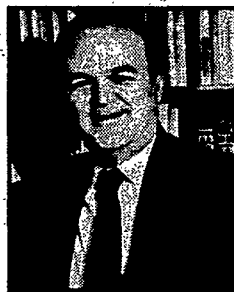


# For some bishops, it's 1950 all over again

The late cardinal-archbishop of Detroit, John Dearden, was fond of pointing out that the Second Vatican Council was like a four-year retreat for those bishops who had the good fortune to participate in it. He also observed that bishops ordained to the episcopate after the council were at some disadvantage in trying to embody the council's spirit for their people and in implementing its decrees. He cited his own experience by way of example.

Before Vatican II his nickname among the priests of Pittsburgh (where he was bishop before being transferred to Detroit) was "Iron John." Because of his own four-year immersion in the conciliar process, however, John Dearden became one of the most beloved and respected bishops in the entire U.S. hierarchy. He served as mentor to several other prominent bishops, including the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, and as a model for many others. In 1966 he was elected the first president of the newly established National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The truth of Cardinal Dearden's observations continues to be underscored today, more than 32 years after Vatican II's final adjournment and 10 years after the cardinal's own death. There are bishops of a post-conciliar generation who sometimes act as if the council never happened. It is



## essays in theology

BY FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

not that they explicitly repudiate Vatican II; they simply prescind from it. It has not had the profoundly spiritual impact of the sort that touched Cardinal Dearden and other council fathers.

By way of example, there is an apparently growing trend among some bishops to restore the honorary title of "monsignor" (literally, "my lord"), in spite of protests from many of their own priests.

The practice of naming monsignors lapsed after the council for at least two reasons. First, it was deemed to be inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel and the nature of ministry. Jesus himself constantly warned the apostles against seeking personal honors. Thus, when an argument broke out among them over who would be regarded as the greatest, Jesus told them that, while the kings of the Gentiles lord it

over others, it was not to be so with his disciples.

"Rather," he said, "let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the leader as the servant... I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:25-27).

A second, more pragmatic reason is that the naming of monsignors is potentially divisive. For every priest given the title, there are perhaps nine others, no less deserving of recognition, made to feel as if they did not somehow measure up. And for every priest who rationalizes his acceptance of the title by insisting that it honors his parish, there may be nine other parishes that have not been so honored.

One can think of few bad ideas in today's church more inopportune than this one. But the trend may illustrate a point that a well-known commentator has made about the state of episcopal leadership. When bishops find themselves at a loss as to what to do about a variety of seemingly intractable problems, many are inclined to fall back into certain familiar and comfortable magisterial patterns, like urging the restoration of the Friday abstinence — or making monsignors.

To be sure, many bishops agree with the majority of their own priests that the naming of monsignors is not only an idea whose time has passed, but that it is un-

evangelical and divisive as well. Other bishops may be tempted to break with the spirit of Vatican II on the matter, but they are prudent enough to respect the judgment and wisdom — of their priests.

Those bishops who have ignored that judgment and have named new priestly "lords" are, in effect, denying the abiding relevance of the council in the fashioning of pastoral policies and practices. It is as if we can pretend that it is 1950 all over again, when the Catholic Church, emerging from its immigrant and minority status, proudly flexed its newly strengthened muscles of power and respectability.

It was a time when titles like "prince of the Church" (referring to cardinals) were used as naturally as "priest" or "bishop." What we failed to see then was the radical incongruity between titles of that sort and the evangelical meaning of discipleship, which is a call to follow in the footsteps of Christ to Calvary and the cross, and only thereafter to the glory of the resurrection and eternal life.

Cardinal Dearden came to see it because of his "retreat" experience at Vatican II. For him, there could be only one Lord and only one Prince of Peace.

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Father McBrien is a professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame.

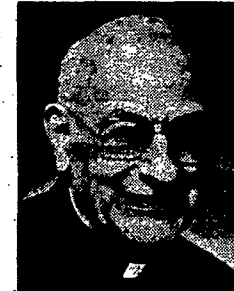
# We draw truths from mystery of Trinity

Sunday's Readings: (R3) John 16:12-15. (R1) Proverbs 8:22-31. (R2) Romans 5:1-5.

When the Jews taught that God is one, Plato asked, "If God is only one whom did he know? Whom did he love? A one God is an alone God, an alone God is a lonely God, a lonely God is an unhappy God — who wants such a God?" So the pagans made god to their image and likeness. It is not good for man to be alone; neither is it good for god — so they created gods and goddesses. Without revelation, man creates mythology. Only with revelation can man get theology.

It was Jesus who answered Plato's question by teaching the doctrine of the Trinity. In one God, he taught, there are three divine Persons: a Father who is eternal life, a Son who is unfathomable truth, and a Holy Spirit who is unspeakable love. Three's a crowd. Life, love and truth are the least common denominator of all happiness. So the Christian answer to the pagan's inquiry is that the one God is not alone.

As our highest activities are knowing and loving, so God from all eternity knows. His knowing generates an eternal thought. His thought is simply of himself. And since there can be no imperfection in God's knowing, his eternal thought had to



## a word for sunday

BY FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

have all the reality of that of which it is the thought. The eternal thought of God had to have the reality of the Godhead.

However, the thought is distinct from the thinker. Therefore the eternal thought of God has the reality of God, but is distinct from the thinker, and so is a person. For a divine person is simply a distinct divine reality, just as a human person is a distinct human reality.

We express our thoughts by words, so God's eternal thought is called the Word of God.

But God not only knows, he also loves. The Father sees his Son as the perfect image of himself and the Son sees the Father as the source of all he is. Love is the result. But love gives. The divine lovers, Father and Son, give themselves totally to each

other. But love is distinct from both the lover and the beloved. We say of lovers: "There's something between those two." So in divine love we have a gift, the divine reality, and a distinction, between two. A distinct divine reality is a Person.

Love is expressed, not by words, but by sighs. The Latin word for sigh is "spiritus." Since God is pure spirit, his love is not carnal; hence "Holy Spirit."

So the Trinity is one God in three Persons: the expression of God's knowing and loving. The mystery of the Trinity is not how can one God be three Persons. The mystery lies in the processions: How can the Son proceed from the Father, and the Holy Spirit from Father and Son and all three be equal? That's the mystery.

A mystery is a truth we can't fully understand, just as we might not be able to drink a well dry. Yet it is revealed to us so we can draw from the mystery many truths.

For instance, the mystery of the Trinity gives us an opportunity to make an act of faith. Second, it reveals how good God is. He didn't need us. He was perfectly happy. He created us just to share his happiness with us. Third, the mystery of the Trinity exemplifies what we are to be like. God is a community of loving Persons. We

are to image him and in one marriage become a community of loving persons. Fourth, the mystery tells us heaven will not be a bore. Heaven is not a glorified church service; it is a wedding to three Persons who can give us forever all the life, all the truth, and all the love our minds and hearts desire.

Whenever we make the Sign of the Cross we ask for this triple blessing.

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Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

## Daily Readings

**Monday, June 8**  
1 Kings 17:1-6; Matthew 5:1-12

**Tuesday, June 9**  
1 Kings 17:7-16; Matthew 5:13-16

**Wednesday, June 10**  
1 Kings 18:20-39; Matthew 5:17-19

**Thursday, June 11**  
Acts 11:21-26, 13:1-3;  
Matthew 5:20-26

**Friday, June 12**  
1 Kings 19:9, 11-16;  
Matthew 5:27-32

**Saturday, June 13**  
1 Kings 19:19-21; Matthew 5:33-37

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