

Archbishop Smith: Awakened from Auto-Pilot

A news item from last week attracted my attention. It contained the story of a self-driving car speeding along the QE 2 highway south of Edmonton. The occupant of the driver's seat had apparently put the car on auto-pilot, then reclined his seat to take a nap while the vehicle sailed along at about 140 km/h! Like everyone, I imagine, I was aghast, and the account left me shaking my head at how that so-called driver could have been so thoughtless.

At the same time, though, the report left me wondering if we might not each do well to ask ourselves: in what ways am I like that man asleep behind the wheel? He relinquished responsibility and allowed the computerized technology of the car to take control, obviously at enormous risk to himself and others. How might I be placing my life on auto-pilot, and relinquishing responsibility by allowing internal programming to determine its trajectory? Am I carried along by unexamined assumptions without thought to where they might take me? Do my desires and expectations take control and determine the direction I follow? Are the external programmers of popular opinion or the latest fads defining how I navigate life's inevitable twists and turns?

According to that news item, the one who should have been actually driving the car was jolted awake by the siren of a police car. I think it is fairly broadly accepted, now, that the pandemic has shaken all of us awake from an unexamined life. It has been a loud call to wake up from life placed on auto-pilot. At the same time, I hope that a lesson learned is that the wake-up call is not to be too hastily received as an occasion to place only ourselves back in control. Rather, the awakening should be to the fact that we need God with us in the driver's seat. The Lord, who loves us beyond imagining, has much to teach us about how we must direct our lives.

As I announced in last week's blog post, the Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories have launched an initiative to help us all discern what the Lord is teaching us, and how He is calling us, at this moment of awakening from auto-pilot. The endeavour is rooted in key principles of Catholic Social Teaching. Panel discussion will be held around each of the principles, with the aim of inviting the Catholic and broader community to discern together the voice of the Lord and the future pastoral endeavours to which the Church is called. The first discussion has already taken place and can be accessed [here](#). The others will follow weekly. Please follow and join in the conversation!

God does not want us to live on auto-pilot. He will not have us reclining backward and allowing forces other than his love and mercy to determine our lives and leave us hurtling forward at great speed to our own detriment and that of other people. So, God has reached out to us in his Son Jesus to wake us

up from the dangerous slumber of aimless lives and set us on the course to eternal life. He continues to reach out to us now in the communion of the Church. Together, let us ponder deeply and carefully the call he is issuing to us at this moment when we know a new and different future must be fashioned.