

MISSIOLOGY AND MISSION THEOLOGY

Topic: The Practice of Episkopé: Being a Bishop in a Global Church
Conveners: Stephen Bevans, Catholic Theological Union
Colleen Mary Mallon, St. John's University, New York
Moderator: Gemma Cruz, St. Ambrose University
Presenters: T. Howland Sanks, Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley
John S. Cummins, Bishop Emeritus of Oakland, California

This session of the Missiology and Mission Theology program group engaged the convention theme through a dialogical presentation, "The Practice of Episkopé: Being a Bishop in a Global Church". T. Howland Sanks set the context of the discussion, highlighting historical/cultural developments of the role of bishops in the early church. Fast forwarding to the contemporary situation, Bishop Cummins reflected personally on the concrete ways episcopal practices changed following the Second Vatican Council. Sanks' concluding observations stimulated further dialogue with the eighteen participants.

Briefly mapping current historical scholarship, Sanks charted the concrete contours of ecclesial practice by raising the question, "What did bishops actually do?" Citing Ignatius' letter to Polycarp, "bishops were expected to exhort-teach and preach, care for both the physical and spiritual well-being of the community, take care of widows, have regular meetings, greet people personally . . . pray and foster unity in the community." Moreover, bishops presided over Eucharist and had particular responsibility for the poor. In time, their oversight included reconciling sinners, ordaining clergy and sitting in judgment over both ecclesial and civil disputes. These initial points served as backdrop for considering the practice of episkopé in a globalized, post-modern world: "How *are* the concrete expressions of the office of bishop changing? How *could* they change? How *should* they change?"

John Cummins' personal experience of the changing contexts and practices of episkopé following Vatican II infused these questions with existential content. Noting that the word "dialogue" would be woven throughout his remarks, Bishop Cummins discussed three areas of consequence for his leadership practices: collegiality, *Gaudium et Spes*, and style of authority. Bishop Cummins' work with the Asian community in the diocese of Oakland spurred his interest and concern for the larger Asian church and his eventual involvement with FABC. Collegiality, expressed as responsibility for the whole church, meant that Bishop Cummins spent approximately one fourth of every year outside his diocese. *Gaudium et Spes*' call to pay attention to currents within the culture impacted Bishop Cummins' practice of dialogue with the scientific community, particularly since two major (competing) research institutions make their home in the Oakland diocese: Lawrence Livermore Laboratory and the University of California at Berkeley. Facilitating dialogue among these researchers around ethical concerns and consequences resulted in an eleven-year conversation that one researcher commented "only the Church could have successfully facilitated". Probably the greatest shift in episcopal practice lies in the area of style of authority. However warm the understanding between ruler and ruled, a style of authority that relies on top-down relations puts the dignity of

the subject at risk. A dialogical, listening authority orchestrates more adequately and responsibly diverse talents and opportunities present in the local church.

Before opening the dialogue to the participants, Sanks offered six points for further reflection and discussion. First, given our globalized condition, we should expect and accept pluralism in the exercise of the office of bishop. Second, regionalization, a phenomenon concurrent with globalization, is spurring increased collaboration among episcopal conferences as evidenced in U.S. and Canadian participation in CELAM V. Third, the reality of diversity demands more dialogue not less: “not just an *ecclesia docens* or *ecclesia discens*, but an *ecclesia audiens*, a listening church.” Fourth, given that globalization has brought the world to our local churches “there is no need to go forth (*Ad gentes*) from Spain, Portugal, England or France; the *gentes* have come to us.” Bishops are now responsible for the diverse peoples crossing borders into their dioceses. Fifth, increasingly there are expectations worldwide for “greater participation . . . on all levels of the church” and this raises questions around the issue of style of authority which Bishop Cummins referred to. Sixth, terrorism has linked religion to violence and casts suspicion on leaders of all religious traditions. “The credibility and integrity of the office needs to be restored if bishops are going to be effective witnesses to the church’s mission.” Sanks closed his remarks with the recommendation that “one function/title from the early church [be] restored . . . ‘protector of the poor.’ ”

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