
Netherlands: Dutch Bishops at the Vatican. Secularised society, decline in Church participation. “Conscious faith” in the future

The Catholic Church in the Netherlands is “vulnerable”, for there has been a “sharp decline” in participation in the Church life since the sixties. This is because knowledge of the core contents of our faith is “generally very limited or non-existent”, because people believe more in values than in God, and because so many structures that once “supported faith in our daily lives” have disappeared. This is according to the report that the Dutch Bishops presented to the various Vatican Dicasteries during their ad limina visit (7-12 November). The merging of parishes – due to “economic and staffing reasons” – can help “regain missionary vitality and zeal”. This process also leads to the merging of Caritas offices that thus become “larger and stronger, and also capable of giving a diaconal face to the larger parishes of the future”. The report also lists in detail all the activities carried out by the Church in various pastoral areas between 2012 and 2021 (since the year of the last visit in 2013). It also describes the Dutch society, whose distinctive traits are a “drastic secularisation, strong individualism, commercialisation, and religious and cultural pluralism”. “The crisis of faith which underlies the crisis of the Church”, the report reads, needs to be addressed with a “proclamation of the faith and a catechesis that must include Christ”, rather than norms, values, and virtues. The future of the Dutch Church is made up of “people who want to be Catholic on the basis of a conscious and enthusiastic decision”: “we are confident that they can be the yeast of the Kingdom of God”.

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