

# COLUMNISTS

## Next pope must respect bishops' authority

Collegiality is likely to be the decisive issue when the time comes for more than 100 of the church's cardinals under the age of 80 to gather to elect the next pope.

Some readers will undoubtedly balk at the suggestion. Collegiality, they will say, is an in-house issue that pales in comparison with challenge of evangelization.

But who decides what evangelization entails, determines its scope and content, and selects the pastoral leaders who are to direct the process?

Should evangelization focus on the social teachings of the church, as Pope Paul VI insisted in his 1975 pronouncement, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World), or would that "politicize the Gospel," as one of the current pope's most prominent and vociferous partisans once put it in an interview with *The New York Times*?

According to the church's current style of governance, such decisions are entirely in the hands of the pope, which means under the direct control of key figures in the Roman Curia. Diocesan bishops around the world are expected to abide by and faithfully execute curial mandates.

Too often the Vatican's attitude toward the pastoral authority of the bishops has been less a matter of indifference



essays in theology

By FATHER RICHARD P. MCBRIEN

than of blatant disrespect. When bishops of a country or a region agree upon an acceptable translation of biblical, liturgical and catechetical texts, they are often second-guessed and overruled by church bureaucrats, some of whom do not even speak the language in question.

A reaction began to set in a few years ago, only gradually and in muted tones at first. Some of the bluntest language came from safely-retired ecclesiastical figures out of retribution's reach; for example, Franz Koenig, former cardinal-archbishop of Vienna, and John Quinn, one-time archbishop of San Francisco.

The issue is out in the open now. Cardinals disagree with one another in print about the proper relationship between the universal church, headquartered in Rome, and the local churches through-

out the world (as Cardinals Ratzinger and Kasper did in *America* magazine a few months ago). Others give interviews to the media in which they make clear their unhappiness with the high-handed manner in which the Roman Curia sometimes relates to individual bishops and to national episcopal conferences.

At the consistory of cardinals last May, collegiality surfaced as a persistent theme. Several cardinals argued that the current balance of power in the church is out of alignment. Even Cardinal Bernard Law of Boston proposed that synods be held annually, with open agendas.

At the world synod in October on the role of bishops, there were widespread calls for greater pastoral autonomy at the diocesan and national levels and for stricter limits on curial power. The synod submitted more than 60 propositions to the pope, 10 dealing with the relationship between the Vatican and local churches.

These latter propositions called for meetings between bishops and representatives of episcopal conferences, on one side, and members of the Roman Curia, on the other. They also proposed that regional bishops be consulted on the appointment of new bishops in their area, "as stated in canon law," and that the decisions by national episcopal con-

ferences, on such matters as the translation of liturgical texts, be given greater weight and respect by the Curia.

What this cluster of propositions makes clear is that the synodal bishops have been unhappy with the manner in which synods have been conducted and they want the pope to call an extraordinary synod just to discuss the matter.

The propositions were said to be milder than the discussions that occurred on the floor of the synod. According to one report, more than 50 of the 250 assembled bishops explicitly criticized this pontificate's excessive centralization of authority.

Were the cardinals and bishops speaking to one another, to the pope, to the Curia? "Yes," to all, but more particularly to those cardinals who seriously hope to be elected at the next conclave.

The message from the consistory and the synod is clear: No candidate will receive the necessary two-thirds vote unless he assures the cardinal-electors that he will govern in a collegial manner, respecting the authority of the bishops and sharply limiting the power of the Roman Curia.

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

## Make changes, reach out to others during Advent

2nd Sunday of Advent (Dec. 9): (R3) Matthew 3:1-12; (R1) Isaiah 11:1-10; (R2) Romans 15:4-9.

It's not easy getting ready for Christmas. For many of us this is the busiest time of the year and the most nerve-racking — especially if you don't enjoy shopping.

Each year about this time we hear the voice of John the Baptist calling to us from the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths." John calls us to an inner change of mind and heart — repentance — to produce a pure and holy life.

Are there some changes you need to make in your life? Is there some resentment you need to let go of? A relationship you need to examine? The Baptist calls us to look within, to search ourselves and to deal with problem areas in our lives before they get out of hand. We must deal with anger, resentment, self-destructive habits while they are small, before we become captive to them. So John comes to us saying, "Repent." Look within. Examine your life. See if there are changes you need to make.

There is a legend about a swan that alighted one day by the banks of a river where a crane was wading about seeking



a word for sunday

By FATHER ALBERT SHAMON

snails. The crane asked: "Where do you come from?"

"From heaven!" replied the swan.

"Where is heaven?" asked the crane.

"Heaven!" said the swan. "Have you never heard of heaven?" Then the swan went on to describe the grandeur of the Eternal City: golden streets and walls of precious stones, a river of life, pure as crystal upon whose banks were trees whose leaves could heal nations.

Finally, the crane asked: "Are there any snails there?"

"Snails!" repeated the swan. "No! Of course there are not."

"Then," said the crane, "you can have your heaven. I want snails!"

How many young persons to whom God has granted the advantages of a

Christian home, have turned their backs on it and searched for snails! How many a man will sacrifice his wife, his family, his all, for the snails of sin! How many a girl has deliberately turned from the love of parents and home to learn too late that heaven has been forfeited for snails!

Secondly, are there some people we need to reach out to? Repentance is more than turning away from sin, it is always a turning to God and to one's family and friends and neighbors. That is the wonderful thing about this time of year: We are motivated to reach out and demonstrate our love to others.

A 15-year-old farm boy, in hearing his father tell his wife how much he loved his son, wanted to show his father how much he loved him. So one morning before Christmas he got up at four o'clock and milked the cows before his father suspected anything. When his father discovered what his son had done, he promised to remember this gift every Christmas for as long as he lived.

This gift of thoughtfulness did not cost the lad a penny, but it was priceless to his father.

Advent is not simply a time to prepare for Christmas. It is a time to prepare for Christ. It is a time to go to confession

and to pray the rosary daily as a gift to the Christ child. "The reign of God is at hand." So examine your lives, reach out to others, especially to Christ.

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

### Daily Readings

**Monday, December 10**  
Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalms 85:9AB-14; Luke 5:17-26

**Tuesday, December 11**  
Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalms 96:1-3, 10-13; Matthew 18:12-14

**Wednesday, December 12**  
Zechariah 2:14-17 or Revelation 11:19A, 12:1-6A, 10AB; Psalms 45:11-12, 14-17; Luke 1:26-38 or Luke 1:39-47

**Thursday, December 13**  
Isaiah 41:13-20; Psalms 145:1, 9-13AB; Matthew 11:11-15

**Friday, December 14**  
Isaiah 48:17-19; Psalms 1:1-4, 6; Matthew 11:16-19

**Saturday, December 15**  
Sirach 48:1-4, 9-11; Psalms 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19; Matthew 17:10-13

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