

Consecration, Collegiality

By REV. ALBERT SHAMON
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(Sixth article in a series)

The 1870 Vatican Council, after having defined the primacy and infallibility of the Pope, intended to consider the episcopal office. But the Franco-Prussian war cut that Council short. Vatican Council II picked up where Vatican I had left off.

In the longest chapter in the document on the Church, the 1962-1965 Council dealt with the hierarchical structure of the Church, especially the episcopacy. It considered two matters: episcopal consecration and collegiality.

In the Middle Ages theologians made a distinction between "orders" and "jurisdiction." They taught holy orders gave the power to administer the sacraments only and nothing more; whereas jurisdiction gave the power to rule in the Church.

According to Jesuit Father Joseph Ratzinger this division was most unfortunate. It practically reduced bishops to priests, having merely greater power of jurisdiction. Getting this jurisdiction from the Pope, bishops were looked upon as little more than papal legates.

As a result the structure of the Church mirrored the absolute monarchy of the sixteenth century—the Pope was king; and the Curia, the king's men.

Vatican II dissolved the rigid division between "orders" and "jurisdiction" by clearly stating that episcopal consecration confers jurisdiction as well as the power to teach and rule, as well as the power to sanctify. Episcopal consecration, not appointment by the Pope to a diocese, makes bishops successors of the apostles, with all the apostles' powers to teach and govern.

Bishops, therefore, are not to be regarded as vicars of the Roman Pontiff, for they exercise an authority which is proper to them, and are quite correctly called "prelates," heads of the people whom they govern" (No. 27). Pope Paul's call (Dec. 23, 1966) for a worldwide synod of bishops is but an implementation of this truth.

To clarify how episcopal consecration confers jurisdiction, it was necessary for the Council to resurrect an old term, but one not familiar to most Catholics, namely collegiality.

Collegiality comes from the word "college," a third-century legal term. The first thought of the word "college" brought to my mind was a complex of buildings erected for educational purposes, an institution for specialized instructions like a medical college.

Originally, the word referred to a person, not an institution. "College" meant one in partnership with another, a colleague. Then it came to mean not one, but many banded together for a common purpose, an association, league or group. That is why in the third and fourth century, the little band gathered by Christ to preach the Gospel was called "the apostolic college."

Speaking of the apostolic college, the Council said: "The Lord Jesus, after praying appointed twelve men who would stay in His company, and whom He would send to preach the Kingdom of God. These apostles He formed after the

manner of a college or a fixed group, over which He placed Peter, chosen from among them" (No. 19). Together, they were instructed by Him. Together, they witnessed His works and words. Together, they shared in the first Mass. Together, they were consecrated priests. Together, they received the power to forgive sins. That is why the evangelists first called the apostles "the twelve," that is, a group or a college. Only after Pentecost were they called "the apostles," namely, a group with a mission. Still later, the two terms were combined by St. Luke into the single expression "the twelve apostles."

Christ's choice of "twelve" was a symbolic gesture. Remember Christ was a prophet. And not infrequently prophets dramatized their message by acting it out.

When Ahias, for example, was commanded by God to prophesy the division of Solomon's kingdom, he tore his new garment into twelve pieces. Ten he gave to Jeroboam saying: "Thus shall God divide Israel giving to you ten tribes. Juda shall have but one tribe" (3 Kings 11:30ff).

Similarly, Christ chose "twelve" to dramatize what He came to announce, namely, that the Kingdom of God, the "end-time," the Messianic era, was at hand. The Jews believed that when God's kingdom came, He would restore the twelve scattered tribes of Israel. Christ's choice, therefore, eloquently said: "God is fulfilling His promises now. This group of twelve is a symbol of the New Israel. As Israel of old sprang from the twelve sons of Jacob, so the new Israel, the Church, the people of God, would spring from these twelve."

Accordingly, to this group, this college, Christ gave His command and authorization to teach, rule and sanctify—first Israel, and then the nations (Matt. 28:19-20). They were fully confirmed in this mission on Pentecost Sunday.

Together, they received the Holy Spirit. Together, they accepted the responsibilities for disseminating the Gospel. When danger first threatened the Church, they met it together, at the Council of Jerusalem. And together, they decided what was to be done (Acts 15:6 f). Speaking of Peter's leadership, McKenzie wrote: "We have no clear instance of a decision which he made without associating himself with other members of the group. Even in Acts, chapters one through twelve, where his leadership is best seen, decisions are made by 'the Twelve,' or the apostles, or 'the church,' and not by Peter" (Authority in the Church, p. 46).

Because this mission entrusted to the Twelve with Peter as their head was to last till the end of time, the apostles took care to appoint successors. They passed on to them the duty of perfecting and consolidating the work begun by themselves. They charged their collaborators to attend to the whole flock and to shepherd the Church of God (Acts 20:28). These cooperators of the apostles were called sometimes bishops, sometimes presbyters or elders (Acts 20:17 & 28).

In the absence of the apostles, who were usually travelling, these bishops or presbyters or elders celebrated the Eucharist and governed the Church; they governed collegially, together as a body (1 Tim. 4:14). From this presbyterial-college there gradually emerged the figure of a head, whose distinguishing features became steadily clearer. By the third century this head is the bishop distinct from his priests and indisputably set above them. The reason for this preeminence is episcopal consecration.

By this consecration one is made a member of the college that succeeds the apostolic one. Episcopal consecration, together with the office of sanctifying, also confers the office of teaching and governing" (No. 21). And just as the Lord constituted St. Peter and the other apostles one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, and the bishops as the successors of the apostles are joined together. Collegiality, therefore, "means that the bishops of the Catholic Church in union with the Pope, the Bishop of Rome, constitute a body, a unity, a college which, as body, is heir of the body of the Twelve, the apostles with Peter as their head, which Jesus made the foundation and columns of the Church." In this body is vested the supreme authority for spreading the Gospel. Yet—and this fact is important—this college or body of bishops has authority only "together with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head" (No. 22).

Then, how does this doctrine of collegiality differ from the traditional teaching on Church authority? It really doesn't. It merely restores a balance in the exercise of the supreme authority in the Church. Vatican I made the position of the Pope in the Church very clear when it defined papal infallibility. Yet it gave an unbalanced view, because it did not give the episcopal side of authority its due. (This one-sided-

ness was not the result of one-sided thinking but because political upheavals caused Vatican I to adjourn abruptly.) Vatican II finished the job. Its doctrine of collegiality gives a more balanced view of the Church's authority. Providentially, God had interrupted Vatican I, for this matter has been discussed one hundred years ago, it would never have received the developed and advanced treatment accorded it by Vatican II.

Heretofore the exercise of supreme authority in the Church was top-heavy. The Pope with his Curia seemed to wield it all alone. The bishops too often appeared as his mere legates. Collegiality restores to bishops their proper role.

Instead of placing the full pastoral government of the Church in the hands of a man-instituted Curia, it put it, where it belongs, into the hands of a divinely instituted episcopacy, with all the charisms and graces that go with that office.

Collegiality means that as teachers, bishops must make their contributions to the teaching of the universal Church; that as rulers, they have a responsibility for the Church that goes beyond the boundaries of their dioceses. It means that the many may make their contributions to the decisions of the few. It means a dialogue

structure will be admitted into the exercise of the supreme authority in the Church. It means that in the years to come bishops will be called upon to play a more prominent role in the government of the Church.

Already Pope Paul has called a worldwide synod of bishops. In this way the unity of Church government will be enriched by the diversity so necessary for its vitality; diversity from all the bishops and unity from the Bishop of Rome.

The reverberations of what is happening on the universal level of the Church should carry even to the parochial level. In the individual parish, the principle of unity is the pastor. But his monarchy must not be so absolute as to stifle all initiative.

Room must be left for advice from the laity and his clerical brothers. Not everything is suitable for everyone, nor is every one fashioned after the same pattern.

Unity must never destroy diversity; for diversity does not destroy unity—it vitalizes it. Collegiality prevents the unity of the Church from making it a unitary Church; for this reason "in the building up of Christ's body there is a flourishing variety of members and functions" (No. 7).



A Bible by Eskimos

Wakeham Bay, Que. — (RNS) — An Eskimo mother carrying a baby operates the offset duplicator that produces the Bible in the Eskimos' Ungava dialect. Work was done at the Wakeham Bay Catholic mission in Canada's remote Northern region. Two missionaries, Father Antoine and Father Dion, taught a group of the Eskimos how to operate the duplicating machine and spearheaded the Bible translation. The machine, weighing 213 pounds, was shipped 800 miles by air and dogsled to reach the mission.

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Albany — (RNS) — U heavy fire from several of legislative colleagues, a legislator who sponsored the bill to broaden the New York State abortion law, said his proposal is a "crisis in conscience."

Assemblyman Albert H. Menthal (D-Manhattan), who introduced the controversial abortion law, spoke for 30 minutes on the Assembly floor.

He said that opposition to proposed abortion reform "came almost entirely from Catholic Church."

Mr. Blumenthal said his statement was an answer to a letter signed by the bishops of the eight New York dioceses and read at Sunday Masses in the state's 1,700 Catholic churches.

In their letter the eight bishops had urged the state's million Catholics to fight "all their power" the bill to legalize New York's 84-year-old abortion law.

(Bishop Sheen wrote his letter to be read in parishes of the Rochester area. It was published in week's Courier.)

Current New York law permits abortion only when mother's life is in danger.

Mr. Blumenthal's bill would permit abortion in cases where the mother's physical or mental health could be impaired, or in cases of incest or rape and married young girls.

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