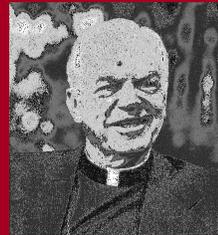


Excerpts from The Cardinal Dearden Legacy Project—

## *Living the Wisdom of Vatican II*

*John Cardinal Dearden:*

*Archbishop of Detroit, Council Father,  
NCCB President, Architect of Call to Action*



### The primacy of Baptism: All are called to be a pilgrim Church—

Through his experience at Vatican II, Cardinal Dearden came to understand at a very profound level that the mystery of the Church lives in the entire people of God. That sounds simple enough; we would all get it right on a multiple-choice test. But John Dearden understood the depth of that statement—he had helped to shape the documents that expressed it. He really believed that it was so. And he lived it.

[He] told the story of a priest who was leading the General Intercessions at Mass who prayed, “For the Holy Father, the bishops, priests, religious and the People of God.” Cardinal Dearden [astutely noted], “The wrong word in there was the *and*. We are *all* the People of God: the Holy Father, the bishops, the priests, the laity, the entire Church.”

—Bishop Ken Untener, “Cardinal Dearden: A Gentleman of the Church,” *America*, 11-26-88

At the closing session of the Call to Action conference, the Cardinal was awaiting his turn to deliver his final remarks. I was seated next to him—so this seemed like a good time to ask Cardinal Dearden what he predicted might happen in the days ahead.

He thought a moment and then, looking out at the assembly, said quietly that he did expect it would take some time to sort through the whole experiment and surely controversies would continue: “Any change takes time.” I remember his saying, “The Church might not be quite ready for this exact way of proceeding just now but we are in this for the long haul and what we may be seeing now is something like our way of proceeding in the future.”

Four decades hence would Cardinal Dearden be surprised by how hard it has been to implement a way of being Church that honored the vision of Second Vatican Council? We can only speculate. He did seem to feel that our ability to become what the Council envi-



sioned had something to do with getting in touch better with the human side, “the heart side,” of the Church—something I suspect that happened to him personally in the intense experience of the Holy Spirit during Council sessions.

As he articulated repeatedly throughout the program, and by the example of his own leadership and life, his hope for the Catholic Church was that it would become far more servant-like, humble and compassionate.

That, he knew, required the ability to listen. And John Dearden listened exceptionally well.

—Dr. Frank Butler, Executive Director, N.C.C.B. Committee for the Bicentennial; written for the Dearden Legacy Project\*

#### IN THE WORDS OF CARDINAL DEARDEN:

*The Church is not a building. It is not a set of rules. The Church is what we are—with our joys and sorrows, our strengths and weaknesses. The Church will always be in need of reform, but this does not excuse us from the awesome responsibility which is ours to fulfill. Re-evaluation and planning...is not an easy task. At the same time, it is not impossible...providing we enter upon it together with Christian hope, a dependency on the Holy Spirit and with an openness equal to the freedom shown at Vatican II.*

—Overview of Synod/69, fall 1967

*We will do all this in a setting of prayerful reflection on the call of the Holy Spirit. Our central preoccupation here should be how we can more authentically as a Christian community live our faith in God and His Son, bearing witness to our confidence in Him and our awareness of His image in every person, and, together as a Church and individually as workers, citizens and Church members, serve the cause of justice and human development.*

—Call to Action, Opening Address, 10-21-76

*We are, after all, pilgrims on a journey, and pilgrims get dirty. The road is a dusty one. But we should not let this cause us to lose sight of the more profound reality of what the Church is—the instrument of God that He has given us to bring us [and all people] closer to Him.*

*It is this that gives me hope, and confidence, and love for the Church. A love of the Church ought to be a basic part of our lives. But you can love it only if you understand it, and you can understand it only through faith. The first chapter of *Lumen Gentium* on the mystery of the Church—the one that is so often passed over—is profound. It presents to us God’s design for His creatures, and it talks of how this design is to be realized—imperfectly—but realized nonetheless. This is the underlying reality of the Church. And in God’s own way, and in God’s own time, it will come.*

—On *Lumen Gentium*, Diocese of Saginaw, 1987

*To move to a period where you have to have endless consultations with great numbers of different people and organizations causes a major adjustment. ... On the other hand, it isn’t so much the end result anymore, as the fact that those who are affected by a decision have a voice in the shaping of it. ... I’ve had to learn to do those things, and it was no easier for me than for anyone else. I may have known the language, but that’s all.*

—Cited by Paul Bernier, SSS, “Shaping *Lumen Gentium*,” *Emmanuel Magazine*, November 1979

## The primacy of a well-formed conscience—

When it came to my own public acts of civil disobedience, I'm sure there were times when Cardinal Dearden was not particularly pleased. On the other hand, he never stopped me either. Still, it was *his* influence and *his* search for truth that compelled me to find *my* own way to live the gospel message.

Cardinal Dearden's commitment to racial justice, the poor and to the building of peace, had a profound effect on me. His personal integrity, extraordinary love for the Church and commitment to its unity have been guiding examples throughout my priesthood. Thanks to him, his vision, his intelligence and scholarship, and most of all, his love of God and God's people, I am able to live and work as a bishop committed to the justice and peace that he taught me with his life. I could not have had a better teacher.

—**Bishop Tom Gumbleton**

Written for the Cardinal Dearden Legacy Project\*

*While it is important that our young people be aware of the moral dimensions of conscientious objection, the subject should not be presented to them in a weighted fashion. If we are leading people to sound formation of conscience, we have a distinct obligation to see to it that the moral issues that touch upon the whole question of military service be presented in an objective manner. To weight a presentation in one direction is an injustice.*

—**Cardinal Dearden** commenting on a film about conscientious objection

## Collegial and responsible decision-making—

[In our discussions about] the forthcoming Synod planned for the Detroit archdiocese, Dearden said: *The people must be educated first so they are not offering recommendations for the future of the Archdiocese out of the bag of old theologies and misunderstandings they have carried for years. I know it will be slower, but the people will have a more profound grasp of what it means to be Church. They will have a greater sense of partnership with each other and with me if they invest the time and commit themselves to study before they speak up.*

That fall [1967], in his letter of invitation to participate in the Synod, he prepared the people to anticipate the door they were about to enter and the process which would lead to the culmination of **Synod/69**. Eighty thousand adults and one hundred thousand young adults gathered, studying together, discussing and writing recommendations. The process of Synod/69 was a hearty *bravo* of approval of Dearden and the door held open for them to grow consciously into *being* the Church he said they were. People still reminisce nostalgically about the *Speak Up* groups which awakened the people and brought about democratic changes in the Detroit Church.

—**Jane Wolford Hughes**, "In Memoriam," *Living Light*, June 1989, Vol. 25, No. 4; Director, Institute for Continuing Education, 1966 to 1985, and first lay woman to be appointed to an archdiocesan executive position in the U.S. Church

[For me] the finest example of Cardinal Dearden's sharing of responsibility is the Archdiocesan Pastoral Council. Throughout the two days in October 1973, Cardinal Dearden sat in on small group discussions and demonstrated his openness and willingness to listen. He received a standing ovation as he stood on the final day to share his impressions of the assembly. There were hundreds of recommendations. Most of them started with "The Cardinal should ... ." Laughing, he said, "I appreciate the high confidence you have in my ability to influence people."

He persisted in encouraging us to understand our role and our responsibility for the mission of the Church. As the council matured, the recommendations gradually changed from "The Cardinal should ... to "We should ... ."

—**Mary Carry**, peace activist  
Written for the Dearden Legacy Project\* (*see back page*)

***Don't ever ask for people's advice unless you are really open to take seriously what they have to say.*** —**Cardinal Dearden**

[In an interview with Eugene Kennedy, **Bishop Tom Gumbleton** described the discussion sessions that Archbishop Dearden had with his priests in the months before the last session of the Council in 1965.]

Priests began to speak up with a new openness and honesty. ... "And the big thing was that he was able to hear them, that he had learned really to listen to what others had to say. That was a big shift. ... The fine qualities he always had really came out as he began to hear what was going on; he didn't have to know all the answers beforehand and he did not have to have everything decided before a meeting even began. The change in him changed all the rest of us."

—**Eugene Kennedy**, "Two for Detroit. I. Cardinal Dearden," *The Critic*, Vol. 32, 1974

At the 1987 N.C.C.B. meeting, the assembled bishops were engaged in a long and intense discussion about the statement to be issued on the [Raymond] Hunthausen case. A statement had been drafted by the executive committee, and many bishops rose to remind us that the committee put hours and hours into this ... it was a very complicated and delicate matter ... and we should trust their wisdom.

Toward the end of a long afternoon, Cardinal Dearden raised his hand. He stood and turned, not to the head table, but to the body of bishops and said, *I, as you, appreciate the hard work of the executive committee, but I would be careful about putting too much emphasis on this. Remember, they work on behalf of the entire body, and at this moment we have the entire body gathered together. It is the wisdom of the entire body, not of the executive committee, that is important here.*

—**Bishop Ken Untener**, "Cardinal Dearden: A Gentleman of the Church," *America*, 11-26-88

## The Church is in the world, not above it—



It is risky to try to capture the meaning of a man's life in a word, but in John Dearden's case one word provides the pivotal idea of his life. He was, in the best sense of the term, a churchman, an ecclesial man. David O'Brien of Holy Cross [College] expressed his conviction at the time of Dearden's death [Aug. 1, 1988] that future historians will rank him **"as the most important American bishop**

since James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore."

To watch Dearden from a distance or close-up was to see the example of an ecclesial man. His sense of the Church was so rich and his love for the Church so deep that it could sustain those he served, those he worked with, and those who worked for him. He was called by vocation to lead—as a bishop in the local Church, as a cardinal in the universal Church, and as president of the national episcopal conference. The bulk of this time of leadership was fulfilled during the age of Vatican II.

The demands of the conciliar era specified the challenge of leadership for him; the substance of the conciliar teaching shaped the meaning of leadership for him; and the spirit of the council informed how he led.

—**Rev. J. Bryan Hehir**, "Going Forward: The Leadership of Cardinal Dearden," *Commonweal* (115) 10-21-88

*Throughout America, wherever Catholics were asked, they expressed their desire to share responsibility for the Church and the nation. They like parish and diocesan pastoral councils but they want these new structures. They want to work closely with their priests and bishops, and they want their leaders to trust them and be accountable to them for the use of Church resources. Everywhere this program took place the participants were respectful, even deferential, towards Church leaders, modest in their demands, wary of quick judgment on questions they perceive as theological or doctrinal. They spoke of the existence of injustice in the Church, but they did not fix blame. They urged all Catholics to work together to make the Church a more fitting witness to the truths that it proclaims.*

*... As pastors, we bishops must be alarmed at the failures of our community to share more fully the works of justice; as Catholics all of us must be dismayed at our common failure to make our tradition of social action a living reality at all levels of our community.*

*... We are trying to begin a new way of doing the work of the Church in America. We may fail, but let us try and let people ... say of us that 'they cared enough to try.'*

—**Cardinal's Opening Address, Call to Action, 10-21-76**

## Enculturation ... Openness to all peoples—

Cardinal Dearden addressed the 200 women assembled for the first women's conference of the Archdiocese of Detroit. For too long, he admitted, the contributions of women in the Church had been "overlooked or taken for granted." He spoke with regret of a "Church community that received what women had to offer, but was slow in opening up to them new and broader avenues of service. Change is taking place," he wanted to assure his audience, "but slowly—painfully slowly."

Yet in a remarkably constant way during these years in Detroit with Cardinal Dearden, it has been a time of progress for women, who share in the pilgrimage of a pilgrim Church. Going far beyond simply accepting the involvement of women in the Church, Cardinal Dearden became a pacesetter among the hierarchy in actively seeking out women for key leadership positions.

—**Helen Marks**, "Women Made Decisions" *The Michigan Catholic*, 10-24-80 (retirement supplement)

*The commemoration of the nation's bicentennial, if approached in a humble and measured manner, can be the impetus for a genuine resurrection of spirit.*

—**Cardinal Dearden** (1973)



After the [1967] riots, the Archbishop immediately set aside a million dollars for an urban crisis fund. This was part of his response to the need for institutions to become involved with the disaffected community. Representatives of the black and brown communities decided how the money should be spent. He accepted their recommendations. The response [by some Catholics] was surprising and shocking. There were charges of communism and socialism. It affected diocesan collections for years.

He has not turned his back on [us]. That's why he has set up a Black Secretariat and a Latin American Secretariat. He wants the diocese to hear of the needs so that it can respond.

—**Dr. Albert Wheeler**, first African American appointed by Dearden as Director of Christian Service, quoted by Eugene Kennedy, *The Critic*, Vol. 32, 1974

[Upon the Cardinal's retirement in 1980, a timeline was prepared and published in *The Michigan Catholic*.]

- Ministers of service, a lay urban ministry initiated in the Archdiocese, celebrated the 10<sup>th</sup> year of service in February 1980.

- For the first time in the Archdiocese, Cardinal Dearden celebrated a special Mass for separated and divorced Catholics at the cathedral in March 1980.

- Cardinal Dearden welcomed 1,200 handicapped persons, their friends and families at the first handicapped pilgrimage to the cathedral in September 1980.

—**Tom Ewald**, "Priest, Prelate, Prince," 10-24-80

## Prophets of a Future Not Our Own

First presented by Cardinal Dearden in 1979—Quoted by Pope Francis in 2015\*\*

It helps, now and then,  
to step back and take the long view.  
The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts,  
it is even beyond our vision.

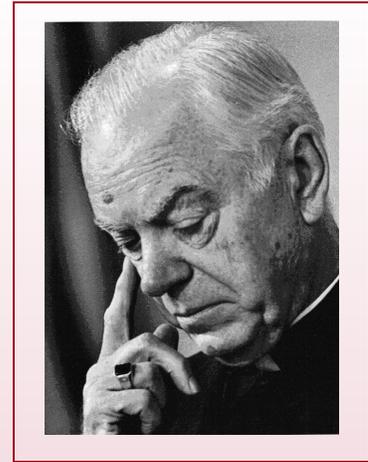
We accomplish in our lifetime  
only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise  
that is God's work.  
Nothing we do is complete,  
which is another way of saying  
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.  
No statement says all that could be said.  
No prayer fully expresses our faith.  
No confession brings perfection.  
No pastoral visit brings wholeness.  
No program accomplishes the Church's mission.  
No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.  
We plant the seeds that one day will grow.  
We water seeds already planted,  
knowing that they hold future promise.  
We lay foundations that will need further development.  
We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything,  
and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.  
This enables us to do something,  
and to do it very well.  
It may be incomplete,  
but it is a beginning,  
a step along the way,  
an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results,  
but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs.  
We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen.



**John Francis Dearden**  
Oct. 15, 1907—Aug. 1, 1988  
Archbishop of Detroit  
1958—1980

Photo by Tony Spina—  
all photos courtesy of  
*The Michigan Catholic*

**\*\*Written for Cardinal Dearden by then-Father Ken Untener on the occasion of the Mass for Deceased Priests, October 25, 1979. Pope Francis quoted this reflection in his remarks to the Roman Curia on Dec. 21, 2015.**

\*These excerpts are from **The Cardinal Dearden Legacy Project** directed by Judy M. Holmes. Its purpose is to publish a collection of the cardinal's major speeches and writings as well as assessments of his wisdom, vision, leadership and legacy.  
**For more information on the project,** visit: [www.johncardinaldearden.com](http://www.johncardinaldearden.com) or e-mail: [judymholmes@comcast.net](mailto:judymholmes@comcast.net)