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The Bishops? Meeting

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When I read stories about the current meeting of Catholic bishops in Baltimore, I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

The bishops gathered after suffering electoral defeats across the board. Despite their thinly veiled electioneering, Obama was re-elected. More specifically, the majority of the Catholic vote went for Obama. And voters approved all four referenda on marriage equality for gay and lesbian couples, despite the bishops' opposition. Even Heidi Heidkamp ? a Democrat in ?red state? North Dakota ? won her senate race despite specific electioneering against her by the Bishop of Bismarck.

You would think it would be time for soul-searching and a new approach to the world of public policy. But no!

There was no sign that they planned to re-visit their positions on birth control and religious freedom (in relation to the Affordable Care Act) or marriage equality.

They could not even come to grips with current economic realities and put them in the light of Catholic social teaching. What was supposed to be a major statement on the economy failed to pass? and it sounds like deserved to fail. It did not even mention the rising income inequality in the United States. It contained only one sentence on the right of workers to organize. It failed to reference the bishops' 1986 Pastoral, *Economic Justice for All*. And in spite of an explicit recommendation from the bishops themselves, the committee that wrote this failed document did not consult an economist.

Then? Cardinal Dolan of New York told the assembled bishops to repent and confess their sins. But

neither Dolan nor the assembled bishops chose to discipline Bishop Robert Finn of Kansas City, MO who sat as part of the group, although he is a convicted criminal, found guilty on a misdemeanor charge, because he covered up sex abuse crimes in his diocese. So much for repentance.

Now, the bishops did pass a document on better preaching, encouraging homilists to relate scriptural messages to the lives of everyday people. If there's something new here, I missed it. I thought this advice was part of "preaching 101."

The document said in part, "Our people hunger for better preaching, preaching that would help them rediscover their faith." Actually, lots of Catholics are looking for different *content* in preaching rather than harping on issues of sexuality and reproduction.

And if you really want to improve preaching? let some of the articulate laity do it.

The bishops also approved a re-organization of their communications department. Problem is: they need something compelling to communicate. When they have a social justice tradition as rich as ours, and they can't apply it to the current economic state of affairs in this country? they really have nothing to say.

Like I said? I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

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Editor's Note: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated that Bishop Finn's criminal conviction was a felony. Bishop Finn was found guilty of one misdemeanor count of failing to report suspected child abuse. We regret the error.

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