

PRIMACY IN COLLEGIALITY

In the mystery of the *kyriake*, Jesus Kyrios is constantly at work, present among and guiding mankind as we make our pilgrim way towards man's perfection when we see God face to face.¹ The people of God, the Body of Christ, is not some kind of memorial association, formed to perpetuate the memory of some past great man, or even to regularly commemorate a "dead" god. The living reality of the continuing action of Christ among his brothers, which we call the Church, grows in self-awareness as it grows in total awareness of its role in the life of mankind. One such area of growing realization is the principle of episcopal collegiality. While it may be true that this fact has never been obliterated from the total truth of the Church, it has often been neglected. A possible contributing factor to this has been a desire to promote efficiency by centralization in Rome, and an occasional curialist treatment of residential bishops as though they were but vicars of the pope.

The Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus* of Vatican I² clarified the concept of papal primacy; the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* of Vatican II³ established with conciliar authority the principle of episcopal collegiality; it may take another hundred years and a dogmatic constitution of Vatican III to determine the working reality of the relationships of these two truths. Since both are of divine origin, primacy and collegiality are not in opposition, but they are in a state of creative tension. We can expect clarifications from future sessions of the universal Episcopal Synod, which may become a collegial function of the episcopate, although the planned meeting seems to be a primatial advisory group.⁴ The functioning of regional "colleges," such as the Fourth Plenary Council of Baltimore, will also be closely watched by theologians. It seems now that the principles

¹ Ap 22:4

² *DB* 1821-1840

³ November 21, 1964

⁴ It has been suggested that two meetings during the sessions of Vatican II might be considered synodal rather than conciliar: the discussions on fast and abstinence on 21 October 1965, and on indulgences on 11 November, 1965.

of relationship will be drawn from the practice and cannot be established *a priori*.

For clearly, *Lumen Gentium* is not a correction, a limitation or a democratization of *Pastor Aeternus*; it is a completion, particularly of chapter three of that document.⁵ Just as it is impossible to consider authentic an action of the college of bishops without the bishop of Rome, so it would be foolish to consider the actions of the bishop of Rome in any way divorced from his brother bishops. Certainly, the Roman pontiffs have made this point clear: Gregory the Great said: "My honor is the honor of the whole church; my honor is the solid strength of my brothers,"⁶ and the present pontiff, talking to the council fathers before his trip to the United Nations, said: "Our only intention is that your voices may be heard through us." Any action of the college involves the action of the Roman See; and in the working out of the constitutional⁷ basis of this complex relationship, any action of the Roman pontiff, even *ex sese*, involves the universal Church and its divinely-established shepherds. For Christ "placed St. Peter at the head of the other apostles that the episcopate might be one and undivided, that the whole multitude of believers might be preserved in the unity of faith and communion."⁸

Although the two Vatican Councils have expressed and clarified the concept of the Roman primacy and the reality of episcopal collegiality, some difficulty does exist in expressing the practical working out of this duality in unity. Both are the clear teaching of the Church; each is understandable in itself; yet a certain gray area of interpretation needs lightening—not the brilliant flash of lightning, but the growing clarity that comes in the process of living the reality. One could apply, *mutatis mutandis*, what Emile Zola once said about Lourdes: "For those who believe, no explanation is necessary; for those who do not believe, no explanation is possible."

The solution seems to be that primacy works *within* the frame-

⁵ DB 1826-1831

⁶ Quoted by Vatican I, DB 1828.

⁷ Papal legislation has been . . . produced by an organization essentially administrative in design and function, free from the stern necessity of constitutional responsibility," E. Hill, "Authority in the Church," *Clergy Review* 50, 9 & 10, Aug. & Sept. 1965.

⁸ *Pastor Aeternus*, Introduction, DB 1821.

work of collegiality. An examination of the existing structures of the people of God does not bring this out in a sufficiently clear manner; we must rather see the causes of the recent practices: the Christ-given unity of his Church; the purpose of both primacy and episcopacy in real *diakonia*, and their very nature as "ruling in love"; the constitutional responsibility of the corps of bishops for the whole Church; the functioning of patriarchs and primates as well as metropolitans; and the reality of the presence of Christ in the local Church gathered around their bishops in his name. Only then can we find the means by which primacy and collegiality do and can and must exist and function, in order that the Good News and salvation can be brought effectively to all men.

It is clear from the priestly role of the entire people of God, of the Church, and of the bishops, that the totality of the Christ-Church is present in each Eucharistic event.⁹ But viewed from the aspect of their prophetic role, this totality necessitates both a unity with other local congregations and a measureable orthodoxy in proposing and propounding the message of Christ. Further, in the third aspect, that of shepherding the people of God in their pilgrim march toward eternity, a unity—not necessarily a uniformity—as to means and goals as established by Christ is also required. Hence the completeness of the local church under one aspect becomes an incompleteness under others. And it is within the whole mystery of the Church that the whole office of the bishop must be placed. If we were dealing with clearly optional administrative procedures, we could opt for any one we chose; but here we must look for the role Christ willed for the bishop within the people of God. "The hierarchic priesthood," P. Meinhold says, "of the Catholic Church cannot be thought of as a state which could exist for itself without being incorporated into the people of God."¹⁰

"Office is a function within the Church and not over the Church,"¹¹ emphasizes John McKenzie; and the Second Vatican

⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 26: (H. Marot thinks of this section as a reflection of the "Eucharistic Ecclesiology" of N. Afanassieff; see *Concilium* 14 (*Ecumenical Theology*, 2), p. 144ff.) "This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful united with their pastors".

¹⁰ *Irenikon* 38-3, 1965, p. 316.

¹¹ J. McKenzie, S.J., *Authority in the Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), p. 76.

Council, when it treated of collegiality in chapter three, the "nervous" chapter,¹² used phrases like "shepherding" or "nurturing" some thirty-five times, while words like "governing" or "ruling" were used but five times. But the bishop's role is even greater than this; he "is to be considered the high priest of his flock, from whom the life in Christ of his flock is in some way derived and dependent."¹³ Further, he is the sign and factor, *i.e.*, the instrumental cause, of unity within the diocese, and in union with his brother bishops of unity within the entire Church. He is also made responsible by his consecration for the entire Church's trueness to its divine mission.¹⁴ This is not only clear from *Lumen Gentium*,¹⁵ but it has been part of papal teaching, for example, that of Pius XII when he wrote: (the bishop) "by divine institution and precept is made responsible for the apostolic function of the Church along with the rest of the bishops, in accordance with those words which Christ spoke to his apostles: 'As the Father has sent me, so I also send you.'"¹⁶

Yet if all this is clear about the bishop, it is even clearer that the Roman pontiff fulfills all these functions and offices in a more eminent way. If a bishop is the sign and factor of Catholic unity, the Roman bishop is the *great* sign and factor of Catholic unity among the Catholic bishops as among all the people of God. Just as union with the bishop is the mark of the Catholic,¹⁷ so union with the bishop of Rome is the mark of the Catholic bishop.¹⁸ If the college of bishops is charged with the governing of the whole church,¹⁹ the bishop of Rome is specifically charged individually with this very task of governing the whole Church.²⁰ Boniface VIII phrased it:

¹² *Lumen Gentium*, 18-21.

¹³ *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, 41; cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 26.

¹⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 21.

¹⁵ *Lumen Gentium* (cf. especially, 18).

¹⁶ *Fidei Donum*, AAS 49 (1957), p. 237.

¹⁷ "You should understand that the bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop and that whoever is not with the bishop is not in the Church," Cyprian, *Ep.* 66,6.

¹⁸ "in hierarchic communion with the head and members of the college," *Lumen Gentium*, 21.

¹⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 18.

²⁰ *Pastor Aeternus*, 1; DB 1822.

"Every human creature is subject to the Roman pontiff";²¹ and, quite simply, governing the whole people of God naturally includes governing the bishops themselves.

How then can we reconcile these two truths? The bishop of Rome cannot, in faith, be reduced to the status of a "chief administrative officer," who functions as an elected representative of all the bishops; the very nature of the Church founded by Christ will not allow him to be but a president, as though he were the executive arm of a tripartite system of government of which the synod of bishops would be the legislative arm, as some of our Christian brothers would have it.²² It is equally unreal to refer to the bishop of Rome as a "monarch," as though he were only an earthly king or dictator. The Council used the somewhat ambiguous term "head" (*caput*) of the college, which is susceptible of a wide range of interpretation. I cannot think of precise terms which will describe accurately the relationship in principle or in functioning of the accepted duality of authority. There simply exists a bi-polarity, as Karl Rahner implies, which cannot be written into a formal constitution.²³ In Bertram's words:

The Roman pontiff when acting alone represents more the unicity of the power of Christ our Lord over the entire Church since He is the unique mediator in the New Testament between God and man. The body of bishops when acting together with the Roman pontiff represents more the universality of the authority and power of Christ our Lord since His power extends to all nations, territories and times. Hence, the collegiate act . . . contains the formality of more *extensive representation*.²⁴

If we were to look to the apostolic church to find the relation-

²¹ *Unam Sanctum* (A.D. 1302), *DB* 469.

²² D. W. Allen and A. M. Allchin, in an article, "Primacy and Collegiality: An Anglican View," say:

There is an essential equality among bishops, for in the power of the Spirit, Christ is fully present wherever the local church comes together in his name. But the unity of the body cannot be revealed unless the whole college of bishops are in communion one with another, and with the Bishop of Rome, who is, and should be, the President of the College.

Journal of Ecumenical Studies 2, 1 (Winter, 1965), p. 79.

²³ K. Rahner and J. Ratzinger, *The Episcopate and Primacy* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), p. 13.

²⁴ W. Bertrams, *The Papacy, the Episcopacy and Collegiality*, p. 134 ff.

ship between Peter and the twelve, we find a similar distinction, although it is not really the same situation: the bishops are in some way²⁵ successors to the apostles, not new apostles; and the pope is the successor of St. Peter, not a second Peter, for he lacks what Cardinal Journet refers to as the "transapostolic powers."²⁶ Certainly there existed a college of the twelve, and equally certainly Peter's position was unique; but it was within the college that he functioned, as A. Nissiotis points out: "An Orthodox must remind the Roman Church [that] the twelve apostles are not to be regarded as one plus eleven."²⁷ Peter's absolutely unique position was not conferred by an election, or by other apostles granting him administrative authority; his office comes to him from Christ, just as the office of the twelve (including Peter) comes from Christ. The "council" of Jerusalem as Luke describes it is interesting to us because of the way in which the decision was reached—by common consent after full deliberation, as John McKenzie says: "The apostolic office, like the leadership of Peter, was not exercised in an absolute manner. However, the decision, when it was reached, was an authoritative decision."²⁸

The whole thrust of the apostolic office was true *diakonia*, in the very real sense of service to others. Yves Congar points out that "in his *Commentary on Matthew 20*, St. Thomas clearly states the evangelical nature of authority as a *dignitas* in the sense of a degree of service rather than a *dominium*."²⁹ No one preaches or teaches to hear his own voice; and such service cannot be impersonal, because of its very nature it is the service of one person to another. Both primacy and episcopacy are offices of the honor of service, and in actual fact are serving the same people. Any conflict between them could exist only on the basis of a rivalry to be of more effective

²⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, 22; cf. the *Nota Praevia* appended to the Constitution "by higher authority": there is "only a *proportionality* between the first relationship, Peter/apostles, and the second, pope/bishops."

²⁶ *The Church of the Word Incarnate*, vol. 1: *The Apostolic Hierarchy*, p. 146.

²⁷ *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 2, 1 (Winter, 1965), p. 43.

²⁸ J. McKenzie, S.J., *op. cit.*, p. 50.

²⁹ "Authority as Service," *Perspectives*, Nov.-Dec., 1963, p. 169.

service.³⁰ So that, far from searching for areas of possible conflict,³¹ the areas of cooperation and mutual means of service should be investigated.

One such area is the modern thrust for self-determination, which surrounds us today: in the Berkeley students' "Declaration of Independence," in the search for racial equality, in the civil rights upsurge, and, in the Church, in the very convening of Vatican II, and the use of diocesan and parish councils. Collegiality is not a constitutional representational form of ecclesiastical government; nevertheless, it could make it possible for all the voices of the Church to be heard, and meet modern man's needs in that sense. Few men are willing today to accept authoritarianism in any form: civil governments are limited by constitutions and human conventions, corporations are limited by governmental regulations and stockholders' decisions and union votes, and the human ruling of the Church is limited by canon law and custom. Today, each man wants to exercise his God-given freedom to make his personal response to God's Word a truly personal response—not a dictated, automated or even computerized response. If authority in the Church, given by God for the shepherding of the people of God, is to be effective today, it must involve both the person serving and the one served; just as obedience imposes mutual obligations, so Christian authority must listen as well as speak. The concept of collegiality, assuming fruitful and probably structured dialogue within each diocese, makes it possible for the body of bishops to be the voice of the Church, and not simply the voice of one element within the Church.

The solution of the mutually dependent primacy and collegiality relationships seems to be that there simply exists a bipolarity in Christ's plan for the human structures he uses for the salvation of the human race. This is really nothing new: we are

³⁰ Probably the most idealistic sentence ever written on this subject.

³¹ Carlo Colombo said recently: "There is no possibility of conflict or division between the two forms in which the presence of Our Lord's salvific action in the Church is realized: Christ is not 'divided,' nor could he be." "The Hierarchical Structure of the Church," a talk given at the University of Notre Dame, 22 March, 1966, ms. p. 17.

accustomed to the presence of Christ in his Church and the guidance of the Holy Spirit at the same time; we are accustomed, too, to the duality of structured leadership and charismatic leadership, despite our normal human desire to find both in the same person; we are likewise accustomed to the duality of the clarity of administrative authority and to the persuasiveness of the authority of saintliness; and we have become accustomed to the fact that both the pope and the local bishop have ordinary jurisdiction over the same people. It remains no wonder to us that we have not fully penetrated the mystery of the Church; and that the very fact of faith upon which our lives are based, expresses at the same time a knowledge and an ignorance of the totality of God's saving action in time and space.

Some things seem clear: the individual bishop receives his position in the Church by his acceptance into the college of bishops, symbolized today in a two-fold manner: by his reception of sacramental orders at the hands of three representatives of the college,³² and, indeed, at the hands of all the bishops present; and by the assignment of specific mission and jurisdiction by the Roman pontiff. Hence the individual bishop is directly related to the Roman bishop, and in a sense dependent upon him. On the other hand, the bishop of Rome does not live in isolation, for Christ's charge to Peter was to give strength not to "subjects" but to his brothers.³³ The pope has a unique place within the college of bishops, in that he is in himself the summation of that college, not its representative; he acts as an epitome, not a delegate; but he can no more act independently of that fact than he can act independently of his humanity, his Christianity or his Episcopacy.

This, it seems to me, is as far as we can delineate the relationship at the moment. Much, much more remains for the theological work of clarification. I might suggest that the following questions need answers:

N. Arseniev writes:

The council does not consider the episcopal office itself as a

³² Of much greater significance than V. DeWaal sees in the "quasi-magical character of the consecration." "L'Anglicanisme et al Constitution conciliaire 'De Ecclesia'," *Irenikon* 38, 3 (1965), p. 312.

³³ Luke 22:32

delegation of papal powers, and yet the *exercise* of the episcopate is still placed in total dependence on the Roman pontiff, and this by divine right. What then is left of the concept of collegiality? ³⁴

The selection of Christians for office of bishop in the Church is at present an action of the Primacy. Would this be done better if it were entrusted to the local church? Or the local presbyterate? Or by making a collegiate action of the regional bishops?

Is the concrete conferral of the canonical mission of the individual bishop of human origin? If so, are we now using the best possible means?

How will the universal Synod of Bishops affect the primacy-collegiality relationships?

Is it possible for someone other than the bishop of Rome to speak for the college of bishops?

If the bishops are "subordinate to the lawful authority of the Roman pontiff," ³⁵ is this only in the conferral of the canonical mission or also in its exercise?

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³⁴ "The Second Vatican Council's Constitution 'De Ecclesia,'" *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 9, 1 (1965), p. 33.

³⁵ Pius XII, *Mystici Corporis*, 42.