

# 'Collegiality and Primacy'

By REV. ALBERT SHAMON  
St. Patrick's, Victor  
(Seventh in a series)

Sometimes we get the idea that what we call the Catholic Church is just one big monolithic structure made up of tiny administrative parts which we call dioceses. This is far from true. The full essence of the Church is embodied in the local church. Thus Paul wrote "to the church of God at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2); and John the Apostle "to the seven churches that are in Asia" (Apoc. 1:4).

In the beginning the basic hierarchical structure of the Church was simply one of apostles and people. The apostle was one of the Twelve, the people who accepted the teaching and baptism of any one of them constituted a church. By the end of the first century, this hierarchical structure became more clearly defined as that of bishops, priests, and deacons. And the bishop together with his priests, deacons and people constituted the church.

Thus the Council wrote: "The Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful" (26). For when you have priest and people united with their bishop (a union made visible especially in the consecrated Mass), there you have the church. For you have everything we mean by church: a people made of the people of God through word, sacraments, and rule.

This oneness of priest and people with their bishop contains the essence of the Church. Yet to be truly the Church of Christ, this unity cannot be a closed totality. The local church must be opened in two directions: it must stretch back to the apostles and must spread out to all other churches. In other words it must be both apostolic and Catholic. This unity is achieved through the bishop.

In the first place the bishop by his episcopal consecration is admitted into the college of bishops, which college succeeds the apostolic one—the Twelve. That is why at least three bishops are needed to consecrate him: to signify he is being received into the college by the college.

In the second place the bishop, by his intercommunion with other bishops, is united to the college of bishops, which college succeeds the apostolic one—the Twelve. That is why at least three bishops are needed to consecrate him: to signify he is being received into the college by the college.

In the early Church, the epistle was one of these means. The annual conference of bishops in a country and the worldwide synod of bishops, called by Pope Paul, are other ways and means. One can see now why the Council seemed so episcopally minded: why—in addressing priests—it said that "their sanctity profits (much) from loyal attachment to the bishop and generous collaboration with him" (On the Church No. 41). The bishop is the hub of the Church; he sums up the whole Church in himself. In the words of St. Cyprian: "The bishop is in the Church, and the Church is in the bishop."

Collegiality, however, does not militate against the primacy of the Pope. Up to Vatican II, many theologians defended a binary concept of authority in the Church. They held that the supreme authority in the Church was vested in two distinct subjects: the Pope acting alone and the bishops, united with him acting in a council. Because this division of authority obscured the organic character of the Church's unity, many theologians found this doctrine inadequate. Collegiality, on the contrary, preserves unity. For authority in the Church is one single seat—the college of bishops. As successors of the Twelve (including Peter), it is supreme in ruling and teaching. Together with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without it, the episcopal college exercises the supreme and full power of the universal Church" (Bishop's Pastoral Office No. 4).

This supreme authority may be exercised in various ways, but always leaving the unity of the episcopal college intact. If bishops exercise it in a general council, the unity is there for they all act in concert with their head, the Pope. If the bishops remain dispersed around the world, they still are one by their union with the Pope. Even if the Pope acts alone, he does no harm to the unity of the college for he acts as its head just as Peter spoke for the Twelve when he defended the right of the apostles to preach the Gospel (Acts 4:5-21; 5:27-47).

Collegiality, therefore, does not compromise papal primacy. It simply puts it into the wider context of the Church, just as treating Mary in the document "On the Church" situated the Mother of God in the context of the Church. Collegiality makes the Pope appear now more clearly than ever as a member of the Church, a bishop of a

diocese, and as head of the whole Church. The rediscovery of this term of collegiality is a great gain, for it has made visible the basic structure of the Church of the patristic age. The danger is we might stop here. This term reveals only the fifth-century structure. In the first century, a brother-relationship, based on the fatherhood of God, pervaded the Church. All Christians addressed each other as brothers in accord with Christ's own wish: "Do not you be called 'Rabbi,' for one is your Master, and all you are brothers. And call no one on earth your father; for one is your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 23:8f).

Traces of this usage are still found in the liturgy: "Pray, brethren, that my sacrifice and yours..." In the third century this usage became less frequent. Bishops addressed each other as brothers; whereas the people addressed their peers as "papa." The "fraternity" or brotherhood was restricted to the narrow circle of bishops. It is interesting to note how the Council hearkened back to this usage in speaking of priests as bound "in an intimate brotherhood" and as gathering together "God's family as a brotherhood all of one mind" (No. 28).

The college, therefore, fulfills its mission when it serves brotherliness: brotherliness of one bishop with other bishops and of each bishop with his own priests and people. Collegiality does not make bishops little popes. Rather it makes them more outgoing to other churches and more ingoing to their own church in order to build up the community of love. Thus the ultimate pastoral office of a bishop is service.

To serve the Church of God in the entire world through union with other bishops and to serve his local church through communion with his own priests and people. This is really what Catholic means: "being united—with others, helping others in need, learning from others, sharing with others. Paul did not hesitate to write to churches he had not founded. Ignatius was concerned not only about his own church at Antioch. "Oh, how poor," said Pope John XXIII, "the life of the bishop or of the priest who is reduced to being only a diplomat or a bureaucrat!"

As for the faithful themselves, the badge of early Christians was brotherliness as manifested by their hospitality. What an indictment when a pilgrim from Peking to Rome could lament that "the closer he got to Rome, the less hospitality he got."

Collegiality gives greater insight into what renewal—the aim of the Council—exactly is. The renewal of the Church can be true or false. False reformation examines the present in the light of the present day only. It asks, "What does modern society do? Let us do likewise. Big corporations have boards of directors; let us too have episcopal synods." It "modernizes" the Church, not by going back to its origins, but by making concessions to the times and the fashions, like the so-called "jazz" Masses. True renewal, on the contrary, re-examines the Church of today in the light of its origins.

It asks, "What did Christ mean His Church to be? What did He mean it to do? Let us measure up to that for the purpose of better accommodation."

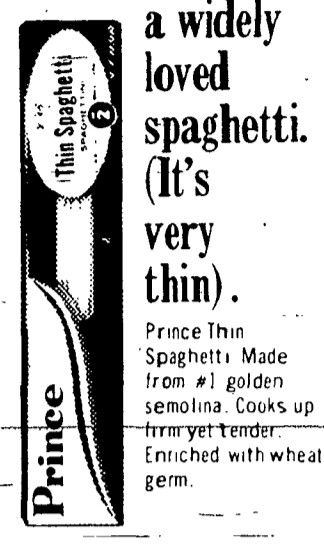
ing the Church to the present. True renewal cuts off excesses so that the original image may shine forth. It is like cleaning out Westminster Abbey so that it may become once more what it was meant to be—an Abbey, not a museum or mausoleum. True renewal goes back to origins.

And yet, a return to origins is never enough. To go back to the past for its own sake is to glorify the dead past, pure antiquarianism. A return to collegial ideas is not a mere return to origins for its own sake; it is a present necessity. In this technological age, with its ease of communications and consequent rapid diffusion of ideas, a universal tendency is being produced toward larger social units. Problems are no longer localized in small territorial zones, but arise on a national and even continental scale.

True renewal looks also to the future. As the Old Testament had a twofold orientation: a "looking back to the Exodus and a looking ahead to the Messiah; so the Church of the New Testament must have a double thrust: a look to the past (the life, death and resurrection of Christ) and a look to the future (the Parousia). Thus the Church turns toward the past in hope of the future; she neither canonizes the past, nor consecrates the present; rather she examines the present in the light of the past to prepare for the future coming of the Lord.

The Christ of the past is present to constantly reform us for the future. A person acts truly as a person when he acts in the present in the light of his memories and his hopes. Similarly, present renewal is true renewal when it looks back to the past and ahead to the future.

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## Paulists Publish New Catechism

Glen Rock, N.J. — (RNS) — "Come to the Father," termed a catechism of the 70's has been issued by the Paulist Press in Glen Rock, N.J. A complete departure from the traditional question-and-answer approach, the book is heavily illustrated and contains pages to be read by parents. These pages are designed to encourage the parents to continue the discussion of religion at home and to provide them with an active participation in the religion training of their children. The illustrations are also used as large wall posters (above) which can be employed to encourage discussion in the classroom. The pilot program is now being used in 50 U.S. archdioceses and dioceses, including St. Andrew School, Rochester.

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# The Church, A Sign of Unity

See how many men and women still today accept the vocation of imitating their young and budding lives in the practice and evidence of charity! See how many humble priests give their lives as pastors, chaplains, missionaries, and as a sign of unity and