

The New Code of Canon Law

January 23 marked the third anniversary of the Promulgation of the New Code of Canon Law. Described by Pope John Paul II as an "indispensable instrument to ensure order both in individual and social life, and also in the Church's activity," the latest legislative Code for the universal Church promises to affect the Catholic and wider Christian community for many years to come. This is the first of 10 articles on the subject, written by Father Kevin McKenna, vice chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester. In this column, Father McKenna will attempt to survey some of the pastoral and practical ramifications of the revised Code.

By Father Kevin McKenna

On January 25, 1959 Pope John XXIII announced three major decisions that would have important ramifications upon the life of the Church for decades to come. He called for a synod to be convened for the Diocese of Rome: an "Ecumenical Council" for the entire Church and a reformation of the existing body of Canon Law that had been in effect since 1917 for the Latin Church. He envisioned these three reforms as an effective means of pursuing the mission of the Church in the modern world.

Undoubtedly the second of his dreams received the most attention. The Second Vatican Council propelled the Roman Catholic Church into an intense self-analysis and articulated several constitutions and decrees after "reading the signs of the time and interpreting them in light of the Gospel" (The Church in the Modern World, no. 4). Although it did not receive as much publicity, a concurrent process was evolving, but it would not see fruition until many years after the conclusion of the Council. A revised Code of Canon Law, implementing and legislating the deliberations of the Council, would begin simultaneously, but would wait until the pontificate of John Paul II for its official promulgation.

It was to be Pope Paul VI, successor to John XIII, who would bring the deliberations of the Vatican Council to a successful conclusion and guide the reformulation of the Code of Canon Law. In many addresses in the period following the end of the Council, he stressed the need for continuity between the teachings of the Council and the new legislative document: "Now however,

with changing conditions — for life seems to evolve more rapidly — Canon Law must be prudently reformed; specifically, it must be accommodated to a new way of thinking proper to the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, in which pastoral care and new needs of the people of God are met" (Comm. 1, 1986, 41). Over and over again, Paul VI would accentuate the pastoral orientation needed to be incorporated into the newly revised code. "The revision of the new code...cannot solely consist in the correction of the former one...rather, after the celebration of the second Vatican Council, the new code must prove to be an instrument most finely adapted to the life of the Church" (Paul VI, to Roman Rota, 1977).

Desiring therefore that the Code be properly imbued with the same spirit that characterized the thinking of the Council Fathers, Paul VI wisely had postponed the actual workings of the Code Revision Commission until November, 1965, and the end of the Vatican Council. Beginning in 1966, 10 study groups consisting of bishops, priests, religious, lay people and canonical specialists were to meet regularly to prepare drafts, while soliciting feedback from the Episcopal Conferences, union of superiors general/religious and secular institutes, departments of the curia and pontifical universities and faculties throughout the world. To ensure a continuity between the Second Vatican Council and the revised Code, the first Synod of Bishops meeting in 1967, requested, among its principles for revision of the code, that such legislation be grounded in the teachings of Vatican II and follow its ideas not only in the spirit but in structure as well.

By October of 1981, after much consultation, discussion and revision of drafts, the Commission which had been charged with preparation of the New Code voted to submit its work to the Holy Father for promulgation. John Paul II named special consultants to review with him the prepared draft, and after some modifications, promulgated into law a Revised Code of Canon Law for the Church of the Latin Rite — a revision that was to take effect the first day of Advent, 1983.

Next Week: "Canon Law — A Heritage and Tradition.)



A Word for Sunday Father Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 10:27-30; (R1) Acts 13:14, 43-52; (R2) Revelations 7:9, 14-17.

In last Sunday's gospel, Peter was commissioned to feed the lambs and the sheep of the Lord. But who are the sheep of His flock? They are those who respond to the word of the Lord with praise (R1); who cling to it despite persecution (R2). "My sheep hear my voice" (R3).

On his first missionary journey, Paul discovered that the Jews, who should have responded to God's word, did not, whereas the Gentiles, who were not expected to respond, did.

Paul interpreted his preaching to the Gentiles as a fulfillment of the promise made to the Isaian Servant to be "a light to the nations, a means of salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6) And he saw his sufferings not unlike those of the Servant, for they were occasioned by his mission.

The Jews believed that all nations would reach salvation through them — but according to their terms, not God's. That fact accounts for their rage against Paul and Barnabas: they saw their synagogue opened to Gentiles and Paul offering salvation to them on equal terms with themselves.

St. John in the second reading describes a vision of heaven in which God's people consist of both Jews and Gentiles: "countless crowds from every nation and race, people and tongue." For clinging to God's word, they too, like Paul, have suffered — "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb."

This heavenly scene is a verification of Christ's words that "I give (my sheep who hear my voice) eternal life." The Jews in the gospel were looking for clarification on who Jesus was. He did not refuse to answer this question ("I and the Father are one"), but He made it clear that clarification alone would be

futile. What was needed was not clear declaration, but faith on the listener's part. To hear God's word, one must listen!

In communication, it is said that the receiver controls input. That was why the same message, Paul's, was received by Gentiles with joy and by Jews with rage. What causes one to turn off God's word? Why did God's people reject Paul's word?

The word of God is often opaque. For instance the words "The Father and I are one" are full of mystery: We might liken God's words to a jack-in-the box. The jack-in-the box is on a spring that pushes Jack against the lid. Should one lift the lid, Jack would pop out. God's words are like a jack-in-the-box. Because these words are often hidden, the intellect, like a spring, pushes hard against accepting them. The intellect chafes at mysteries. For the nature of the intellect is to seek to "read into" (inter-legere) things. So the will, helped by God's grace, like the lid, compels the intellect to assent to the truths of faith. However, should the will get weakened, then it would not be able to hold the intellect down — the lid flies open and the word of God pops away and is rejected.

What weakens will is sin. Thus the threat to faith, to God's word, is not its opacity. The threat to faith is sin. God's word is rejected for moral, not intellectual reasons. Jealousy stirred up the Pisidian Jews against Paul. He treated Gentiles as their equals. Therefore, they countered with a whispering campaign and violent persecution.

It has always been thus. Those who do not hear the voice of the Shepherd are those who do not follow the Shepherd. "My sheep" — those who try to live good, moral lives — it is these who hear His voice.

FOURTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 13:14, 43-52; Revelation 7:9, 14-17; John 10:27-30.

The readings this week tell the story of good shepherds; for this reason, we could call this Sunday "Good Shepherd Sunday." In John's gospel, Jesus assures us that He is the shepherd watching over and guiding His sheep. We are reminded that there is no one greater than God, so if one looks for protection, he should look to the Creator. All has been entrusted to the Savior; He is the Good Shepherd guiding those who journey to the Father.

The Acts of the Apostles speak of the shepherding done by Paul and Barnabas when they broadened the crowd of seekers to include Gentiles as well as Jews. Even though the Jews became jealous and ousted Paul and Barnabas from town, they continued to carry Jesus' message, ever-guiding and directing God's people. Even when faced with conflict, they remained faithful shepherds.

The Book of Revelation speaks of the day of judgment, the washing of the

robes in the blood of the Lamb, and the credal statement: "... the Lamb on the throne will shepherd them." It is the testimony of many deeds and struggles that give truth to the mystic message of John. The Easter mystery calls the faithful to confidence and hope in the Good Shepherd.

This is a Sunday that lends itself very naturally to celebrating a communal anointing of the sick. It is a time for our sick and infirmed to experience the gentle touch of the Good Shepherd. How often life seems tedious and rejecting? How many times have those who are ill felt like outcasts and unnecessary baggage? If the community is to be an extension of Christ, it must be a caring one that is able to reconcile the rejection, fear and overwhelming power of human ailments. During the Easter season, the Church rejoices with her daughters and sons who are broken in body but alive in the Spirit. Welcome them home!



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THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER



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What should I say when I go to the funeral home?

What you say may not be nearly as important as the fact that you are willing to go to pay your respects. Saying the "right thing" is nearly impossible. In fact there may be no "right thing" to say that adequately expresses how we feel. Many bereaved persons have told us that comforting words aren't the only way to help! Presence at the funeral home is equally important to communicate your sympathy and concern. A hug or briefly holding your friend's hand is a good way to say "I care." When a friend loses a loved one, express your feelings either verbally or non-verbally in person at the funeral home or as soon as possible after the funeral.

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