

THE BISHOP'S PARTICIPATION  
IN THE THREEFOLD OFFICE OF CHRIST

Topic: The Bishop's Participation in the Threefold Office of Christ  
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Moderator: Catherine E. Clifford, Saint Paul University, Ottawa  
Presenter: James Coriden, Washington Theological Union  
Presenter: Peter De Mey, Catholic University of Leuven

The presenters in this session are members of the Peter and Paul Seminar, an independent group of canonists and theologians dedicated to the critical study of the Second Vatican Council and its reception into the canonical structures and practice of the life of the church. In this round of study, the seminar has focused on the relationship of the bishop to the local church, recognizing that this new insight, though present in the conciliar teaching, remains somewhat underdeveloped. The conciliar debate on collegiality sought largely to balance the role of the bishops against the centralizing tendencies of papal primacy in the wake of Vatican I. Consideration of the relationship of the bishop to the local church was often a by-product of rethinking his role within the wider universal church, such that the council's theological reflection on the former was somewhat limited. The studies presented here attempt to analyze the conciliar teaching and the *Code of Canon Law* and to consider the direction for continuing renewal of the theology and exercise of the episcopal office.

Canonist James Coriden's paper, "The Teaching Ministry of the Diocesan Bishop: A Collaborative Exercise," explores the theological and canonical vision of the teaching office by the bishop in the context of the local church. He observes that the code of canon law itself sees the whole church as the subject of the teaching function (CIC 747.1). The teaching ministry of the people of God in each place, sustained by the Holy Spirit and sharing in Christ's prophetic mission to announce the reign of God, is the essential context for the teaching ministry of the bishop. His role as an authoritative teacher "neither precedes nor exhausts that of the diocesan church." In his discussion of the bishop's teaching function, Coriden insists the need to distinguish between the office of teaching, whose source is the sacrament of ordination, and the natural gifts that belong to an effective teacher, "wisdom, deep understanding, keen judgment, and the facility to explain the truths of faith." Because not every bishop is blessed with such gifts, he must rely on those who do in a collaborative exercise of their office in order to ensure that the gospel is effectively proclaimed. The scope of the church's teaching mission, and of the bishop's function within it, which includes formational and education activities, catechesis, evangelization, and multiple forms of media for the effective communication of the gospel, point again to the necessity of a collective exercise of the teaching office. Coriden notes that *The Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* elevates "the principle of cooperation" to the level of a fundamental, general principle for the bishop's ministry. He considers that "an explicit insistence of the collaborative exercise of the teaching function" is lacking from the present *Code of Canon Law*, and suggests that this be rectified by a set of canons to indicate the various roles played by those who effectively collaborate in the diocesan teaching function, and

the inclusion of some provision for a consultative body on theological matters. Such changes in the code might “remind everyone that the diocesan teaching ministry is not the bishop’s alone.”

Peter De Mey presents a critical reevaluation of Vatican II’s teaching in his paper, “Reconsidering *Lumen gentium* 25-27 in Light of Reflection on the Episcopacy in Other Christian Churches and in Ecumenical Dialogue.” In the first part he analyzes the conciliar teaching on the *tria munera Christi*, noting the contrasting emphases in its application of these categories to the whole people of God, and to the hierarchy. He observes that in its concern to safeguard the jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome, *LG* 27 does not entirely succeed in avoiding a juridical terminology or interpretation of the categories of the threefold office. De Mey looks to the fruits of ecumenical dialogue on the nature and exercise of episcopate to consider both how the theology of the *tria munera* is being received more widely. Faith and Order’s document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Ministry) mentions the *tria munera* in relation to the common priesthood of the faithful, and to the ordained ministry, though this concept is not developed as a participation in the threefold ministry of Christ. The work of ARCIC reflects a use of the *tria munera* in relation to ordained ministry, though, perhaps due to a certain reserve in applying the term “priestly” (reflected in the 1979 “Elucidation” on *Ministry and Ordination*), to the laity, it does not apply these categories to the whole people of God. The *tria munera* are applied extensively in the Orthodox-Roman Catholic Commission’s Valamo statement, though, De Mey observes they seem at times to be understood as a “*tria potestates*.” In a tentative conclusion, he suggests that while the dialogues find in the *tria munera* helpful categories for structuring their reflection on the people of God, the ministry of the ordained, and the exercise of episcopé, the Catholic vision of participation in the threefold mission of Christ should not be lost.

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