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Scholars from the Soviet Union and Spain were also expected but political and airline difficulties made

it impossible for them to come. There were 30 Basilians enrolled as participants, and several others attended occasionally. Language was only a minor and infrequent difficulty. All of the German scholars, who came in relatively large numbers, were fluent in English. Of the scholars whose English was not fluent, most knew French, and translators were easily found when needed.

There were eleven main speakers, which meant eleven plenary sessions. Each paper was approximately an hour in length, followed by a coffee break, and then forty minutes of response by panelists and questions from the floor. This arrangement proved interesting and even exciting. There were only two plenary sessions a day, which scheduling allowed for reflection on the main topic, and prevented the sometimes regrettable situation of two excellent papers being given simultaneously. Twenty-four shorter papers, or «Communications», given on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, were, however, conducted in simultaneous sessions. It was a heavy program, but one which was sufficiently spacious.

The Papers given were of the standard of excellence hoped for by the organizers. They might be grouped under three main headings: the doctrine of Basil, particularly his teaching on the Holy Spirit; the life of Basil and his influence on his times; and the spirituality of Basil. Some were highly technical; some were inspiring; all were valuable. The ensuing volume should represent, as was hoped, the latest and best in Basil studies. A special icon, done for the «Year of St. Basil», was used as the official Symposium picture. Copies of this icon will be sent to each member of the Community.

Besides the papers given, the Symposium was enriched by several «extra curricular activities» which proved happy and successful in unexpected and significant ways. The Royal Ontario Museum put together a special exhibit, from its own collections, on the place and time of Basil. The exhibit was opened by Cardinal Willebrands, and the Museum offered a reception to the scholars. This exhibit is to continue for several months. Early in the Symposium, Cardinal Carter tendered a dinner for Cardinal Willebrands, to which were invited: Cardinal Flahiff; Archbishop Tawil; Bishop Sotirios; Bishop Hill, the Anglican Bishop of Ontario; Bishop Borecky, the Ukrainian Eparch of Toronto, who was accompanied by Bishop Timko of Humngert; as well as Fathers Synan, Hanrahan, Long (Secretary to Cardinal Willebrands), Tsanas (Secretary to Bishop Sotirios), and Platt. There took place

in the course of this dinner a discussion of faith, doctrine, differences, problems and possibilities of union which was as frank as it was friendly. It was, in fact, a model of an ecumenical meeting. It probably launched Catholic-Orthodox relations in Toronto on a new and highly favourable course. The same can be said for all the other combinations of relationships between Catholics, Orthodox, Uniates, and Anglicans. Cardinal Flahiff described the meeting as «agape» in the fullest sense.

Sister Wilma Fitzgerald, a Sister of Providence on the Institute staff, gave a remarkable slide lecture on the iconography of St. Basil on Monday evening. The visual dimension this provided served as a background to the learned papers. Two other events also contributed much to the joy of the Symposium by providing encounters in friendship as well as relief from the heavy academic program. On Thursday, June 14, while Basilians celebrated St. Basil's Day at St. Michael's College, some 30 participants, including Cardinal Willebrands, and mostly Europeans, went on an excursion to Niagara Falls and enjoyed their Kentucky fried picnic dinner near the Falls immensely. Then on Friday evening there was a banquet at which Father Hanrahan gave a brilliant talk on «The Wit of Basil».

There developed during the week of the Symposium a remarkable spirit of friendship, even of family, among the participants. This did not exclude differences of opinion, but these never seemed to injure the common love of Basil which prevailed and suffused the Symposium. Perhaps it is not presumptuous to say that the primary lessons of Basil's life, that is, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, were the finest fruit of this meeting of minds.