

Pope takes monarchical approach

There is perhaps no one who arouses greater conflict in today's Catholic Church than the pope himself, largely because of the manner in which he exercises his vast authority. That is supremely ironic because the very purpose of the Petrine ministry is to preserve the unity of the church.

Pope John Paul II had acknowledged the problem in his 1995 encyclical *Ut unum sint*. He insisted that the papacy itself is beyond negotiation, but he pointed out that the question of the papacy's existence is separable from any question regarding the manner in which its authority is exercised. He even invited theologians and pastoral leaders of other Christian churches to suggest improvement so that the papacy might be less of an ecumenical stumbling block.

Before Vatican II, Catholics assumed that the pope had absolute authority over the church. He alone was authorized to appoint bishops, canonize saints, amend Canon Law, promulgate catechisms for the universal church — indeed, to do anything short of promoting heresy itself.

This absolutist mentality was rooted in large part in the two papal dogmas of the First Vatican Council (1869-1870), papal primacy and papal infallibility, but Vatican I was not the only culprit. The trend



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

toward an absolutely monarchical papacy actually began much earlier.

While there were some tentative steps in that direction during the First Christian Millennium, the major turning point occurred with the pontificate of Pope Gregory VII (1073-1085). In his commendable effort to root out corruption inside the church and to combat interference from temporal rulers outside, Pope Gregory amassed for the papacy such broad legal powers that it was transformed from a primarily spiritual ministry to a juridical and even a political office. Thus, Pope Boniface VIII (1295-1303) claimed supreme authority over the state as well as the church.

For a variety of historical reasons, this second millennial trend reached its climax in the pontificate of Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), who pressured the bishops

of the First Vatican Council into approving the dogma of papal infallibility. The dogma stipulated that the pope is immune from error when teaching as earthly head of the church on a matter of faith and morals, with the intention of binding the whole church. Linked with the council's other dogma on papal primacy, papal infallibility led many Catholics to conclude that ecumenical councils were a thing of the past. Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) upset that assumption.

In a very real sense, the Second Vatican Council completed the work of the First Vatican Council, which had to adjourn abruptly because of the political turmoil in Rome. In its consideration of the episcopate as a whole, Vatican II was able to situate Vatican teaching on the papacy in a wider doctrinal context.

According to Vatican II, the pope is the earthly head of the church and the successor of Peter, but he is not alone in governing the universal church. All other bishops share in that responsibility in accordance with the doctrine of collegiality (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, nn. 22-28). As Bishop of Rome, the pope is president of the College of Bishops, but is not its only member, nor is he to act unilaterally, without any reference to his brother bishops.

Vatican II's constitution on the church

makes clear that the bishops are not simply the delegates or vicars of the pope. They are pastoral leaders in their own right. Indeed, the episcopate itself exists by divine law, and not at the sufferance of the Roman Pontiff (n. 27).

Moreover, the charism of infallibility is not the pope's alone. All the other bishops share in that charism when, with the pope, they solemnly proclaim a church doctrine for the acceptance of the whole body of the faithful. Furthermore, infallibility is not just for the pope and the other bishops. Vatican II insists (as did Vatican I) that the infallibility which the pope enjoys under certain limited circumstances is the same infallibility "with which the divine Redeemer willed his Church to be endowed" (n. 25).

If Vatican II provided such a balanced teaching on the papacy, why do so many Catholics have a problem with it today? Because the current pope has adopted a governing style more reflective of the monarchical approach of the pre-Vatican II period than of the collaborative and collegial approach of Vatican II.

And that is likely to be one of the main concerns at the next conclave when cardinals gather to elect a new pope.

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Who do we remember? Those who gave more

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 14:1, 7-14. (R1) Sirach 3:17-18, 20, 28-29. (R2) Hebrews 12:18-19, 22-24.

Don't you love a person with a sense of humor? You ought to love Jesus then. For Jesus had a terrific sense of humor. He made puns. He used hyperbole — extreme exaggeration. And he kept people off guard with his unique perspective on life. Sure Isaiah described him as a "man of sorrow and acquainted with grief." But that didn't mean that Jesus was somber all the time.

People loved to hear Jesus; they wouldn't if he was a sourpuss. They invited him to dinner often. You can imagine that he had a smile on his lips and a twinkle in his eye when he spoke to the people invited and the master who had invited him to this particular banquet.

Watching guests pushing for the first places, Jesus told them they ought to be seeking the lowest places. Nothing theological about it. Just practical advice. Humorous. Lighthearted. People grinned at the freshness of Jesus' insight. Then he drove home his point. "Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

Then Jesus turned to the host and said, "When you give a dinner, do not in-



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

invite your friends or rich neighbors, lest they invite you in return, and you be repaid. Rather invite beggars, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

In his unique, joyous way Jesus gave practical lessons that only a few wise persons ever heed. The first lesson is this: True stature is not measured by how much we puff ourselves up, but by how willing we are to humble ourselves.

Remember the story of the rooster Chanticleer who thought his crowing brought the sun up each morning. Day after day he got up at dawn and crowed. Sure enough the sun did rise! So Chanticleer thought that he was responsible for this sequence. One day, however, he

became preoccupied with some personal problems and forgot to crow. Sure enough, the sun rose anyway. How silly is pride. How wonderful is humility.

A king came to the throne in England in the sixth century. His name was Arthur. He founded an army of knights who were to go throughout the kingdom to "live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King" (Christ). To discuss their plans Arthur wished to have a table where the leading knights could dine with him. As soon as the knights found out about the table, they started arguing about who would get to sit at the head of the table. When King Arthur found out about this, he told the table makers to make the table completely round. That way the table would not have a head.

Jesus told his followers to be humble and not try to be first, but instead to serve others. Jesus had everything as son of God. Yet he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, humbling himself unto the cross. And what happened? God raised him up and gave him a name above every other name. At his name every knee shall bend. Mahatma Gandhi was touched deeply by the life of Christ. He once remarked, "I might have become a Christian had it not been for

Christians!"

America has produced many millionaires over the past two centuries. Most of them are forgotten. Who will be remembered? Those who gave more to the world than they received, like Mother Teresa, Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer. So many problems in society would be solved if those who have would be concerned about those who have not. Greatness is measured not by what we get, but by what we give.

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

Daily Readings

Monday, August 31
1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Luke 4:16-30
Tuesday, September 1
1 Corinthians 2:10-16; Luke 4:31-37
Wednesday, September 2
1 Corinthians 3:1-9; Luke 4:38-44
Thursday, September 3
1 Corinthians 3:18-23; Luke 5:1-11
Friday, September 4
1 Corinthians 4:1-5; Luke 5:33-39
Saturday, September 5
1 Corinthians 4:6-15; Luke 6:1-5

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