

Approval of the Neocatechumenal Way Statutes

On Friday 28th June 2002 in the aula magna of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the decree of approval of the Neocatechumenal Way Statutes was presented to the members of the team that head the international organisation, Mr. Francisco (Kiko) Argüello, Ms Carmen Hernández and Rev. Mario Pezzi. The ceremony was presided by Cardinal James Francis Stafford, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity. Also present were Bishop Stanisław Rylko, Secretary, and Prof. Guzmán Carriquiry, Under-Secretary of the dicastery. The ceremony was attended by about forty catechists of the Neocatechumenal Way coming from different parts of the world.

This was certainly an event of considerable importance in the Church. The Neocatechumenal Way started in Spain in 1964 and has spread to a large number of countries around the world, some of them mission territory. In the wake of the renewal arising from the Second Vatican Council, the Way placed themselves at the service of diocesan bishops and parish pastors to offer a way of rediscovering the sacrament of Baptism and of ongoing education in the faith. It is intended for the faithful who wish to rekindle the wonder of Christian initiation in their lives by following this itinerary of catechesis and conversion. The Neocatechumenal Way is also an instrument of Christian initiation for adults preparing to receive Baptism.

In the audience given by the Holy Father on 24th January 1997 to the founders of the Way accompanied by a large group of catechists, lay people and priests returning from a gathering at Mount Sinai, Pope John Paul II affirmed that drawing up the Statutes was for the Way “an important step that opens up the road towards its formal juridical recognition by the Church, giving you a further guarantee of the authenticity of your charism”. He encouraged them to continue this process under the guidance of the Pontifical Council for the Laity.

On 5th April 2001, in a letter addressed to Cardinal James Francis Stafford, the Holy Father reaffirmed the above demand. He also reconfirmed the responsibility of the dicastery for the approval of the Neocatechumenal Way Statutes and for the future care and guidance of the Way. The originators of the Way, together with their collaborators, worked together with the Pontifical Council for the Laity to achieve what the Holy Father had asked. During these five years, the Pontifical Council for the Laity has worked closely with the other dicasteries of the Roman Curia directly involved in the question, each according to their respective competences. In addition, there have been numerous consultations with individual prelates as well as with Bishops’ Conferences around the world to evaluate the experience of the Way at the parish, diocesan and national levels, while many patriarchs, cardinals and bishops from all around the world have written to the Holy Father to give their support to the study and approval of the Statutes.

The process of drafting and examining the Statutes was also a time of discernment concerning the conception and experience of the Neocatechumenal Way on the part of the Holy See. The objective of the approved Statutes is to regulate a code of practice for the Neocatechumenal Way and its harmonious insertion within the

ecclesial structure, and at the same time to aid the Pastors of the Church in their paternal and vigilant accompaniment of the Neocatechumenal community.

On the 21st September 2002 in the courtyard of the Pontifical Residence in Castelgandolfo, as the Holy Father received in audience a group of catechists and presbyters of the Neocatechumenal Way coming from all the nations where it is present, he expressed his satisfaction that the goal had been reached and emphasised the ecclesial importance of the approval of their Statutes. At the same time, the Pope reaffirmed that these juridical norms should be a “clear and sure rule of life for the Neocatechumenal Way”. The Catechetical Directory and the catechetical and liturgical practice of the Neocatechumenal Way are presently under study by the relevant dicasteries of the Holy See.

With the approval of the Statutes, a new phase has opened in the life of the Neocatechumenal Way, and the Pontifical Council for the Laity will not fail to encourage, accompany and help in discernment of this process.