

The U.S. Bishops On

The
VOICE

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

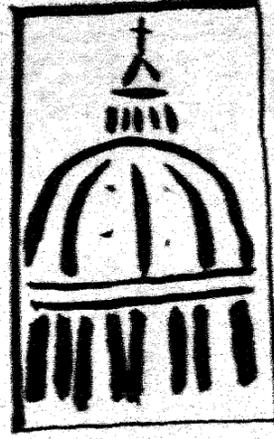
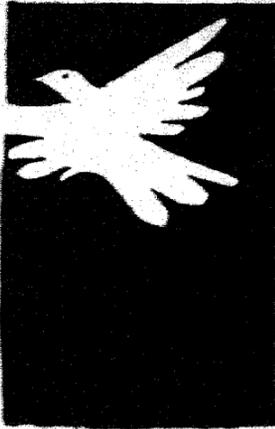
JAN. 12, 1968

The Church In Our Day

DIAZ DE
VILLEGAS

A Collective Pastoral Letter of the U. S.
Bishops Which was Approved at Their
Annual Meeting in Washington, D. C.
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FOREWORD

In response to the needs of the hour and, in Pope John XXIII's words, alive to the "rhythm of the times," the bishops of the United States have undertaken this year to address themselves to a major doctrinal statement on the Church.

The format for this collective pastoral letter is a departure from the customary statements of the American hierarchy. Specifically it is to be a doctrinal exposition on the life and development of the American Church in the light of Vatican Council II. The principal document interpreted in the present letter is the doctrinal Constitution on the Church. It undertakes this commentary in addressing itself to areas of special concern to the Church in the United States in our day. As its very name implies, the pastoral letter is intended to have as its first objective and as its guiding principle the care of souls.

In an age where questions concerning the "charismatic" and "institutional" elements of the Church are of moment, at a time when the essentials of priestly life and religious dedication are freely discussed, in these days when freedom of conscience and religious

authority come often into conversation, it is thought not only prudent but necessary that the American bishops present the considered, extended statement on the doctrinal matters underlying the present discussions.

At a time when faith is challenged on many sides, it is especially necessary to remind all the people of God of the need for continued, strong and devoted love for Christ's Church. This is particularly appropriate in the Year of Faith. The witness of that church to the presence of Christ in the world is a light to us and to all men of Christ's saving grace among men. That witness can only be expressed if it is seen, felt and lived in the visible Church — the evidence of Christ's incarnation in our day.

With this in mind the bishops of the United States make a special plea for a renewal among God's people of that love for the Church that has so characterized the faithful of all ages. And it is their hope that this present pastoral letter will contribute to that renewal.

† John F. Dearden, D. D., President,
National Conference of Catholic Bishops

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

The Church of Christ is living today a privileged hour. Seldom in her long history has there been so much to do, so many new possibilities for everything except that mediocrity which Pius XI, in the early moments of this hour, repudiated for all Christians.

We see not only the glory but also the burden of this privileged hour. We share the concern of all those who experience the promise and the concomitant uncertainties of this moment. Our deep love for the Church and all her people makes us long to do more, yearn to serve better, wish that we had fewer limitations and were more like to Jesus of Nazareth. At times, we must remind ourselves that it is only when Christ comes back to us that "there shall be no night" (Rev. 21:25). At moments, we must meditate on the great promise of the Master, "I shall indeed be with you soon!" (Rev. 22:20) and on the Church's trusting response, "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20).

We, your elder brothers in the Church, "shepherds of the flock of God" (1 Peter 5:2), are eager to share with you our thoughts on the Second Vatican Council and on this post-conciliar period. For you are with us "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation" (1 Peter 2:9). You are, furthermore, at once our brothers and sisters in faith and yet our sons and daughters in whom our spiritual fatherhood is realized and put to the test.

We speak not to "lord it over" the brethren nor to "make our authority felt" (Matt. 20:25), though we are conscious of the responsible position we have received from the Lord for the good of the community. We speak in discharge of our responsibility, motivated by a pastoral love that sometimes speaks in silence but chooses now to speak in words. For we bear in our office not only the solicitude of the Church and her people but also a mandate to instruct the Church of God and to exercise that "authority which the Lord gave us for building up and not for destroying" (2 Cor. 13:10).

EXPOSITION OF BASIC COUNCIL DOCUMENT

The motive which prompts us is response to a need many have made known to us together with their desire that the bishops of the United States interpret the present moment for the American Church. Our action takes the form of a collective pastoral letter, the first since the convocation of the Second Vatican Council. We wish to consider with you the opening chapters of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and some of their implications for Catholic life in the United States.

A special urgency attaches to this letter since we are speaking of a grave matter, involving salvation, namely, the doctrine on the Church, and we do this in

a season of particular solemnity, namely, the Year of Faith. In later collective pastorals we hope to interpret and, in due course, apply other council documents and decrees.

We speak because we must. Even though our words may not, in every case, be heeded, they still have to be spoken. Words are not solutions in themselves, but words convey saving ideas indispensable to order here and salvation hereafter. Words are not only a means of instruction; they are, in their own way, sacramental, even redemptive. Through words, we come to understand one another and we are often healed by this understanding. It is through words, above all through the Incarnate Word, that we come to know something of the wisdom and love of God and something of the destiny of man as faith perceives that destiny.

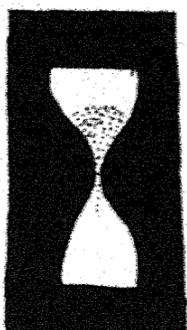
The experience of the Second Vatican Council has given us Catholics in the United States, as it has given the whole Church of God, a fresh outlook and new horizons. The council may prove to have been the most productive and far-reaching of all the Church's ecumenical councils. The openness of our deliberations helped us to see with new clarity all the freedoms in which God has created us and by which Jesus Christ has set us free. We saw in the pursuit of our common hopes how the Church learns as she teaches, rules as she serves, receives as she gives. We heard in the council the call of the future, a future which shall be no less responsive to God's redeeming power and truth than were the best and holiest moments of the Church's past. We sensed in the council not only the great deeds the Church has done for man and for God in her long history of mingled joys and sorrows but also the many things yet to be endured, undertaken and accomplished.

The council gave us increased consciousness of our responsibilities as custodians of a tradition whose sacred richness demands that we be vigilant; it made us no less conscious of our duties as heralds of a future wherein that tradition will reveal its capacity for new glory. As the years of the council progressed, we became more aware of the magnitude of the agony and the loftiness of the aspirations which identify this mighty century. We experienced anew our need to carry the cross of the human condition, to trust more deeply in the never failing presence of the Spirit, to affirm hope even when many would counsel despair, and to wait, in all our distress, the fulfillment of Christ's Easter promise.

In all this, we felt ourselves at once the servants and ministers of a great Mystery. Our conciliar work illumined for us something of the Mystery of the Lord, the Mystery of the World and the reconciliation of these in the Mystery of the Church. We pray that God our Father, who keeps alive in us a sense of our inadequacy, may give us the courage to bring to fruition the work of the council which begins and ends with confidence in one another and with faith in Him.



"WE MUST NOT BECOME PRISONERS OF THE PRESENT."



I- The Mystery Of The Church

Pope John XXIII intended the council to be both the occasion and the means for renewing the Church. He spoke of the paradoxes by which the Church is "always living and always young." She "feels the rhythm of the times" and, therefore, in a marvelous manner "radiates new light, achieves new conquests, while remaining identical with herself, faithful to the divine image impressed on her countenance by her Spouse, who loves her and protects her, Christ Jesus" (Bull of Convocation: Dec. 25, 1961).

Pope Paul VI has emphasized that the basic theme of the council is this Mystery of the Church. He therefore summons us, with ever-increasing urgency, to more positive pastoral involvement with one another.

The council altered some patterns which may have proved oppressive in the past. We must not now become prisoners of the present. Our continuity with Christ and the apostolic age survived all the changing patterns of the past and yet presupposes a continuing relationship with the perennial elements of our religious past. To lose our past in this latter sense is to lose ourselves. Such a loss could account for that spiritual amnesia which, it is said, afflicts a generation suffering a cultural and spiritual identity crisis. To demean the Church of former ages is to diminish the Church of the present age and to impoverish the future. We know the past has not been perfect but we gain nothing by infidelity to it. We profit from the courage to see in the past many things which might have been done better. With equal insight, we see in the past a faithfulness to God and a service rendered to man which make us confident again.

Ours is not, in any case, a Church of the past. Ours is always the Church of the present moment. Thus, we move with the "rhythm of the times." We welcome the fresh insights of theologians, indeed of all God's people, as they confront the Mystery of the Church. We profit most of all from those members of the Church whose prayer and spiritual sensitivity have given them a pre-eminent title to speak in the community of faith and worship.

With sadness we notice that some today, using the noble word "charism" or employing theology almost as therapy, ridicule the Church and, under the guise of being contemporary, seem hostile to everything except their own views. What begins as necessary and solid criticism seems readily to degenerate into a destructive attitude toward life unworthy of reason and inconsistent with faith. Too often (and here each of us must examine his conscience) the life of prayer and the pursuit of spiritual excellence have become the last and the least of considerations. A new Pelagianism seeks salvation in the correction of structures rather than in conversion to God; a new Gnosticism places all its hope in the apt phrase or the esoteric formula rather than in Jesus Christ crucified and risen. We must not forget that what we are seeking to reform is not a mortal institution but the Church of the Living God.

Let these words not be interpreted as a desire to discourage the positive forces developing in the American Catholic Church. We all have much to learn from one another. We shall learn well if we remember that humility is always the mark of the believer and that we all constitute the faithful; patience is still the attitude of a disciple and we are all disciples; and love for one another in God is more important than all else, leading us to the fulfillment of Christ's highest commandment and to the performance of the most distinctive of Christian virtues.

The Church is ultimately a Church of the future. We witness to Christ Jesus who is the same not only yesterday and today but forever (Heb. 13:8). We are one with the same Christ who proclaims: "Behold! I make all things new!" (Rev. 21:5). Our attitude toward the future is affirmative, not fearful. For one day in the future, known only to the Father, the Lord is destined to return to us.

The future does not, however, hold out its own inevitable solutions to our problems. Only those who labor to ransom the present are worthy to inherit the promises of the future. The Church we seek to become depends upon the Church we are today.

The Christian perspective is threefold. It looks to the past with reverence, to the present with responsibility, and to the future with faith, which is the substance of hope (Heb. 11:1).

PROBLEM OF GOD AND PROBLEM OF CHURCH

There are two perplexing questions which especially trouble contemporary man. The first concerns whether God exists and if He does, what kind of a God He is — and what must be said of Him. The second is a problem for men who believe in God. It asks whether there need be a Church and what must be said of the Church. We discern an inevitable relationship between these two questions. No one who believes in God is totally estranged from the Church. Conversely, everyone who truly belongs to the Church can never be far from God. For it is the Church which summons man to God and speaks of God to man. She is charged by the Spirit with a mission of witnessing to God by the power of her deeds (sacramental, social, sacrificial) and the suasion of her words. Because of this, the Church bears a certain responsibility for belief and unbelief in the world. She yearns to bring all believers into ever more complete communion with herself and all men into ever more conscious communion with God. She longs to do this not because she desires dominion but because there is no better way to serve man and to make him free.

The Second Vatican Council was a council of the Church about the Church. If any synthesis of the council can be given, the Church is the key to that synthesis. The council's preoccupation with the Church by no means made her horizon less catholic, as is proved by a mere listing of the issues it deliberated.

Pope Paul VI, mindful of this centrality of the Church, refers "to the science of the Church, ecclesiology," as "the vivid need of our time" (address to general audience, April 27, 1966). The Church was "the principal question" studied by the council, "the center" of Vatican II's deliberations. "To know what the Church is," he declared, "becomes decisive in relation to so many other vital questions: the religious question first of all, the ecumenical question, the humanistic question . . ."

Although we know the Church, unique among institutions, to be a mystery, still we must know, to some extent, what the Church is before we can say what she must do. The social or cultural, the educational, religious and ecumenical tasks we undertake depend upon our awareness of the nature and purpose of the Church as well as of our places in her life and action.

Pope Paul puts it plainly:

"We have inalienable duties toward the Church and in her we seek to find truth and salvation without pluralisms which are contrary to the unifying and constitutive principle of the Church and without elastic uncertainties and equivocations . . ." (address of April 27, 1966).

Thus, our mission to the present moment of history is too complex for simplifications. We must serve our fellow-men with all our heart and energy but we must serve them in a manner befitting disciples of Jesus Christ and as members of His Church. We act under a mandate from the Lord requiring that in all we are and all we do for and among men we become the light of the world, the lamp illumined to show where Christ is to be found.



The Church has her beginning even before time, before the world was made, the Father chose us in Christ" (Eph 1:4), in that mysterious community of persons who constitute the Trinity. Under another aspect, however, the Church begins with the human phenomenon. In the creation of man, Christ and His Holy Church are already there. The first events of human history are the first acts of a drama dominated by the mystery of the Incarnation and the power of Pentecost. Man is made, from his first breath, in the image of God. He awaits from the beginning that further expression of the divine image in the Word that would be made flesh.

The Church is solicitous for the dignity of man since in man the image of God and the humanity of Christ are at issue. The Church seeks the progress of man; she does so because God made man worthy of such solicitude but also because God so made her that she cannot do other than love and serve man. The Church is diminished not only when her children, in despair, forget God but also when, in presumption, they dare to neglect man. The Church is that assembly which looks heavenward to pray "Abba, Father" and then earthward to greet all men as brothers. Thus, the Church is the keeper of each man as a brother because she is God's family. Hence the Church cries out: "Who is scandalized and I am not on fire?" (2 Cor. 11:29). The Church makes her own "the joy and the hope, the grief and the anxiety" (Gaudium et Spes, 1) of all the human family.

The Church emerges not only from the grace of God but from mankind and its history. Her vision for man includes his boldest dreams but soars beyond them and lifts to levels literally divine the hopes of the human heart. The Church tells man that all the splendor of this world will pass (1 John 2:17), that in any case it is not enough for him. She tells him that he is meant for God. One day he will inherit not a perishable city or a corruptible body but a new heaven and a new earth. The Church speaks of an end to human sorrow, of a day when man shall weep no more, of an indestructible love that conquers death, cancels guilt, and heals alienation.

Though the Church reveals to man visions beyond his power to dream, realistically she speaks to him of his tragic insufficiency and his human sinfulness. She reminds him that he is not only a creature with understanding and freedom given him by none other than God but a creature who for all his enlightenment walks in darkness, who for all his freedom is alienated. Thus, he must be redeemed. His redemption is achieved not by his fellow-men, though they are called to share in this, but by God Himself. Yet we are redeemed and judged by man, by one of our brothers, in whom we see not only our other self but also God's only Son.

It is ultimately, then, in Jesus Christ that the Church places all her hope. In no past moment of her history did she really trust in princes and in no future moment will she rely, in fact, on the people's pleasure of the

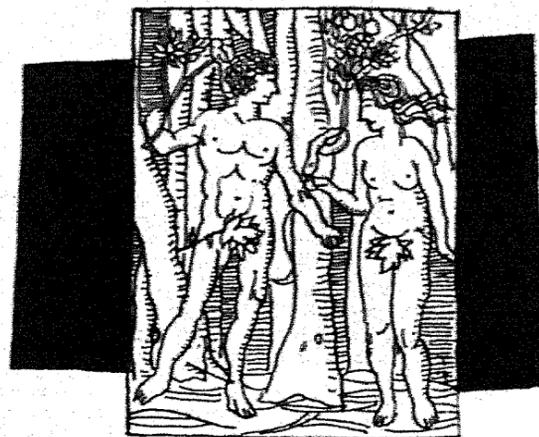
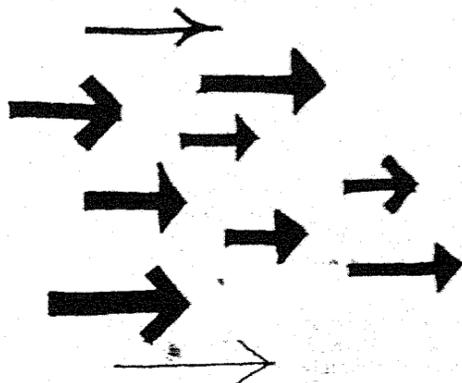
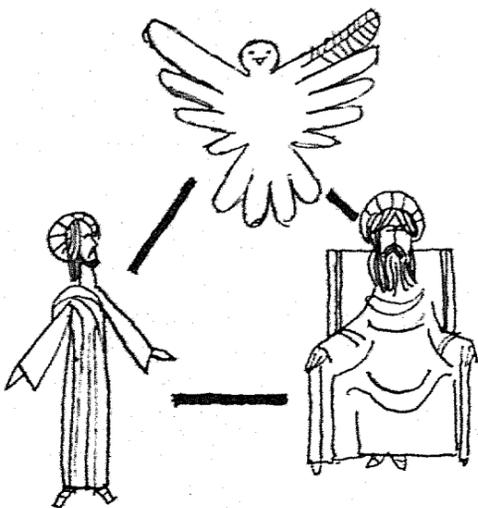
judgment of the crowd. She makes concordats with kings, perhaps, but she never presumes to bargain with Christ. She delights to be among the children of men and to find them siding with her, but she must always be on the side of God, as was Moses, and of God's honor, as was Thomas Becket. Public opinion, like the king's favor, may frequently be a passing solace to her but it fades into nothingness in the face of the judgment of God. Like her saint, Thomas More, she is the king's good servant, a servant Church among the sons of men, but she is God's servant first or she is nothing.

That is why the Church sees in Christ her sole Savior and her Founder. She does not think it too bold to declare that she was brought into being, structured, commissioned, and given her life by the Lord Himself. Her faithfulness to herself becomes, therefore faithfulness to Him. Her total mission in history begins and ends with Jesus. The human phenomenon, which demands her action, reaches its highest intensity in Christ. Divine Love, furthermore, achieves its most tangible expression in that same Christ. Thus, the Mystery of the Church is inseparable from the mystery of the human heart and its needs, above all the need for redemption; it is likewise inseparable from the mystery of that Jesus who is ever our Redeemer, the source of our salvation.

At a time when many question the Church, when some forsake her and seek an allegiance to Christ without a Church, the Church reminds us that discipleship in Christ is necessarily a vocation to the Church of Christ. It is Christ who evokes the Church. All who listen carefully to His voice hear the clarity of His summons to belong also to the Church. But for the historic Church, there would be today no possibility of affirming or denying Christ. For without the Church men, over the long centuries, would have made of Christ what they preferred Christ to be rather than what He is. Some seek to follow the Lord without the Church in what seems to them a simple, less complex, and more spontaneous religious experience. But we must remind ourselves that without the Church the following of Jesus subtly becomes a following of self or even a following of those false prophets against whom Christ warned and whom the Church resists.

Jesus lives undiminished only in that Church which has written and preached the Scriptures; in that Church wherein apostolic tradition remains alive in Christian hearts; in that Church which celebrates the sacraments, proclaims the creeds, assembles the councils, worships the Father, offers the Body of the Lord in her liturgy, and lives by the unfailing Spirit of God. The Church is alive in Christ and Christ lives in His Church. Thus she exists for the glory of God and for the healing of mankind. In Christ, she realizes how mighty is God's glory which abides with us in so tangible a manner. God, however, is not glorified nor are human hearts healed when men seek Christ while consciously rejecting His Church. Man is not allowed to pick and choose when he seeks God's will for himself.

What IS The Church?



THE CHURCH AS ONE

The Second Vatican Council reminded us:

"The present-day conditions of the world add greater urgency to this work of the Church so that all men, joined more closely today by various social, technical, and cultural ties, may also attain fuller unity in Christ." (Lumen Gentium, 1).

The work of Christ and His Church is a work for unity, unity among mankind, unity between mankind and God. It was the Church that first told us that because of our baptism in Christ "there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female" (Gal. 3:28). This is the Church's true mission. If she falters in this, she must recover again her pilgrim path in repentance and renewal. Continually the Church is reminded by the baptism she celebrates, by the Gospel she proclaims, by the Bread she breaks, that her mission is unity, her purpose is harmony, her service is reconciliation. She forever gives thanks to God because she knows that there was a day when we "had no Christ," when we "were immersed in this world, without hope and without God" (Eph. 2:12). Now all this has changed! For "in His own person He killed hostility," so that now we "are no longer aliens but citizens like all the saints and part of God's household" (Eph. 2:16-19).

Now we know that peace binds us together into "one Body, one Spirit, one and the same hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God Who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all" (Eph. 4:3-6). Now we know that Jesus is man's Good Shepherd, that He gave His life for His sheep, and that He prayed for one flock under one pastor (John 10:14-17). Now we know

that "Jesus was to die" so that He might "gather together in unity the scattered children of God" (John 11:50-52). Now we understand, we who live out the post-Easter history of the community of Jesus, what He meant on the night before He died when He asked that "all may be one, Father, as you are in me and I am in you, so that the world may believe" (John 17:21). Now we know this and we give thanks to the Father who did not forget His children, to the Son made our brother who died and came to life for us, and to the Spirit who prompts us to reach out for God and for one another. One day the glory of Christ will burst in radiance upon the Church and call it home, perfecting its unity. One day, "when Christ appears... the glory of God will light up the heavenly city and... the whole Church of the saints in the supreme blessedness of charity will adore God" (Lumen Gentium, 51).

What, then, shall we say of the Church? It is a mystery so deep that every word which gives us awareness of her sacredness gives us also experience of our ignorance. We see the Church-to-be in the dawn of history, in the alliance God forged with man on Sinai, in the new commitment made during the Lord's Last Supper. God's plan was always "to raise men to a sharing of divine life. When man had fallen in Adam, God the Father did not leave man to himself, but constantly offered helps to salvation in view of Christ... He planned to assemble in the holy Church all those who would believe in Christ. From the very beginning of the world, the foreshadowing of the Church took place" (Lumen Gentium, 2). If the human phenomenon cannot be separated from the Incarnation of Christ, Christ cannot be considered in His fullness without the Church.

THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

One of the clearest features of the Church, a feature receiving ever greater emphasis today, is the fact of community

"God does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather has it pleased Him to bring men together as one people." (Lumen Gentium, 9).

The Holy Spirit is given in His fullness only to the community. No one member or one structure in the Church receives the Spirit for itself alone. Likewise, the liturgy of the Church is never unmindful of the community.

Few things are more treasured in life than association in friendship and community. In His mercy, God has joined us together in such a way that we share not only our lives but His life as well. Thus, the Church is not only the sum total of all the persons who are her members but something mysteriously more. As one lives the life of the Church, he discovers not only his brethren but his God.

This emphasis on community is needed. It must not lead us, however, to neglect the individual person. Man is not a creature made only for the good of others. Each man shares with all others a common good at the core of which is Eternal Life and God. He has, however, an inalienable value in himself. Though he is saved in community, he is saved in virtue of his individual response to the call to share in that community's life. No other, certainly no community, can bear for a man the cross of his own existence or wear for him the crown of his

own responsibility. He comes into community as SOME-ONE. Though he is never absent from the prayer and concern of his brethren, there is an inevitable solitude about his living and his dying. Though he faces God in the midst of his family, there is always something God requires of him uniquely, something which He does not ask of others.

It is our visible coming together as a community in the power of the Spirit which makes the Church not only a way of life for us but a sign of salvation for the world. Our coming together signifies Christ for the community itself and for the human family not yet visibly one with us. Our coming together not only signifies Christ, of course, but makes Him effectively present to history so that through the Church Christ Himself acts and saves. Our community with each other is not only a witness to the Lord but an efficacious instrument of His dominion. Thus, formation into a lawfully structured Church is not only something we need ourselves; it is something we owe our brethren within the community to whom we make ourselves available, something we owe our brethren outside the community and for whom we become a saving sign of Christ, as well as something we owe God Himself who wishes to share His life with us in the most intimate manner possible.

We share in the life of Christ's community, then, not only out of concern for ourselves and our fellow-men, but in obedience to God's supreme and saving Will. Life itself, Christian life even more, is not only what we decide to make it; it is a recognition of our accountability in freedom, of our obedience in humility to God. A life of service to God is not bondage; it is the enlightened exercise of freedom. Without God, we become

prisoners of our own resources and captives of time and space. Without God, our eagerness for life becomes anxious and our plans for the future lead to inevitable futility. If there is no God at the beginning and at the end of life, then man lives with little meaning. He is born by accident and is destined for extinction. One day his history and his world will vanish without a trace that he was here. Without God all the human family will one day perish without ever having known why they were here, for what they were made, to what purpose they had lived so glorious and tragic a history. Without God, human life tends to dust, fatally and forever.

Christians cannot accept this gospel of despair. They ask man, heroic in the dreams he has achieved, to dare dream of collaboration with God. They invite our courageous century to attain the further courage of faith. They invite a waiting, expectant age, in all its waiting, to await even God.

Our faith in God is not an escape from life, a reprieve from responsibility, or a hope with no foundation. Our faith in God is a celebration of existence, an affirmation of indestructible meaning in every man and in man's world, a refusal to live with the fiction that human inventions or even human life can offer all the answers and all the healing man needs. A man who cannot aspire beyond the boundaries of space and the limits of time is of all creatures the most pathetic.

The Church proclaims her Gospel in the confidence that men can find a stronger faith, a mightier love, a richer life. Such faith, love and life, with the hope to which these give substance, are the Church's reason for being; they determine her nature.

IMAGES OF THE CHURCH

In seeking to describe the Church, we discover that images often convey more than definitions or precise words. There is more mystery here than categories can manage or scientific phrases exhaust. Ever since the council adjourned, Pope Paul in his occasional discourses has been using a variety of figures and symbols with which to clarify the mystery of the Church. He has reminded us that the Church is the House of God (1 Tim. 3:15), the home in which man meets God, an inner place where a family gathers, a loving community of kinsmen. It is the temple of the Spirit; it is a city, a community united and governed by a distinct social law; it is the Bride of Christ and the mother of the spiritually reborn. The Church is a pledge of great love, the light of the nations, a beacon bringing hope and charity and courage. The Church is a pilgrim pointing out the sure way to order and salvation, a school where Christ is taught, faith fostered, prayer encouraged.

Many of these images have long been familiar to us. For centuries, for example, the Church has thought of herself as the "Bride of Christ." St. Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives "just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed Himself for her to make her holy" (Eph. 5:25).

This latter image has always had great meaning for the Church's theologians. For example, Cardinal Franzelin recalls that "in marriage... two become 'one flesh,' one moral person, one belongs to the other and both become, as it were, parts of one unity in an indissoluble common life; and hence the love of one for the other is the same as the love for himself..." He appeals to St. Paul's description of the Church as Bride:

"Christ is the Proto-type forming, sanctifying, conserving, glorifying His Church... the sanctified unity of man and wife is the sacred sign and likeness by which this Proto-type is represented" (De Ecclesia).

The theme of the Church as the Bride of Christ immediately suggests another Pauline doctrine. The Apostle did not hesitate to call the Church the Body of Christ. Of all the many images of the Church, surely this is the most difficult to comprehend and yet the most eloquent. It reminds us that the Church has a sanctity, a holiness which no one of us would have imagined had not the Apostle assured us of this under God's own inspiration. We have been chosen as a body, indeed as the Body of Christ, to be the People of God.

"By communicating His Spirit mystically, Christ made His brothers, called together from all nations, the components of His own Body" (Lumen Gentium, 7). United to Him by baptism, really and truly partaking of the Body of the Lord in the sacred Eucharist, we are raised into fellowship with Him and with one another (1 Cor. 10:17). In this way, all of us are made members of Christ and through Him, members of one another (Rom. 12:15). This union we call the Mystical Body of Christ. The Church, seen as the family of God but even

more profoundly when seen as the Body of the Lord, is the doctrinal justification and the premise of the mandate for our social apostolate to the world. It insists that in a unity so intimate men are more than brothers; each is a living part of all the others. In such a community of life, beyond mere community of interest, I am no longer my brother's keeper; I am one with my brother and somehow we are both Christ.

St. Paul returns to this mystery of faith frequently (Eph. 5; 1 Cor. 12; Col. 1; Rom. 12). He himself learned in a vivid manner how intimately the Church is Christ. Bent on the persecution of the Christian community, an insignificant minority with scant sign of divine power, he was asked by the Lord: "Saul, why do you persecute Me?" (Acts 9:4). Lest Paul be mistaken, he was re-

mined: "I am Jesus and you are persecuting Me" (Acts 22:7).

Thus, the Church does not see herself as one more human institution in a world of many institutions. She does not view herself as an organization of social service at a time when there are so many such services available to us. The Church is a sacred, religious, charismatic, incarnational reality. The Church is "the complement of the Redeemer, while Christ, in a sense, attains through the Church a fullness in all things" (Mystici Corporis, 77).

Catholic spirituality, therefore, is always an ecclesial spirituality. It is a spirituality which lives the life of the Church, her worship, her tradition, her sacraments, her liturgical year. The Church seen as the Body of Jesus should inspire all our prayer and lead us to the full celebration of the Church's sacramental Liturgy. A Catholic spirituality brings us especially to the Eucharist which is, in another and real way, the Body of Christ and, therefore, the cause of our unity and its final expression.

There are few things more urgent in our present need than the development of a truly modern and deeply ecclesial spirituality. No little of the unrest in the world is due to the unrest in the hearts of men. So much of the turmoil in the lives of some Catholics since the council is due to the absence of a mature and serious spiritual life. The invitation to a more intense following of Christ is not an invitation to quietism. It calls us to labor more arduously than ever before. We must renew and reform the Church. We must enter into dialogue with each other, with other religions, with the world of unbelief. Yet all this must be done with a serenity and peace of heart which only Christ gives. If we see ourselves as the Body of Jesus, then we shall strive to be one with Christ in His consecration to the Father, one with Him in His openness to the Spirit, one with Him in His love for His brethren even unto death.

This life-giving union with Christ and His brothers should fire the Catholic with a fervent zeal for the social apostolate. Every Catholic should be eager to endure any hardship for the good of all his fellow-men, recalling the words of St. Paul: "If one of us suffer, all suffer together; if one of us is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Cor. 12:26). A Catholic becomes responsible when he realizes that his own dignity and destiny are bound up with the dignity and destiny of all men. A vocation to Catholic life is also a vocation of service to every member of the human family.

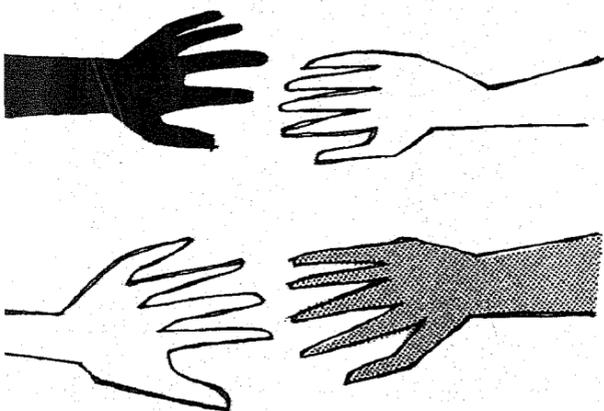
Therefore, indignity, injustice, and inhumanity at any time, in any place, toward any man should arouse in us a deep and burning concern. This concern is not accidental to the devout life, something super-added to the faith as an evidence of its presence or an adornment of its practice. It is the faith at work, the faith alive in the works without which faith is dead. It is a concern active in us when fellow men are denied human or civil rights, when there are riots in our streets, when death and devastation are rained on other men's cities, when men hunger and thirst in other lands or in our own. A Catholic must be one who truly believes that as one of us suffers, all suffer; as one of us is healed, all are healed, when one of us is denied justice, all are threatened. Every Catholic conscience must respond in word and deed to the moral imperative addressed by Christ to

nations as well as to men: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (Matt. 7:12).

We seek Christ not only in the Scriptures but in the signs of the times; not only in the sacraments but in the hearts of men; not only in sacred Tradition but in all human cultures, in the human condition itself.

Within recent years the Church has maintained the high level of its official teaching in encyclicals, in council, in synod, in papal addresses. She has borne dramatic witness to principle in Mater et Magistra, in Pacem in Terris, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, at the United Nations, and in Progressio Populorum. She has addressed herself to social justice, world peace, the political order, the underdeveloped nations. By all this, many were moved to put their hopes in her. If Catholic performance does not match Catholic promise, then truly we shall have failed. If our deeds contradict our statements, then we shall have doubly sinned. We were warned once: "It is not your encyclicals which we despise; what we despise is the neglect with which you yourselves treat them!" (Rappoport as quoted by Richard in "Le Pape et le Communisme"). This was said in indictment of the People of God in another nation and another generation, but there is no point in pretending that it cannot be applied with equal force and fury against us in America in our decade.

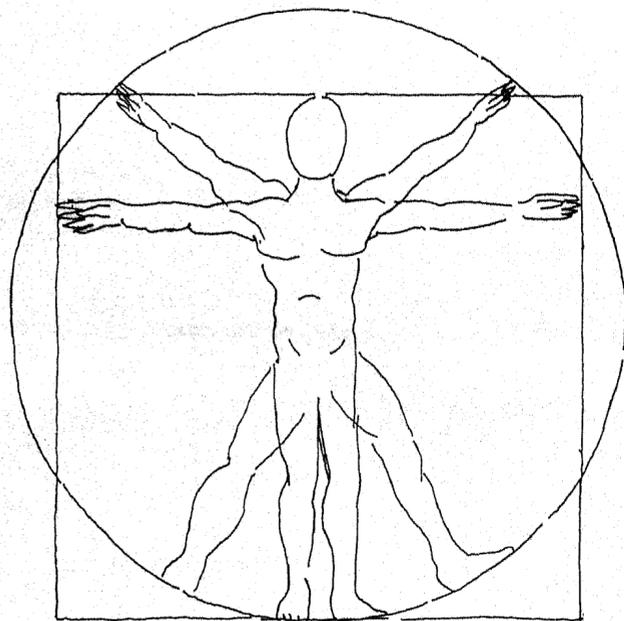
SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS



II- The Structure Of The Church

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus went about preaching the Kingdom of God. That Kingdom, present in His Church, does not hover formlessly over the cities or exist unseen among the nations of the world. The People of God, the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit, His Church is organized, structured, visible. The visibility of the Church is essential to her identity and is, indeed, a sign, in this case sacramental, of something divine. The Church is a visible sign of the mystery of God, the mystery of grace, the mystery of Christ and of the Spirit. When one realizes that the visibility of the Church is achieved through human persons and human signs, then one understands why her visibility will be inadequate to the task of signifying all that must be signified. Nonetheless, the visibility of the Church is a sign, a sacrament, an instrument through which God acts and dwells with us.

If one reflects on how detached from human history and how inconsistent with the human condition an invisible Church would be, he realizes how necessary is that visibility which Catholics have always believed to be Christ's own provision for His Church.



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This does not mean that visibility is merely the best of many possible choices. Nor does it mean that visibility is something for which we settle either for reasons of convenience or because there is nothing else available. It does not mean, finally, that visibility is something extrinsic to the Church, a ceremonial addition or a pragmatic necessity, something the Church might have done without or may yet do without, or even something which is not really the Church, as if the real Church were to be found only on an invisible level eluding and resisting all the visible structures of community.

If this latter concept were well-founded, then there would, in effect, be two Churches. One would be invisible and therein alone the reality of the Church would be accessible to us or at least to some of us; the other, visible, would somehow parallel the invisible Church, being tolerable when useful for the less enlightened, but not for those who, as in every form of Gnosticism, think of themselves as a religious elite and deprecate the need for a visible or, as they sometimes say, institutional Church.

The visibility which is Christ's intention for His Church is explained by none of the above. The visible structuring of the Church is no less the Church than her invisible reality. The sacramental Church is the spontaneous result of grace which, like love, seeks visible expression and identifies with it. The grace of Christ in which the Church is created is not imprisoned in the visible structure of the Church, but neither is it independent of her. For the Church is a sign or sacrament of grace. This means that the grace of the Lord, requiring visible presence among us (even as did He), is destined to triumph when time shall be no more and is expressed through the institutional structures of the Church and inseparable from them. This is not to say that grace, salvation, or the Kingdom of God is found only where the organized Church is seen to be at work, but it is to say that all grace seeks to become manifest not only in the Incarnation of Christ, but also in those visible elements of His Church which are not merely human but sacramental in the fullest sense of the word.

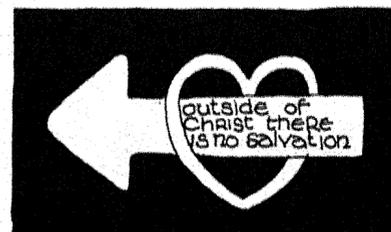
And so, in a sense even more profound than the polemic of past centuries could have supposed, we are beginning to discover new meaning in such seemingly harsh but nonetheless inescapable formulations of theological truth as "Neither is there salvation in any other (than Christ)" (Acts 4:11) "Outside the Church, there is no salvation" "Outside the Church, no salvation."

The Second Vatican Council developed broader implications of the doctrine of salvation that is God's will for His children and the consequent validity of many human societies or religious institutions which become signs of salvation for their members.

Speaking of certain non-Christians and even of some atheists, the council remarked:

"Nor is God Himself far distant from those who are any other God than the God whom we know to be Father, Son and Spirit; that there is any other Redeemer than the one Savior who died for all men in atoning love and who reigns over the human family as its only source of grace and guarantee of salvation. Nor could the council suggest that there is any other Church ultimately intended for man's salvation than that Church of Christ which 'exists in the Catholic Church' (Lumen Gentium, 8)

Pope Paul touched on the same theme in his first encyclical:



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"We see these men (i. e., atheists) full of yearning, prompted sometimes by passion and desire for the unattainable, but also by great-hearted dreams of justice and progress. In such dreams noble social aims are set up in the place of the absolute and necessary God, testifying thereby to the ineradicable need for the Divine Source and End of all things, whose transcendence and immanence it is the task of our teaching office to reveal with patience and wisdom" (Ecclesiam Suam, 108).

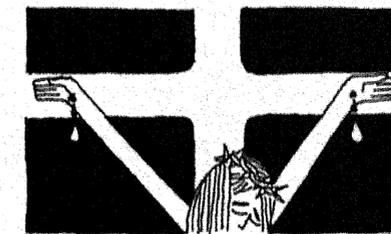
What is true of men who have not yet explicitly found God, is certainly true of those who explicitly acknowledge God. For man is saved not only in the solitude of his heart but also by means of those legitimate human, religious and ecclesial communities which, under God's mercy, not only announce but somehow minister salvation to their conscientious members.

But the council could not possibly imply that there is any other Redeemer than the one Savior who died for all men in atoning love and who reigns over the human family as its only source of grace and guarantee of salvation. Nor could the council suggest that there is any other Church ultimately intended for man's salvation than that Church of Christ which "exists in the Catholic Church" (Lumen Gentium, 8).

In any case, Christians reject the notion that there are many divergent ways to salvation, ways which by-

pass the Church and yet arrive in Christ or ways which turn aside from even Christ who is the only Way (John 14:6), and yet result in God. The formulations of the theology of salvation which we have cited are more subtle than we may have appreciated; they are not, however, any less valid today than in the past. When one has found Christ and come into the Church, he has discovered not one of many equal ways to salvation. He has become one through grace with the one Christ in whom every effort at salvation, whether His name be known or not, begins and ends, he has done this within the one Church to which all grace is oriented and through which the grace of Christ is uniquely communicated to God's children. When one comes into the visible Church, he has followed the path, along which man seeks salvation, to its destination.

In the Church of Christ, men find God; they are, however, still called to explore ever more fully His infinite mystery. In our continued search within the Church we enjoy the security of those who are at home and who know the Master of the house. Many of God's people are not yet in the Church of Christ, as He Himself reminds us. We look forward to the day when, together with all who seek God, we can continue even more closely to search out the mystery of the brotherhood by which and in which we are saved under the Fatherhood of God.



HIDDEN GRACE, VISIBLE CHURCH

As is a sacrament, the Church is the result of grace, an intensification of grace and an effective sign of grace at work among us. One who belongs to the Church through faith, hope and charity has found where God's graces converge concretely. In the visible Church, grace is given an earthly habitation and a name; in the visible Church, Christ's victorious saving presence is recognized and celebrated; in the visible Church, the invisible mystery of the Church achieves its history.

The council clarifies this point for us:

"Christ, the one mediator, established here on earth His holy Church which He unfailingly sustains as a community of faith, hope and charity, a visible organization through which He communicates truth and grace to all... As the assumed nature inseparably united to Him serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in the building up of the body. This is the one Church of Christ which in the Creed is professed as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which our Savior, after His resurrection, commissioned Peter to shepherd, and with the other Apostles to extend and rule, establishing it for all ages as 'the pillar and mainstay of truth' (1 Tim. 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized in the world as a society, exists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward Catholic unity" (Lumen Gentium, 8).

Nothing in the created universe is potentially more sacred than the human: the human person, human gestures, human words. Through these potentially most sacred of visible realities, the Church acquires her visibility. Sacred though these realities may become, they are not immune from the imperfection and sinfulness of the human condition. And so one must not be utopian in what he expects of his fellowmen even when they are called by the Spirit or sacramentally ordained for the Church of Jesus Christ. But neither may one be pessimistic about God's power and choice to sanctify us through our fellowmen and created signs.

Of all things visible by which men are drawn to God, the Church is the sum and the sign. And yet, there recurs in history the temptation to take scandal at the idea of God present among men in flesh like their own, or of a Church audible, visible, human as well as divine, and therefore inevitably imperfect. Hence some men turn away impatiently from the Church when they find her less than ideal. This turning away from the Church would be less harmful if there were any beneficial alternative to the Church. History records none.

Men may criticize the Church but no one can create the indispensable substitute for her. One who lives the life of the Church senses in his heart not only the sentiments expressed by Peter's haunting question "Lord, to whom else shall we go?" (John 6:68), but also the conviction that there is no better place to be than in the Church. "It is good for us to be here" (Mark 9:5). In other words, the Church brings into history an experience we would not wish to forego even were it possible to do so without harm to ourselves and to our brethren.

CATHOLICITY OF THE CHURCH

The Church of Christ is not only visible. It is also Catholic in every sense of the word. It provides for differences, but it has no vertical or horizontal lines of division. It has, for example, no vertical lines of division essentially separating conservatives and liberals, nor horizontal lines so dividing generations within the Church into young and old or ministries within the Church into clergy and laity as to pit these one against another. There is no "coming great Church" that is not already present in the world, having come to us across the centuries from the first Pentecost and the primitive Christian community. The Church as it yet may be, however different its style or developed its structures, will be the tree essentially present when first the mustard seed began to sprout; the Church in every stage of its maturity was present in that tiny seed.

In no essential sense can the Church be constricted within a contemporary Church, a futuristic Church, a traditionalist Church, or a Church of the past. A Church monopolized by any group or reserved to any one period or comfortable in any single culture would run counter to the pluralities recognized and demanded by Vatican II and would, in effect, become that monolithic, uncatholic institution which the partisans of each special group or tendency profess to reject.

What baffles most is the neglect of Scripture and history by some who, professing to seek or even to perfect the Church, seem disinclined to recognize what Christ intended the Church to be. There are others who measure the Church exclusively in terms of social effectiveness, of cultural conformity, or of whatever efficiency most appeals to their special interest; some speak only of relevancy to those values of the world which they cherish, or of suitability to the temper of the times. These things, many good in themselves, are hardly adequate norms for evaluating the open, eternal, transcendent, human yet divine Church of God. If one seeks confirmation of this, let him ponder how Jesus Christ would fare if He were measured only in terms of the historical effect of His preaching or by the secular relevancy or suitability of His Person to His times.

If one makes use of only such norms as these, the Church will always be "irrelevant." This must not discourage those who labor for reform or renewal. It is merely a reminder of what we are about. There are those who are frustrated because they cannot fully explain the Church or her activity in a vocabulary which the world can fully comprehend. Forgetting that today, as always, both Christ and His Church remain foolishness for some, a stumbling block to others (1 Cor. 1:23).

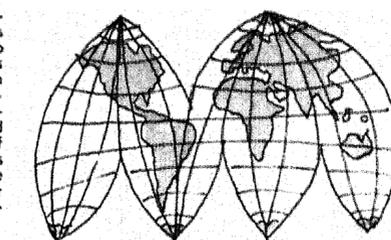
The problem which confronts us, then, is not whether there should be a Church. If there were none, believers would inevitably bring one into being by their desire to converse with one another about the common concerns of the devout, to worship the God awareness of whom brings them together in prayer. Sharing creates community; shared religious beliefs create religious communities which, however spiritual, speedily become structured and visible part of history. The problem is the kind of Church there must be, especially since God has sent His only Son to live with us and to make known to us the Mystery of our salvation and the means He intended for its accomplishment. What we must seek is a careful understanding of the type of Church the Lord provided.

We speak in this chapter of but one feature of the Church's visibility, namely, the structures by which the Church is constituted and those by which it is ordered. No one pretends, least of all we who are bishops, that these latter institutions are the most important, though their validity is fundamental and essential. Everyone knows that the structures and forms involved in the Church's work of sanctification, especially the sacraments, are more important (more "noble" our traditional philosophers might have said) than the structures of juridical authority, even as the order of love takes precedence over the order of law, though by no means contradicting it.

So too the structures for teaching the faith are doubtless more important in the total work of the Church than are those of governing, though faith and order will often depend on how well the work of governing facilitates the work of teaching and implements the work of sanctifying. A contemporary theologian has observed in this connection:

"The order of jurisdiction, necessary and of divine origin though it be, is not the noblest nor most divine thing in the Church. All its greatness is derived from its purpose which is to be the servant of Love. Did not our Lord Himself say that He had come to serve? The Church is greater and nobler than what exists for her sake. The papacy is for the Church, not vice versa. It is therefore true that the Pope is not a master but a servant, and that the Church, absolutely speaking, is more excellent and nobler than he, although from the standpoint of jurisdiction, he is her head" (Charles Journé: "The Church of the Word Incarnate").

All these offices in the Church and all the structures through which they operate are services, but there is a hierarchy among them, a hierarchy of worth and a hierarchy of relative proximity to the heart of the matter, which is always salvation.





1- The Laity

The spirit of the times suggests that we begin our discussion of the structured Church with the laity. A major task of the layman in the present chapter of Church history is the discovery of his own identity and vocation in the Church of Christ. Somewhere between the prevailing, but far from universal, silence of the past and the occasionally strident confusion of the present must be heard the authentic voice of the layman.

The laity is a sacramental structure in the Church. The Church is realized, though not completely, in the Christian layman. From his baptism in Christ to his confirmation anointing in the Spirit, from his communion with Christ and the Church in the Eucharist to his mirroring forth of the Church in the sign of his marriage or other vocations to hallow the world, the layman is part of everything meant by discipleship in Christ.

Hence the layman is not to be defined negatively as if he were merely a person not ordained to Holy Orders or not called to religious life under vows. He is a positive part of the Church and a force in her life and action; he is a consecrated person, called to participate in the general priestly work of Christ and His Church. He therefore shares in the prophetic gifts and charismatic endowments with which the Spirit has enriched the Church.

Cardinal Suhard, anticipating a generation ago the charter which Vatican Council II has given to the Christian laity, wrote:

"Such is the irreplaceable mission of the laity. They have their own witness to bear, their specific problems to solve and reforms to be undertaken, all on their own responsibility. By giving them a free hand, the Church is not making the best of a bad job and using them as substitutes until such times as she has reliable priests to

take over the direction of the temporal order. On the contrary, she fully intends, without any ulterior motive, to confide to the laity the full responsibility for human society" ("Priests among Men").

It is for these reasons that without the laity there is no Church. When the layman, understood as the Church intends, is silent, we all suffer and God's work remains only partly done; when the layman is passive, we are all weakened; if he leaves us we are all diminished. Frequently, the layman is the only means by which the secular world knows there is a Church or profits from the fact. "Even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world" (Lumen Gentium, 35). "Guided by a Christian conscience, the layman realizes that 'there is no human activity which can be withdrawn from God's dominion' (Lumen Gentium, 36).

The laity, however, like any part of the structured Church, is not a law unto itself, any more than is the hierarchy. The layman is not only responsible to Christ as revealed to us in Scripture and Tradition, but also to all those structures in the Church which are essential to the composition of the organized but organic Christian community. The fact that the hierarchical and lay structures are distinct, in the very nature of the constitution of the Church, and have their respective proper functions does not destroy the unity of the Church nor diminish the mutuality of the different gifts and ministries within the Church; quite the contrary, these differences are the condition of the unity in the midst of diversity which makes possible the accomplishment by His Church of the manifold works of Christ.

In any consultation of the laity concerning the faith, the layman's ability to speak and his title to be

heeded depend, to an extent, upon his openness to Christ and to the whole community, which means to the grace of his own calling. Let us explain. Those who hold an office of apostolic authority in the Church have a right to be heard when they speak in legitimate exercise of that office. This does not exonerate them from the obligation of witnessing Christ to the community by the personal example of their lives as well as by the official exercise of their office. They would still have to be heard, nevertheless, when they spoke authentically even if, sadly, their personal lives did not reflect their own teaching. "The scribes and the Pharisees occupy the chair of Moses. You must, therefore, do what they tell you and listen to what they say" (Matt. 23:1-3). These words of our Lord are all the more pertinent since Jesus had just warned that those in authority of whom He spoke "do not practice what they preach." Things will doubtless be otherwise in His Kingdom, but not so different that authority may be discounted or the possibility of scandal eliminated. It was especially to the disciples that Jesus confided:

"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? So he called a little child to him and set the child in front of them. Then he said . . . 'the one who makes himself as little as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'" (Matt. 18:1-4).

It was especially to the Apostles that Jesus cautioned after He washed their feet:

"Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example . . ." (John 13:13-15).

The layman has his right to speak and to be heard in virtue of his status in the Church. Given the nature of the Church, his title to be heeded on matters of faith and morals depends not upon his ability to teach with apostolic authority but upon his ability to witness the will of Christ, the judgment of the Gospel or the genuine good of the community. The voice of the Spirit is the more clearly heard when those in authority exercise the charism of their office in appropriate consultation with the laity. Scripture and Tradition assure us, however, that the layman never speaks to and for the community in the same way as must those who possess apostolic authority. No one would maintain, for example, that an individual layman or all the laity together should be heard by the Christian community in the same way that the Pope in his office of Chief Shepherd, or the College of Bishops are to be heard.

The voice of the laity must echo the authentic voice of Christ to the whole community which is heard in the community at large and therefore never in isolation from those who hold apostolic office. "Anyone who listens to you, listens to me" (Luke 10:16) was not spoken to any one of the faithful but to the Church as Christ intended it. Hence, the layman who loses the sense of community loses his ability to echo Christ. Likewise, those in apostolic office who violate the limits of their authority imperil the sense of community and diminish their effectiveness in echoing Christ authentically.

The man held responsible by Christ because he would not hear the Church (cf. Matt. 18:15-17) was not accused of neglecting selected voices, or even the voice of the majority, but that of the Church as Christ constituted her. In no case does the Church listen to the voice of any individual as such for the statement of the faith of the community. An individual who does not reflect the spirit of the Church or respect its structure speaks in a manner that the community cannot interpret. This is true of Pope, bishop, priest or layman, in each case with careful regard to the formalities of their respective roles. When an individual is heard, he is heard as an individual in the community and thus not as an individual as such. He is an individual who has taken his place and found himself in the context of a wider reality, namely, the community of Christ.

Even when the Church speaks officially, she relies on the continuing work of the faithful to clarify further what has been taught and to apply concretely the program specified in ecclesiastical pronouncements.

"While the **definition** of the Faith has been confided to the successors of the Apostles in union with the successor of St. Peter, or to the Pope speaking in their name, the **development** of revelation has been confided to all who have been baptized in Jesus Christ" (Jean Guittou: "The Church and the Laity").

With the layman's increasing voice in the life of the developing Church comes a graver responsibility. The Church does not listen, as we have just said, to any individual as such. She listens in each voice for the echo of the ages with their accumulated wisdom and for the voice of eternity with its ultimate judgment. With a subtle discernment, she recognizes the voice of the person, be he priest or layman, whose accent is unmistakably Catholic and whose motive is the genuine good of the brethren, neither of these being divorced from the integrity of the faith. Better than Isaac, she knows how to distinguish the voice of Esau from that of Jacob when the inheritance of the Christian people, a matter of faith and morals, is at issue (Gen. 27:22).

Thus there is never sound reason to believe that the voice of the layman concerning the faith is heard in public-opinion polls or any mere counting of hands. Rather, the faith of the Church is heard in the judgment of the deeply committed Catholic who witnesses to the

community the experience of integral Christian living. It is not how many say something which is significant for the Church, but **who it is** who is speaking and what manner of faith is his. Numbers count only if those who comprise the total really know. Sometimes, as when the Church was threatened with Arianism, the laity were articulate on the side of those who know and who speak accurately the voice of Tradition. Sometimes, as when the Church verged on the brink of conciliarism, it is the voice of Peter who confirms his uncertain brothers in the episcopate. Sometimes, as in the Second Vatican Council, Pope and laity listen with special care to the voice of the bishops. This is not to say that the Church moves forward disregarding Pope, bishops, priests or laity. It is to say that God's Providence provides for special moments and occasions when each structure in the Church is called upon to aid the others without subverting that order for the Church which is Christ's disposition and the Spirit's gift to the community.

It is imperative, however, to add that we welcome, not avoid the consultation of the laity in every manner consistent with the mission of the Church, the promptings of the Spirit, and the needs of the community of faith. Thus it is not rhetorical concession to the mood of the hour, but an exercise of the pastoral office we share with Pope St. Leo which impels us to say to the laity of our times what he said to those of his day: "Recognize, O Christian, your dignity!"

It was our intent in the council to salute that dignity in the chapter on the laity in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church and in the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity. It is our hope that these documents will be studied in depth and implemented in detail by all the laity who bring the gift of their graces to the structures, permanent and contingent, present and future, of the Church they love no less than do we.

Our present efforts at restructuring procedures in the Church within the national and diocesan communities depend in great measure on the seriousness with which study is undertaken and the disposition to implement it on the part of the laity.

The sacred calling of the layman was summed up by the council:

"The supreme and eternal Priest, Christ Jesus, since He wills to continue His witness and service also through the laity, vivifies them in the Spirit and increasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work. For besides intimately linking them to His life and His mission, He also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men" (Lumen Gentium, 34).

We have had these words in mind when providing for liturgical renewal in our nation. We shall return to other aspects of the vocation of the laity in the future statements and programs as, in proper fashion, there develop new forms for the apostolate of the laity among us, particularly in the pastoral councils for the establishment of which we are presently preparing norms. Meanwhile, Cardinal Suhard's appeal for the unity of the Church in his country is the theme underlying our respective and mutual parts in the new Pentecost of the Church in America:

"We shall have to create among all men that fraternal union which alone can assure the victory of the Gospel: by the same token we must bring an end to rivalries between classes, groups, vested interests, and egoisms, which so often destroy all harmony and paralyze our efforts. . . . The success of the apostolic effort, which will influence the salvation of the country, depends in a large part on the answer you give to the urgent appeal which we address to you" (Cardinal Suhard: "The Parish Community").

THE LAYMAN'S WITNESS

"Without the laity there is no Church"

2- The Priesthood



In the manifold sacerdotal offices committed by Christ to His Church, priests, from earliest times, have been the most proximate and intimate collaborators of the bishops. They remain so still. By the very nature of the Church in its essence and its structure they must always be so.

"The priest... enters the scene, sent by God... to fulfill the anguished need of men... he is present in the Church always; he is, with the Holy Spirit, the enduring source of her permanence and of her life" (Cardinal Suhard: "Priests among Men").

The Second Vatican Council left no doubt that the "renewal of the whole Church depends in large measure on... priests" (Optatum Totius, Preface). Hence the reasons why renewal of some aspects of priestly life is so important.

"The pastoral and human circumstances of the priesthood have in very many instances been thoroughly changed (Presbyterorum Ordinis, Preface). With this in mind, Pope Paul spoke to the pastors and Lenten preachers of Rome about an "oppressing doubt about the value of one's own vocation and ministry" which can assail even the best of priests (Feb. 21, 1966).

Confusion about one's role and crisis in identity are not peculiar to modern-day priests. Many sensitive Chris-

tians in their various vocations of marriage or religious life, the professions or public life, find themselves in these troubled times frequently overwhelmed, quite as much as any priest, by the sense of inadequacy in the face of mounting pressures, questioned values and out-moded methods. The Holy Father recognized the same problem which the Council had seen as a "danger," namely, that priests today can easily become "depressed in spirit" unless, of course, the Spirit Himself constantly renews them.

It may not be too much to say that countless priests today dwell in the desert of their temptations. Like their Master, they are tempted to become ministers of the temporal city of man, forsaking their consecration as ministers of Redemption and neglecting Scripture's mandate that they "must worship the Lord their God, and serve Him alone" (Matt. 4:10).

How can we, the elder brothers of all men in the priesthood, be unaware of the suffering or the problems that priests endure? How can we ignore situations which we too have known and still know? It is not likely that we would dismiss as unfounded or unreal difficulties of which we have familiarity not only because we daily experience them in ourselves but also because we see them in those whom, because they are our brother priests, we best know and most love.

RELATIONS OF PRIESTS TO RENEWAL

Let us first agree, priests or, for that matter, all Christians, that no benefits of the affluent society or the age of technology can remove the cross and its redeeming burden from the shoulders of any who bear the name of Christ, especially when they are ordained ministers of Christ as we priests are called to be. Conversely, the joy of the priesthood is and must forever be different from any joy which this world alone or the human condition as such can instill.

This said, let us begin candidly. We need every brother priest who is truly a priest. More humanity needs him. More still the Church of Christ needs not merely the priesthood but everyone who qualifies to accept its burdens, dispense its mysteries, achieve its works. Most of all Christ needs the priest so much that "when he dies (the priest) can say to his Lord: 'I am an unprofitable servant.' But he can also add 'You made me a priest, Lord! It was your idea, after all. It was you who pretended that you needed me'" (Abbe Michonneau: "My Father's Business").

When a priest falters, the whole Church trembles. When a priest is troubled in heart, the tranquility of all God's People is threatened. Indeed, the world itself is not yet so sophisticated that it does not still take scandal, whatever it may pretend, when a priest is derelict. Everyone knows this, so why should we keep silent about it? However a priest may think of himself as being exactly like everyone else, the world does not so see him. Certainly the believer does not and neither does Christ, as He Himself explicitly said, above all the night before He died: "They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world" (John 17:16). "I shall not call you servants any more, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends... You did not choose me, no, I chose you" (John 15: 14-16).

The priest bears within him not only the consecration received through us bishops but the hopes of all the redeemed for the future.

Let us be even more candid. The ministry which we as bishops share with our brother-priests becomes bearable and fruitful in the degree of our mutual fidelity, our faithfulness to priests, their loyalty to us. If it be true, as it is, that because we are men we know the burdens of priests, it is also true that because they are priests they know the special burdens which trouble us. In times of greatest stress, next only to the presence of the Paraclete, it is the solidarity of priests, compactly closed around us, their understanding, their unselfish devotion, their persevering work, the laughter and the tears they and we share, which blend with all the resources of nature and grace, to enable us the better to perform every priestly function that Christ committed to the college of His apostles in communion with Peter. This priestly office we share with all the priests in union with us.

Even were it possible for priests to live out their lives in isolation from us, neither we nor they would wish this. The reasons why this is impossible are far from being merely juridical and moral; they are doctrinal and ontological. They are reasons rooted in the very nature of the priesthood as Christ has shared with us the priesthood in which He Himself was constituted.

"The only means of transmitting the Gospel is to have received it by 'tradition.' The priest is not sent to improvise his preaching of the Good News; he is sent by the Church, and more precisely, by the bishop. For 'the Church is in the Bishop' (St. Cyprian, Ep. 69:8). He is not merely the head who ordains, controls and reprimands. He is at once the symbol and the source of unity and life. 'Let priests do nothing without the bishop's approval,

for it is to him that the Lord's people have been committed' (Canon Apost. 39:2). This is fundamental. If he is cut off from the bishop, the priest will be cut off from the Mystical Body, 'like the branch from the Vine'... With all this in mind, no one can say that priestly 'obedience' is a secondary virtue. It does even more than make the priest accessible: it helps him, with God's grace, to perpetuate the Church and thus to save the world" (Cardinal Suhard: "Priests among Men").

Thus the priesthood we share together is not only something priests have received through us. It is also something by which we and they are bound together and through which we are mutually enriched. Our episcopacy takes on new meaning and new value in the priesthood of the men we ordain. Through them, our priesthood is increased not only in the number of Christians we reach but in the intensity of grace that their ministry and holiness bestows upon us in the communion of saints and the fraternity of the priesthood. In them we behold not only one of the most sublime expressions of our priesthood but also our brothers by whom we and our churches are made strong: a brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city (Prov. 18:19).

In his encyclical on priestly celibacy, Pope Paul spoke with personal love as well as official concern about those who have tragically abandoned their priestly witness. He saw in their leaving not only individual disasters, the dimensions of which they themselves well know, but a catastrophe for the Church at large. No new appraisal of the sacred and the secular, no sympathy born of deeper insights into human frailty or human needs, alters the fact that Christian peoples generally, dedicated religious and seminarians eager to grow in the image of Christ, are scandalized by the derelict priest and threatened in the pursuit of their own sacred destinies.

CRISIS IN PRESENT PRIESTLY LIFE

Some priests, whose vocation it remains to mirror Christ, have not only lost their own vision but have sought to shatter the ideals of others and made a public display of their defects. We urge such priests, motivated by their personal need of repentance as well as by a public obligation of example, speedily to reconcile themselves, as priests have done for centuries, with the Christ whose priesthood all unworthily, even in the case of saints, we sinners bear. To the priests of the 20th century no less than to His contemporary disciples, Christ speaks a language that is diminished in its gravity by no findings of psychology, sociology or theology:

"Anyone who is a scandal to bring down one of these little ones who have faith in Me would be better drowned in the depths of the sea with a great millstone round his neck. Alas for the world that there should be such scandals. Scandals indeed there must be but alas for the man who provides them!" (Matt. 18:6-7).

On the other hand, in manner at once impressive and unique, the priest, every priest, is a sign of fidelity to all the People of God: he proclaims God's faithfulness in raising up the priests He promised and he proclaims the Church's faithfulness in serving God and leading men to Him.

Are we and our people to believe that a significant number of priests have lost the vision that gives meaning to their vocation? Even if there are only a few who waver, why has this come about?

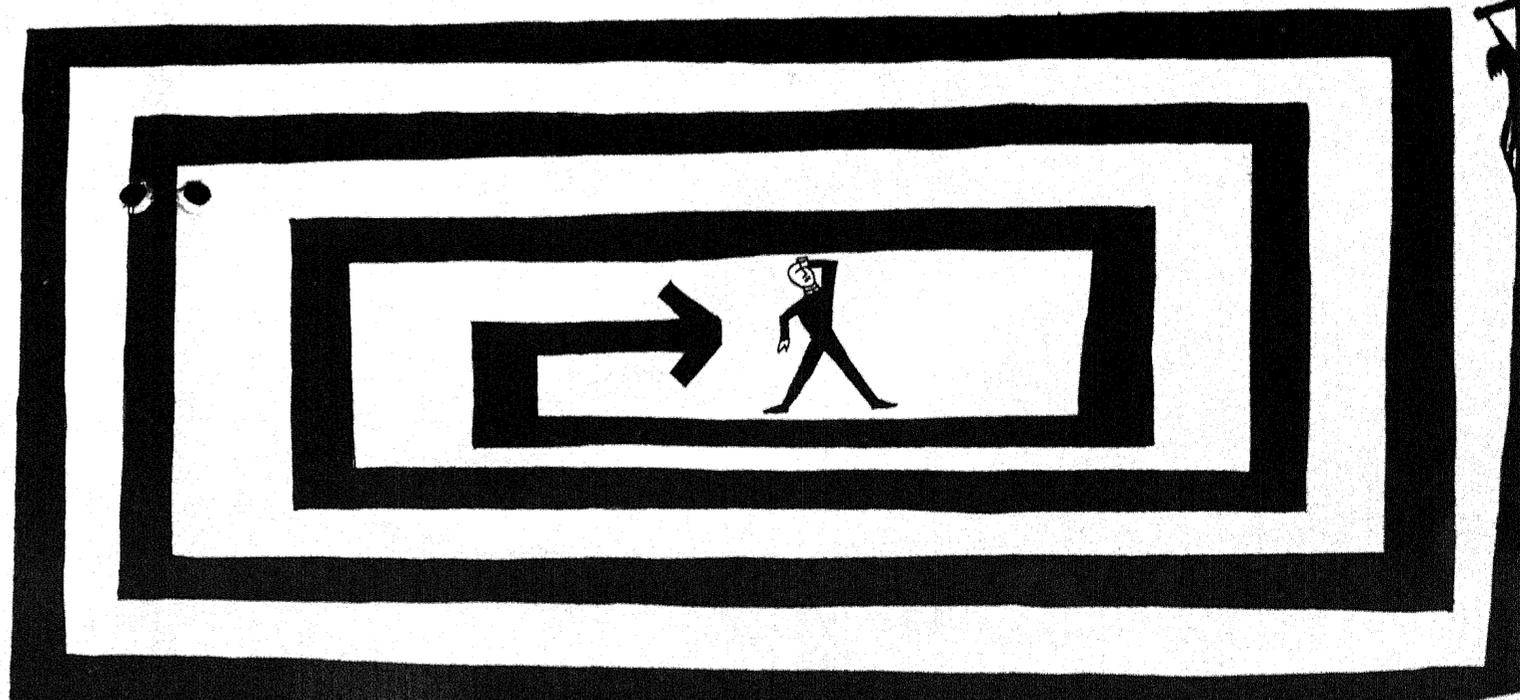
To some extent we bishops may be responsible. To some extent the laity may be responsible. It still remains true, however, that, as in any other collapses of ideals

or failures of commitment, the individuals involved, in this case priests, have their plain personal responsibility. However, in this sad problem we have no need for accusers or victims. There is too much sorrow, too much guilt among all of us for that.

It is not the Christian vocation to canonize the human condition as such or to lament over it. It is our vocation to rise above it where it drags us down; to transform it where it might trap others; to ennoble it by the operation, through our agency, of that Spirit who continually refreshes the Church and renews the face of the earth. In all this Pope Paul has reminded us, his brother bishops, in the encyclical on priestly celibacy, that we "owe the best part of our hearts and pastoral care to priests and to the young men preparing to be priests" (Sacerdotalis Caelibatus, 92).

It is the Vicar of Christ, the bishop in whom we Catholics see an expression of the unity of the Church, who instructs us 20th-century bishops:

"It is your fraternal and kindly presence and deeds that must fill up in advance the human loneliness of the priest, which is so often the cause of his discouragement and temptations. Before being the superiors and judges of your priests, be their teachers, fathers, friends, their good and kind brothers, always ready to understand, to sympathize, and to help. In every possible way, encourage your priests to be your personal friends and to be very open with you. This will not weaken the relationship of juridical obedience; rather it will transform it into pastoral love so that they will obey more willingly, sincerely and securely" (Sacerdotalis Caelibatus, 93).



On the pastoral level, there are three especially grave problems which we see confronting priests.

The first of these is sometimes said to be disturbing doubt concerning the worth of their lives. It is painful when one, for whatever reason, is faced with doubt concerning the meaning of the career he has chosen. This is a present pain for countless parents, married couples, religious and persons following other special vocations; it must especially afflict, nowadays, many in the armed forces. In the case of the priest assailed by such misgiving there are probably two reasons why his anxiety may today be so acute. One is the sudden review of doctrine and discipline occasioned by the council. This may have left some priests, who are teachers and shepherds of their communities, somehow less secure in their message and with themselves. Here time and the patience to arrive at understanding through study and priestly experience will help. The priest who surmounts the problems and redeems the promises of aggiornamento will find that Church doctrine has been enriched thereby and the service of the Church made more meaningful. He discovers, moreover, that the priest is needed today more than ever before, more needed liturgically in the worship of the people he serves, more needed apostolically in the market place, more needed intellectually in the forum and on the campus, more needed prophetically in the Church and in the world. In every case (and here is the point) he is more, not less needed.

We must all, the entire hierarchy of bishops and priests, address ourselves to the pressing questions of authority, structures, communication, education and increased demands upon priestly life. But when we do, before we do, and after we do, the essential need which remains and controls all else is the need for the priesthood itself and for every priest capable of the generosity that is the heart of the priesthood.

A second reason why misgiving among some priests may be acute in an age of automation is perhaps the prevailing norms by which people generally appear to measure the worth and meaning of modern lives. The priestly ministry cannot be made meaningful in terms of the technological categories we tend to prize here in the United States. Nor can the priesthood be made relevant in terms of any purely humanistic categories such as are widely exalted in Western civilization. Christ's acceptance of the crucifixion, for example, was hardly a "humanistic" approach to the problem of the human condition. Moreover, the Church, speaking for Christ, often

makes demands which conflict with purely humanistic norms and contradict merely terrestrial humanism. Among these demands we might include religious poverty and chastity, celibacy and obedience, penance and even worship itself. All these, viewed in the positive premises of the renunciations they require, serve not to diminish the person but to help accomplish in him freedom and resurrection into new life.

Priests understand that the meaning and worth of their priesthood can never be adequately, least of all easily explained except by the principles which justify the Church herself. The priest, for example, is not the deputy of the world in the Presence of God, as some would have it. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ. The power and glory of God abide in him in a special manner. He is not only the bearer of peace to men of good will but sometimes the minister of disquietude and the sign of contradiction to a world disposed and frequently eager to live by lesser, even sinful values.

The meaning of the priesthood is known to the man of faith, to the disciple of Christ, to the man who lives by the Spirit. Such a man knows that the priesthood is indispensable to the worship of the God revealed by Jesus Christ and to the bringing of salvation to a world redeemed by Him. This priesthood not only sanctifies the world; it also humanizes society as a result of its relation to the redemption of man and the glory of God. We must, however, avoid two misconceptions about the "humanizing" mission of the priesthood. One is the fiction that the priesthood must be seen only in terms of secular man. The other is the error which alleges that only the Church can humanize. The former, through its negations of the sacred, leads to a humanism which does not ultimately humanize; the latter, through its neglect of the secular, leads to the unrealities of the heresy of angelism.

In preparing ourselves to function more effectively in the secular society, in our efforts to be relevant to its problems and intelligible to its mentality, we have many lessons to learn but none more essential than the wisdom of the saints. It remains God's will for His priests that they be saints: it is still a primary function of the priesthood to lead God's people to holiness by the power of God's grace. The Church rightly calls herself the communion of the saints even though she be, in God's mercy and for our sake, the Church of sinners. All this is why the entire Church of God, bishops, priests and laity, is harmed if the spiritual dimensions of the priesthood are neglected.

1-RELEVANCE



A second problem which confronts priests is loneliness. This problem is not peculiar to the priesthood. Any loneliness in the priest can hardly be seen as unique to his vocation. No one knows better than the priest the loneliness of the aged, the imprisoned, those unmarried despite their preference, the exiled, the abandoned, the dedicated who have renounced consolation to pursue art, science or the service of neighbor.

However, mindful precisely of priests, the council speaks of the "bitter loneliness," and even of the "seeming sterility of the past labors" which priests may sometimes experience. Pope Paul also cautions that "loneliness will weigh heavily on the priest" (*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 59). But it is well to keep certain realities in mind when there is consideration of the loneliness involved in the human condition; even more, it is bound up with the vocation of the Christian, always a pilgrim and stranger on the face of the earth. We are not yet, in the fullest sense of the word, "home"; we have not here a lasting dwelling-place and ours is the unrest of those who seek a city. Nor do we yet so completely experience the effects of redemption that estrangement from God, from one another, and even from our true selves is no longer to be feared.

Married or single, religious or lay, priest or people, all must come to terms with loneliness. Often the sustaining of loneliness results in human and Christian maturity, making us aware of our limitations and of our need for one another. "Christ, too, in the most tragic hours of His life was alone—abandoned by the very ones He had chosen as . . . witnesses . . . and companions . . . and whom He had loved unto the end" (*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 59).

All priests should be involved in the ministry of healing their brother priests. Priests ought to meet frequently together, welcoming opportunities for the social and other gatherings which give mutual support to one another. All superiors, pastors of parishes especially have a grave responsibility to see to it that priests are encouraged to perform in maximum freedom all the truly priestly functions of their vocation. Younger priests should see in those whom they assist not only someone in authority but a brother priest who has known in his lifetime his own share of sorrow and frustration. Priestly charity is not the same as mere friendliness; it is even more than fraternity as this relationship is usually understood; it is expressed most fully in moments and under circumstances when charity is sorely tried and compassion, in the root sense of the word, becomes the compelling need.

These are especially trying times in the priesthood, times of divergent opinions about some of the functions

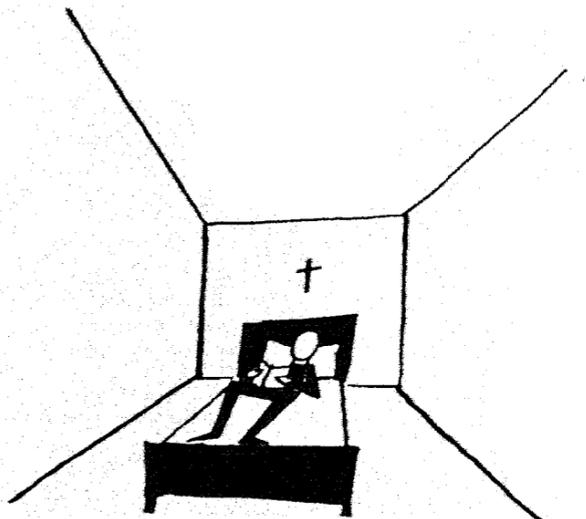
of the priesthood, about the relation of the Church to specific aspects of society, about the most apt theology for post-conciliar life. While we are working out together whatever new consensus may be indicated on these and like pastoral problems, priestly charity and perspectives are more necessary than ever. In trying times, priests have an opportunity to draw closely together in friendship and to render heroic service to one another and to the Church. Priests must never become so involved in their personal pursuits, even in serving their people and others, that they no longer notice their brother priests whose needs may be deeper than their ability to express them. Priests often require special support because they bear in their hearts not only the cares of their own lives but the sufferings of their people and no small part of the solicitude of the Church herself.

No mature priest, indeed no adult Christian, will suppose that life is or ought to be problem-free. We may reduce conflict by reform and ease tension by understanding, but we shall never eliminate anguish from life. We priests are called to be the first to perceive the true horizon of the human condition, to recognize the essential limitations of creation, to be conscious of the universal effects of sin and of the pilgrim character of human history. Though we labor with all our hearts to heal, we realize that, although he succeeds in eliminating some problems from life, man remains a creature who must always live with contradiction, frustration, even heart-break.

"And if hostility, lack of confidence and the indifference of his fellow-men make his solitude quite painful, (a priest) will thus be able to share, with dramatic charity the very experience of Christ, as an apostle who is not above him, by whom he has been sent . . ." (*Sacerdotalis Caelibatus*, 59).

In an age perhaps overly given to introspection, personal problems are intensified by the disposition to concentrate on them. A priest who loses himself in his apostolate, serving God's people, particularly the poor and the neglected, in imitation of his Master will find that much of his loneliness disappears. The loneliness which remains is a small price to pay for a vocation whose sacredness and consolations can hardly be exaggerated. In spite of any problems of the priesthood, there is no greater joy than that which accompanies the work of the dedicated priest, no calling more literally divine than his. In moments of isolation, priests, no matter how great their fears, will recall the words which sustained Christ in His greater loneliness: "I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (John 16:32).

2-LONELINESS



3-APARTNESS

A further problem which may obscure the reality and function of the priesthood arises from a current temptation of priest and people alike to underestimate the consecration of Holy Orders. The liturgical and sacramental sacrifice which is at the heart of the Christian life presupposes a liturgical and sacramental priesthood. An essential office of the ordained priesthood is the formation of Christian community. This the priest accomplishes by the celebration of the sacraments, the mandated preaching of the Word, and by that special presence of a priest in the midst of God's People as a result of which community is formed. The ordained priesthood expresses in its own unique way the priestly aims and actions of that Body, which, so to speak, keeps Christ at work in the world. The ordained priest depends for his ordination on the priesthood of the bishop; the priesthood of the laity depends upon ordained priests for its increase and its perfection in the sacraments, primarily, of course, in the Eucharist.

It is always a symptom that Christian concepts and norms have become confused when sacramental distinctions are seen as class differences or interpreted in merely sociological or cultural terms. Not less destructive of a sound understanding of the priest's vocation is the attitude toward priestly "apartness" as a result of which clergy or laity become unwilling to acknowledge the priest as a man definitively set apart among men, even though he is and is bound to remain one with his fellowmen.

There is an essential difference between priest and people no matter how much the heart of the priest identifies with his people. In a dramatic and altogether decisive manner, the ordained priest is a man of the Church; he becomes the sign of the Church as no other Christian does, he gives expression in his priesthood to special ministries of Jesus Christ, the sole High Priest. His ultimate responsibility is not alone to his people, great though his duties to them, nor is it to himself nor to any priestly caste: his responsibility is to God, by whom he has been called, as Aaron was, to a mission apart

from that of the unordained and yet within the community of God's people, a mission to which he is called and ordered by those appointed by God to rule His Church.

Truth itself as well as pastoral solicitude will require a priest, in encouraging the laity in an appreciation of their vocation, not to do so at the price of destroying confidence in his own priesthood. The historic development in the council of the doctrine of the priesthood of the laity should prove a blessing to all the Church; the fruits of that blessing could be diminished, even lost, if the heightened awareness of the general priesthood in the Church lowered, even momentarily, a true appreciation of the necessary roles of the particular vocation special to the priest called apart and ordained for men in the things that pertain to God.

Many of us think we see an unfortunate eclipse of the clear and separate status of ordained priesthood; this is not good for priests nor for the laity, nor for the Church nor for the world that the Church serves through its diversity of ministries.

Jean Guilton, in his moving dialogues with Pope Paul, comments on this problem, especially in terms of its relation to those aspects of contemporary culture which call into question not only celibacy but the priesthood, indeed the whole Christian message. Both the Holy Father and the lay philosopher found the reflections of Henri Bergson instructive concerning the salutary witness of priestly celibacy, a witness which in its positive values and affirmations goes far beyond sexual renunciations. Even in its negative aspects, such a witness brings prophetic judgment and redemptive healing to a civilization Bergson describes as already "aphrodisiac" in so much of its imagery and emphasis.

Hence the necessity, both the layman and the Pope agreed, for the development of a new attitude toward priestly spirituality. If the human and pastoral circumstances of the priesthood have changed, attitudes towards priestly spirituality have been influenced by these changes. A more contemporary spirituality would depend increas-

ingly upon dogmatic and ascetical theology, sciences which have a strong kinship with each other, rather than on canonical or sociological studies alone. To this task we invite the best of our theologians and spiritual directors.

Whatever emphasizes the intimate brotherhood of priests, of which the council speaks, and the tie to their bishop, as a result of which "they make him present in a certain sense in the individual local congregations and take upon themselves, as far as they are able, his duties and the burden of his care" (Lumen Gentium, 28), gives firm foundation to the needed theology of the priesthood and direction to a new priestly spirituality. We commend to priests in parishes, seminaries and religious communities the recommendations of the recent "Instruction on Eucharistic Worship" (May 25, 1967) with respect to the concelebrated Mass and a fresh appreciation of the common life to be shared by priests in rectories and religious houses; these should be made truly homelike by the fraternal spirit derived from Christ Himself who dwells with them.

Pointedly and urgently, Pope Paul calls upon the laity to "feel responsible for the virtue of those of their brothers who have undertaken the mission of serving them in the priesthood for the salvation of their souls" (Sacerdotalis Caelibatus, 96).

We understand something of the premises to this pointed admonition, for such it is, of the Holy Father. One consideration was suggested by Rosmini well over a century ago: the people of God produce their clergy and their clergy are therefore a reflection of the spiritual excellence expected by the people from whom they come. Furthermore, nothing would better manifest the readiness of the laity to assume their mature place in the life of the Church and warrant the confidence that the Church will profit from consultation of their minds and hearts than the evidence that they recognize the special reasons for priestly virtue and their own responsibility toward the development of that virtue in word and deed.

Though we have spoken directly of the priesthood, many of the things we have said apply with equal validity to religious. Without the public witness to the counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience which religious vow, without their generous example of community life, the Church would be sorely impoverished. The religious life should serve constantly to remind us of what the Church is. Religious manifest to us the beauty and the discipline harmonized in the Christian life, a beauty that does not neglect the sinful human condition nor the reality of death, yet a discipline which is never so severe that it overlooks the redeemed status of the human condition or the inevitability of resurrection. Religious likewise give us a striking sign of the eschatological dimension of the Church; they remind us of the pilgrim road we all travel and of the values by which we shall live in the Promised Land.

The very presence of religious in the world is a consolation. It is also a salutary rebuke to any of us who may be tempted to make our Christian vocation an easy or a worldly endeavor. The presence among us of religious is a preaching of the Gospel to the laity and the priesthood alike; in our country this preaching has been notably confirmed by the titanic work of teaching, hospital service, care of other people's children, mercy to the aged and pioneering in social work accomplished by Catholic Sisters and Brothers who, usually anonymous and too often unthanked, have borne a professional as well as religious witness of unparalleled heroism, holiness and achievement.

We have devoted much of this pastoral letter to priests. The emphasis is required by the problems we face. The whole People of God depends upon priests and religious in a unique way, in the name of God's People we wish to tell priests how much they are needed. As bishops we commend to the American people and to the Church Universal the qualities of the priests and religious of our country, without whom both the United States and the Church of Jesus would be spiritually by far the poorer.

We are painfully aware of the shortcomings of some among us, the excesses of a few. There is neither possibility of concealing these nor point to apology for them. But we can and do ask that people, beginning with people within the Church, be more mindful of our saints, notably the saints in the making among our priests. The Church never promised to be without sinners and she is the last to repudiate them: it was promised that she would give the world many and great saints. In this time of adjustment and self-scrutiny, God is faithful to His promise to raise up in our midst the saints He has never denied us. Future generations may yet envy us the opportunities for sanctity we had and the number of saints God gave us, especially among those American priests and religious who do far more good than they realize, even if it be less than, in their zeal, they intend.

SPECIAL WITNESS OF THE RELIGIOUS



3- The Episcopacy

Every community must have a self-awareness if it hopes to function effectively. The Church of Christ is no exception. Hence, the need to focus attention on the nature and ministry of the episcopacy in the Church now that we have considered the laity and the priesthood

We may begin by recalling the relationship of the episcopacy to the operation of the Holy Spirit among us. The Holy Father States it briefly.

"Christ has entrusted the fulfillment of His work among mankind to two different factors: to the Holy Spirit and to the Apostles. He promised to send the Holy Spirit and He sent the Apostles. Both these missions proceed equally from Christ" (general audience, May 18, 1966).

Pope Paul, reflecting the mind of the council and of prevailing Catholic tradition, points out that, while the action of the Holy Spirit is by no means restricted to the visible ministry even of the divinely appointed episcopacy, that ministry is nonetheless ordinarily needed:

"We should always remember that the work of the visible hierarchy is ordained to the diffusion of the Holy Spirit in the members of the Church. Its ministry is not indispensable to the mercy of God. For, His mercy can

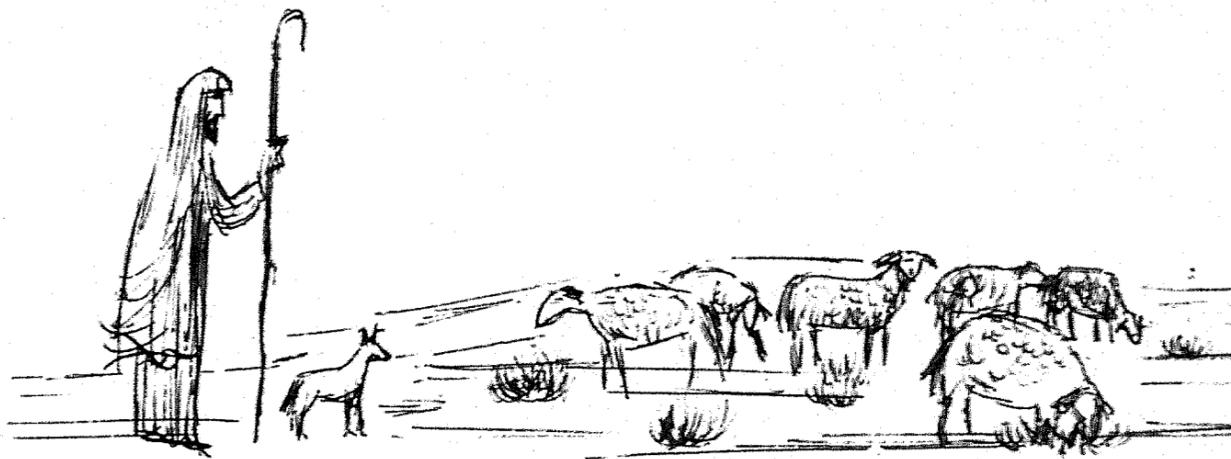
be bestowed as God pleases. But normally, it is indispensable for us, who have had the occasion and the good fortune to obtain the Word of God, the grace of God and the guidance of God from the Apostles . . ."

In its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II outlined some essential features of this ministry of the bishops. They have been appointed, for example, by the Will of Christ "shepherds of His Church to the consummation of the world" (Lumen Gentium, 18). By divine institution, bishops succeed to the place of the Apostles (Lumen Gentium, 20). Without the episcopacy, apostolicity in the Church suffers an essential defect. Without the episcopacy, there is no Eucharist, no priesthood, no historic continuity with the apostolic age and the primitive Christian community. The bishops of the world form together a college whose ministry includes not only the shepherding of their respective Churches, each with the cooperation of his presbyterium (Christus Dominus, 11), but also "supreme and full authority over the universal Church, provided we understand (the college of the bishops) together with its head, the Roman Pontiff, and never without this head" (Lumen Gentium, 22). The council dares to add that bishops preside "in place of God over the flock whose shepherds they are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing" (Lumen Gentium, 20). Indeed, when certain conditions are present, the collegiate body of the bishops proclaims Christ's doctrine infallibly (Lumen Gentium, 25).

Thus, when we speak of our office as bishops of the Church of God, we speak in no self-serving spirit. We declare to the present and future generations of believers only what has been handed down from the origins of Christianity. Setting forth the substance of the episcopal office, we are not treating of anything incidental or accidental to the life of the Christian community. Historically and theologically, Catholic Christians (not to mention their Orthodox and many Protestant brethren) have been plainly aware that the episcopacy pertains to the essence not only of the structured Church but of the very concept of Christian community. They have understood that while, historically, there have doubtless been claims or actions beyond the proper limits of episcopal authority, with the result that prelates have on occasion been called to account by the due process of the organized Christian community, such excesses or defects have been recognized precisely as abnormal and have in no way undermined the legitimate uses of sacred authority. We can repeat, without qualification, the sentiment expressed in the beginning of the second century by Ignatius of Antioch:

"Let a man respect the bishop, for whoever is sent by the Master to run His House, we ought to receive him as we would receive the Master Himself. . . ." (Ephesians 6).

"Wherever the bishop appears, there, let the people be, as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church. . . ." (Smyrnaeans 8).



THE MINISTRY OF BISHOPS

The episcopacy is but one ministry in the Church's variety of ministries (Lumen Gentium, 18). However, the episcopal ministry is uniquely endowed with sacred and sacramental power to direct the members of God's People "toward the common goal of salvation, freely, and in an orderly way" (Lumen Gentium, 18). This ministry, like every ministry in the Church, is a form of service; the service in the case of the bishop is that of presiding over the Church as Christ provided that His Apostles and their successors should do when He would no longer remain visibly with His people. He gave those who would share His authority example as to how He wished that it be exercised. Mindful of their human frailty and of the scandals that would inevitably come, He prayed that they would be confirmed by the Holy Spirit and by one another, above all by Peter, when Satan would seek to sift him as wheat and thus prevail against the Church (cf. Luke 22:31).

In a special way, the hierarchy, united with the Pope, is a ministry for unity and peace in the Christian community. The constant underlying theme of conciliar teaching on the episcopacy is unity—a unity of Pope and bishops, of bishops with one another, of bishops and priests, of clergy and laity.

Some seek to divide the Church neatly into her institutional and her charismatic components, to declare oversimply what is Gospel and what is grace, what is Church and what is Christ. The premises of such divisions are frequently forced and always over-simplified, even when based on appeal to isolated phrases of Scripture. A more reasoned and faithful reading of the sources of theology will discover that, while some elements in the Church are unmistakably spiritual and some manifestly institutional, most, if not all, are blends of the two. Episcopacy and papacy not only represent institution, Gospel, and Church; they are likewise charismatic, supernaturally vital, and signs of Christ. Conversely, there is no genuinely charismatic figure who does not have relationship to institution, Gospel and Church. Catholicism glories in the history of its powerfully charismatic and

persuasively prophetic persons: its reformers, many of its mystics, its saints among the laity of both sexes, the clergy of every rank, and even its children. But it is not without gratitude to those institutional personalities who, whatever the human defects which characterize even the saints among them and certainly the sinners, historically helped maintain the Church's continuity, stability and organized witness in the world.

The heresies which began with scandal at the human elements in the Church often ended with a denial of Christ's own humanity and invariably pitted against one another charismatic and institutional elements in the Church as if they were mutually exclusive, indeed antagonistic (c.f., for example, Gnosticism, Albigensianism and not a few elements in the Modernist synthesis). A like perverse tendency to polarize has time and again led to excessive distinctions between the human and the divine in the Word made flesh, between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history, between freedom and authority in religion, and, finally, between charism and institution. Tertullian described the problem of which we are speaking in words still timely:

"Why do you cut Christ in half with a lie? If the flesh with its sufferings is a figment, then the Spirit with its mighty works is unreal" (De Carne Christi). Or, more pointedly: Those who hold Christ had an imaginary body are imaginary Christians" (Adv. Valent.).

Who fails to recognize how the institutional and charismatic elements of the Church were interwoven and exemplified in the organized assembly of Vatican II, a contemporary reminder that ours is a Church of charisms? Who fails to see how structured and institutionalized was even the charismatic Church of Pentecost?

"Having nominated two candidates . . . they then drew lots for them, and as the lot fell to Matthias, he was listed as one of the twelve Apostles" (Acts 1:23-26).

"These remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers . . . the faithful all lived together and owned everything in common . . . they went as a body to the Temple every day . . ." (Acts 2:42-47).

There can hardly be a cleavage between Gospel and grace, between Church and Christ, between episcopacy and charism, between priesthood and laity, between apostolicity and the Holy Spirit.

COLLEGIALITY

Continuity of Present With Past

These reflections provide a background to the exposition in Vatican Council II of the doctrine of episcopal collegiality. The full implications of the conciliar teaching on collegiality will be felt for centuries in the developing theology, spiritual life, effective administration, missionary activity, and self-awareness of the Church. So dramatic are some of these implications that a few have been tempted to see the whole idea of collegiality as if it were a "break-through" somehow parting with tradition, a concept reserved for discovery only in our times.

In fact, the development of collegiality in Vatican Council II affords many new directions and rich promise for whole new areas of theological thought and pastoral activity; however, the concepts at issue are as native to the beginning of the Church as the acts and letters of the Apostles. They are as venerable as the institution of Church synods and councils and the fundamental concept of Churches in communion with each other and with Rome. Specifically, and more proximately, the doctrine of collegiality is in complete continuity with the First Vatican Council.

When we Catholics speak of continuity rather than change, or of development rather than repudiation of the past, we are not playing with words or indulging in equivocations. We are expressing a reality that is part of the organic nature of the Church and a law of her life. Development in the present and identity with the past in all essentials are conditions of progress in the Church.

It is sometimes suggested that the contemporary emphasis on episcopal collegiality runs counter to the claims for papal primacy defined in Vatican Council I. But the concept of primacy in itself presupposes a college or body within which and over which the primate rules. This was recognized in the deliberations and the projected agenda of Vatican I. It was necessarily implicit in that council's definition of the prerogatives of the papacy and was explicit in its references to the divinely established episcopate. So, Vatican II, explicating the doctrine of episcopal collegiality, kept full faith with Vatican Council I by its insistence on papal primacy in all that the primacy entails.

We touch on this issue because of occasional suggestions that one council breaks with its predecessors and presents an entirely different face to the world from that presented by councils of the past. To evaluate properly any council, one must keep in mind the problems and pressures peculiar to its moment of history, the opportune and providential work that it is called to do in the special circumstances of its generation and the language it employs to express its faith. That is why indictments of the Council of Trent, as if it were somehow blameworthy for not having been Vatican II, are so beside the point. Likewise, efforts to invent contradictions between Vatican I and Vatican II or to find fault with Vatican I for not being Vatican II are of dubious worth. Vatican I served its own moment of history; it could not have anticipated the questions and problems which became mature only in the 20th century. As it was, Vatican I played its part in Vatican II and the 20th-century council advanced deliberately and faithfully in the tradition of its predecessors.

CHURCH AS A FAMILY



The more profound significance of the collegiality of the bishops is grasped best in the awareness we have of the Church as a community of charity. The basis of all hierarchy is love, a love which expresses itself in community, according to the Will of Christ, a love which includes and requires every form of service for which the Lord made provision, including teaching and governing. The consequent institutional inequalities constitute no threat to a community of love. Every family, as we know, comes together unequally but united in love. The charity and the loyalties which characterize the family neither preclude nor destroy the inequalities consistent with love; in effect, they intensify and consecrate those diversities as a result of which each member has a proper and distinctive service to render.

The image of the family is pertinent for many reasons. The doctrine of collegiality reinforces the Church's consciousness of her succession from the Apostles as a community, not in disparate lines of succession, bishop by bishop as it were, but within the ancestral continuity of a family. Within that ecclesial family, each member of the college of bishops is charged with concern for the whole community just as each member of a family shares the common solicitude and cares about every other. Collegiality, furthermore, reminds us that bishops are bound to one another, to their peoples, and to all the Church not by arbitrary choices or patterns, nor merely by juridical ties, but by the built-in pieties and loves which at once typify and constitute the family.

For all these reasons and denying the validity of none of the figures of speech used to express something of the relationship of the bishops to those especially committed to their care, no image of the episcopate is more eloquent than that which depicts the bishop as a father. The juridical and theological titles of the Pope, Chief Bishop in the Church, become clear to all when they are

explained, but everyone instinctively understands the meaning of the words "Holy Father."

The love of every bishop for his people is fostered not only by their need of him and their filial demands upon him but by the sustaining unity of the whole college of bishops, by the Gospel which calls him constantly to an accounting and by the living Tradition he can never dismiss of that Church which is so familial in its nature, history and spirit. The love of a bishop for his people is made ardent by the liturgy he celebrates, by the doctrine he proclaims, and by the Church order he administers.

The apostolic authority essential to the Church and exercised by those who succeed to the place of the Apostles is directed, as we have said, to the service of the community. By virtue of collegiality, that community joins each bishop as well as all the bishops together to the service of the universal People of God:

"It is the duty of all bishops to promote and safeguard the unity of faith and the discipline common to the whole Church, to instruct the faithful, to love the whole Mystical Body of Christ, especially its poor and sorrowing members and those who are suffering persecution for the sake of justice" (Lumen Gentium, 23).

Even when he acts alone, each bishop ministers to the redemption of all men. He does not preach Christ, preside over liturgical worship or even organize a local Church apostolically for one diocese only, without the effects of all this reaching the outer limits of the Church. The message, the worship, the local Church involve the bishop in realities which go far beyond the territorial boundaries of his diocese and advance the coming of God's Kingdom and the accomplishment of His love among all the sons of men.



THE LOCAL CHURCH

Each bishop represents Christ's saving will for those entrusted to him, for them he is called, with a truth that should comfort his people even as it may frighten him, to be an effective sign of their salvation. Together with his brothers in the episcopate, he becomes a sign of Christ's universal will for the salvation of all men. Without the local Church, there is no universal Church; yet no local Church can isolate itself from the universal premises and implications of Christ's work and the Church's mission.

The doctrine of collegiality does not, however, diminish the bishop's special mission to his own diocese. The local Church must always be the direct and unique object of the bishop's consecrated service and personal apostolate. Through their bishop, united in the common brotherhood of all bishops with their elder brother the Successor of Peter, the members of each local Church are assured their place in the universal Church.

The common brotherhood among the bishops effects fraternal communion among all local Churches and enables each to see the other as truly Catholic, particularly since the brotherhood of the bishops includes as an essential unifying bond the recognition of the Roman Pontiff. The whole Church sees in the Successor of Peter "the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity of both the bishops and of the faithful" (Lumen Gentium, 23). Thus, "individual bishops represent each his own Church but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church" (Lumen Gentium, 23).

The fact of Christian fraternity, which is the hallmark of the Church and the heart of collegiality, must be signified pre-eminently in those who, as bishops, preside over local Churches. It is in the exercise of their brotherhood, with all its collegial manifestations, that bishops fulfill the offices of faith concerning their people, mutually confirm the faith of their fellow bishops, and

keep faith with Christ through Peter. Episcopal unity, thus grounded in faith, and episcopal eagerness for the consecrated service urged by love are the core of Christian brotherhood. Without brotherhood in faith and love thus understood, a bishop's local Church would become not a local Church but an isolated enclave.

The recent council, then, did not so explain collegiality as to neglect the central role of the local bishop in the local Church.

"The individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular Churches. These Churches are fashioned after the model of the Universal Church. In them and from them comes the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason, each individual bishop represents his own Church but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love, and unity" (Lumen Gentium, 23).

At a time when society is becoming increasingly unified in its institutions, more complex and less personal than ever, the traditional doctrine of the local Church, in addition to its positive content, serves as a welcome counterforce. The theology of the local Church brings the Church of Christ in its fullness into our neighborhoods. Thus, we are members of the Universal Church through the more tangible reality of the local Church. The Church, in its local presence, celebrates the Eucharist and all the other sacraments, proclaims the Gospel, and possesses all the sacramental structures by which the Church is governed and differentiated. The local Church gathers us around one shepherd who shares the proximate concerns of the community of Christians united closely with one another and with him.

Nor is this to suggest in the slightest that the local Church isolates us from the Universal Church or from those other local Churches in communion with Peter

where we find our brothers in the faith; if it did so, it might be local but it would cease to be the Church. Collegiality turns us, at one and the same time, to our local bishop, in whom we see apostolicity expressed, and then to the entire episcopate, in whom we see apostolicity manifesting ever-new evidence of its catholicity. In a marvelous manner, collegiality, taken together with the theology of the local Church, proclaims to us the pluralities of traditions within the Church, the diversities of cultures, and the multiplicity of languages and rites, each of these typified in its bishops, all of which harmonize into the sign of a Church properly called catholic. Thus in one doctrine is revealed the diversity, the universality, and the catholicity within the unity of the Church of Christ.

The episcopate, therefore, is given to the Church not for her division but precisely for her unity. Both bishop and people, contemplating this profound truth, must act in accordance with it. The bishop is commissioned by the Church and called by the Holy Spirit to make the community of Christ concretely present on the local level. He is given the Church's power to celebrate the death of the Lord, to pray and to preside, and to do all the works of love called to mind on the day of his consecration: "to govern, to interpret doctrine, to consecrate, to ordain, to offer Sacrifice, to baptize and to confirm" (The Roman Pontifical). He is given these powers not for himself, but to make present and proximate the Mystery of the Church in a local community. As the people of that community gather around the altar of their local bishop, as they assemble to hear from him the Word of God authentically proclaimed and to be formed by it, as they recognize, in accordance with their respective gifts, the institutional and charismatic leadership which comes to them through his apostolic episcopacy, as they do all this, the whole Church of God comes into their midst in an intimate, truly personal, visible, tangible and audible manner.

TEACHING OFFICE OF CHURCH AND BISHOPS

There remains a word to be said about the teaching office of the bishops since it is through them that the truths of Christ's saving faith are authentically proclaimed in the local Church. These truths of Christian faith are not efficaciously believed unless they be heard, not heard unless they be preached, not preached except by those who are sent (Rom. 10:14).

One of the most vexing problems of our day is the proper relationship between conscience and authority. The problem, of course, is not new. There has never been a moment in human history when men have not been confronted with the claims of both conscience and some form of authority. By authority here, we do not mean civil jurisdiction as such nor those other valid forces by which the good ordering of any society is sought, forces which seek their fulfillment in external compliance, even when one sees this compliance as morally binding. By authority we mean a force which obligates one in conscience, a force which therefore enters into a man's inner evaluation of himself and which seeks not only external conformity but internal acceptance as well.

We restrict our considerations here to religious authority, an authority which imposes itself more profoundly than any other since it deals with man's relationship to God and has at stake not only his religious welfare now but his ultimate salvation hereafter.

By conscience, we mean a person's awareness of the moral imperative in his life toward truth and virtue, his fellow-men and his God. By moral imperative we intend all those theological and ethical considerations which require a man to call some things good and others evil, some things true for human development, others false.

With few exceptions, modern man is notably concerned about the problem of conscience. The acuteness of the question may reflect a reaction to a time when personal values and decisions are more than ever threatened by group patterns, demanding corporate loyalties and controlled so often by impersonal forces. The problem may be intensified by the plurality of ideologies seeking the allegiance of each of us in a society which welcomes options in everything but fears decisions, above all decisions which require fidelity and restrict one's spontaneity of behavior.

We shall speak first of conscience and its force; secondly, of authority and freedom in religion; thirdly, of ecclesial authority and Catholic conscience. The vastness and complexity of these questions should make it obvious that we do not intend an exhaustive consideration of these matters in this letter. We consider them only in relation to their bearing on the place of the Church's teaching office in our Christian life.

The question of conscience was set forth in clear terms by Cardinal Newman many years ago:

"Conscience does not repose on itself, but vaguely reaches forward to something beyond itself and dimly

discerns a sanction higher than self for its decisions, as is evidenced in that keen sense of obligation and responsibility which informs them" ("Grammar of Assent").

Conscience, then, though it is inviolable, is not a law unto itself. One cannot, in the name of conscience, violate the rights of others. Thus, conscience must have some norm. Today it is widely asserted that conscience's norm is the dignity of the human person. Men of belief go further, however, and see the norm to be the dignity of the human person indeed, but in the light of God. Judaeo-Christian traditions speak of a God who reveals to us truths and values, ultimately Himself, in whom conscience finds its norm.

We cannot agree, therefore, with those who derive the force of conscience only from social or environmental influences. Conscience ultimately derives from the image of God in which man is made and the grace of God by which man is called.

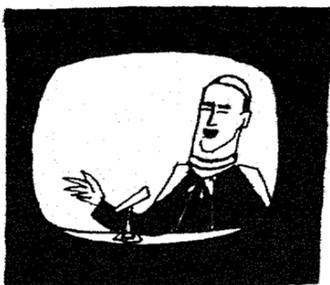
If on these points we draw heavily on Cardinal Newman it is because few theologians have stated so well the mind or the problems of the Church in the face of a skeptical, subjectivist age.

On conscience he wrote and spoke frequently and clearly:

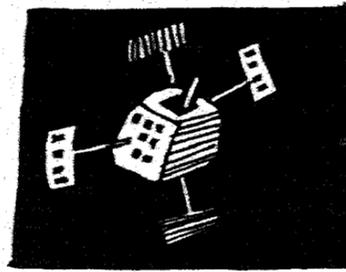
"If man has been betrayed into any kind of immorality, he has a lively sense of responsibility and guilt, though the act be no offense against society,—of distress and apprehension, even though it may be of present service to him,—of compunction and regret, though in itself it be most pleasurable,—of confusion of face, though it may have no witnesses . . ." ("Grammar of Assent").

The force of conscience, then, which we believe makes us beholden to God, no matter how dimly He is perceived or under what form He may be affirmed, obliges us to choose. We are diminished when we choose against it; we are, likewise, compromised when we accept as the dictate of conscience only what we find pleasurable, not attempting to align conscience with the rights of others and with the ultimate question of God's existence and demands upon us. Conscience is not only a gift, inspiring us to virtue and restraining us from vice; it is also a demand that must be accomplished, enlightened, formed, elevated.

Every morally responsible person knows that good is not the same as evil, that the former is to be affirmed and the latter repudiated. He knows also that conscience is an indispensable factor in the recognition of what is good and the rejection of what is evil. Yet conscience does not of itself give us all the answers or even all the elements for the definition of what is good; at once a basic element of religion and, in a sense, the most personal of teachers, it is not, for all this, totally luminous, being (as Newman observed) so easily puzzled, obscured and perverted as to need the formation and perfection the Church provides.



SCRIPTURES
TRADITION
MAGISTERIUM



FREEDOM IN THE CHURCH



A further question we wish to consider concerns the relationship between freedom and authority in religion.

The Second Vatican Council wisely observed:

"A sense of the dignity of the human person has been impressing itself more and more deeply on the consciousness of contemporary man. And the demand is increasingly made that men should act on their own judgment, enjoying and making use of a responsible freedom, not driven by coercion but motivated by a sense of duty" (Dignitatis Humanae Personae, 1).

This helped the council to conclude:

"This Vatican synod declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. The synod further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person, as the dignity is known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself" (Dignitatis Humanae Personae, 2).

The Church, whatever her critics may isolate in her history, regardless of what her loyal sons may wish were done better, is a force for freedom and is freedom's home. It is in the Church and for the Church that Jesus redeems. It is the Church, as we said before, which grace, and hence freedom, seeks. In the Church, the sacrament of freedom is celebrated in the Eucharist; the Gospel of freedom is proclaimed; and a community is formed from that faith in freedom without which we are dead in sin and without which we have no final hope.

St. Paul knew this well and spoke frequently, especially to the Galatians, of the Church's understanding of freedom:

"Before faith came, we were allowed no freedom..." (Gal. 3:23).

"When Christ freed us, He meant us to remain free" (Gal. 5-1).

"My brothers, you were called, as you know, to freedom..." (Gal. 5:13).

"Be careful or this liberty will provide an opening for self-indulgence. Serve one another, rather, in works of love. If you go snapping at each other and tearing each other to pieces, you had better watch or you will destroy the whole community" (Gal. 5:13-15).

These are words written by the Church herself, in the Church's own book, by the Church's ardent Apostle,

for the Church's people, as the Church's norm. She strives, today as so often in the past, to signify in her every visible structure the freedom which brought her into being, a freedom so full that she can never be completely loyal to it, a freedom so persuasive that it always demands more of her. She knows what she is about even though sin may hinder her mission of making freedom credible to that world which always settles for a lesser freedom or at times hails as freedom what the Church knows to be spiritual bondage.

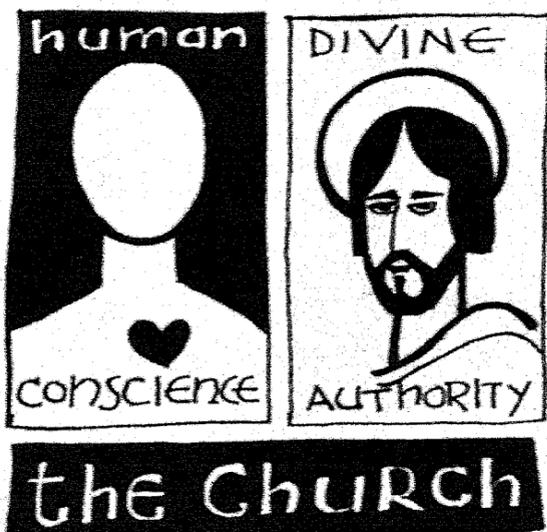
Thus, the Church speaks in harmony with her nature when she declares:

"In all his activity, a man is bound to follow his conscience faithfully, in order that he may come to God, for whom he was created. . . and he is not to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his conscience" (Dignitatis Humanae Personae, 3).

The ways in which the freedom of the Christian is to be formulated by the Church in signs convincing to the world and consistent with herself are not always obvious. The ultimate freedom that the Church professes is realized in charity, of course. There is no freedom without authority, however, just as there is no love without obligation. The intricate questions arising from the relation of freedom to only these two moral factors, charity and authority, hint at how early we are in man's growth toward full understanding of freedom in itself and in its ramifications. Can we, then, be as complacent about the present, or as contemptuous of the past as we sometimes sound when there is talk about freedom?

Is it really honest to suggest for example, that we have discovered freedom's perfect formulation only in this century? Is it just to imply that other centuries were wrong when they had to seek other formulations? Is it not prudent to anticipate that future ages will be able to say of us that our way to freedom was less free than we thought? In each age, the Church may need different signs to signify her essential freedom, signs which are not subterfuges but sacraments. This is not to pretend that there were not failings in the past. It is to emphasize that the past was not always untrue to freedom, that the present has not given freedom its final sign, and that the future need not simply repeat our formulas. Even while begging God for pardon from our sins against freedom (as against every virtue), we thank Him, all the same, for what His grace and His freedom have achieved from the beginning of the Church's life.

FREEDOM AND AUTHORITY



The Second Vatican Council, in its Declaration on Religious Freedom, does not use the phrase "freedom of conscience." This is in part because such a formula is open to considerable misinterpretation. Cardinal Newman once referred to an attitude, prevalent in his day, common to ours:

"When men advocate the rights of conscience, they in no sense mean the rights of the Creator, nor the duty to Him, in thought and deed, of the creature; but the right of thinking, speaking, writing, and acting according to their judgment or their humor, without any thought of God at all. (Each professes) what he pleases, asking no one's leave, and accounting priest or preacher, speaker or writer, unutterably impertinent, who dares to say a word against his going to perdition, if he likes it, in his own way..." ("Difficulties of Anglicans").

Religious authority was a vital distinction, for Newman, between natural and revealed religion.

It must be borne in mind that, as the essence of all religion is authority and obedience, so the distinction between natural religion and revealed lies in this, that the one has a subjective authority, and the other an objective" ("Development of Doctrine").

If there must be authority in religion, an authority essential to freedom's survival, which authority shall it be?

Catholics believe that unaided conscience is insufficient; human nature, inadequate; Scripture, incomplete. These are the three most impressive norms which are available to us, it would seem. Yet "conscience does not repose on itself" ("Grammar of Assent"); humanity is not sufficient "to arrest fierce willful human nature in its onward course" ("Apologia pro Vita Sua"); and even of Scripture it must be said that "a book, after all, cannot make a stand against the wild living intellect of man" (ibid).

Authority in the Church rests ultimately in God (who is too unknown to us to serve as a concrete norm), revealing Himself in Christ (who, even in His Spirit, does not give us clear lines of procedure for doctrinal development or disciplinary progress), in the mystery and sacrament of the Church. In the Church, not only does conscience have its place; human nature, its office; Scripture, its pre-eminence, but in the Church God rules over us in the Revelation of His Son through the Spirit Who dwells in the community of Christ.

Some, of course, while admitting that unsteady conscience seeks a sturdy norm, assert that there is no such norm and insist that man must bear bravely with the torment of his conscience, learning to live with darkness on every side. We believe that God does not leave man to himself but has entered history through a Word which is "the true light that enlightens all men" (John 1:8). That Word speaks to us and still enlightens us in the Church of Jesus Christ which carries the double burden of human conscience and divine authority. The only sufficient norm for conscience is authority established in a person. Thus, the Church appeals ultimately to God, to Christ and to herself whom she sees not as institution

but as person since she is the Body of Jesus vivified by the Holy Spirit and present in the world.

When one confronts the question of ecclesial authority and Catholic conscience, he faces the issue of infallibility in the Church. The Catholic Church sees infallibility as Providence, as grace, a gift she receives in humility for the sake of her Master and for the salvation of her sons and daughters. It is not in arrogance but in wonder that she claims infallibility for her substantive teaching and guidance.

For the reasons we have adduced, Cardinal Newman's warning is well-founded that denial of external authority by a Christian puts him in the condition of mankind had God not given Revelation:

"The supremacy of conscience is the essence of natural religion; the supremacy of Apostle, or Pope, or Church, or Bishop is the essence of revealed; and when such external authority is taken away, the mind falls back again of necessity upon that inward guide which it possessed even before Revelation was vouchsafed" ("Development of Doctrine").

In all this, Scripture's prominence in the Church and in the formation of Christian conscience is not placed but underscored.

"I would not deny as an abstract principle that a Christian may gain the whole truth from the Scriptures, but would maintain that the chances are very seriously against a given individual. I would not deny, rather I maintain that a religious, wise, and intellectually gifted man will succeed; but who answers to this description but the collective Church? The Catholic Church, the true Prophet of God, alone is able to tell the dream and its interpretation" ("Via Media").

Although the Second Vatican Council committed the Church to reform and renewal, although (and even because) the council urged the Church's encouragement of her charismatic elements, words spoken over a century ago by Cardinal Newman are suddenly timely. Indeed, they seem spoken precisely to meet certain present problems:

"There is a time for everything, and many a man desires a reformation of an abuse, or the fuller development of a doctrine, or the adoption of a particular policy, but forgets to ask himself whether the right time for it is come. . . He may seem to the world to be nothing else than a bold champion for the truth and a martyr to free opinion, when he is just one of those persons the competent authority ought to silence; and, though the case may not fall within that subject-matter in which the authority is infallible. . . it is clearly the duty of authority to act vigorously in the case. Yet it will go down to posterity as an instance of a tyrannical interference with private judgment, and of the silencing of a reformer, and of a base love of corruption or error; and it will show still less to advantage, if the ruling power happens in the proceedings to evince any defect of prudence or consideration. And all these who take part of that ruling authority will be considered time-servers, or indifferent to the cause of uprightness and truth..." ("Apologia pro Vita Sua").

INFALLIBILITY IN THE CHURCH

Against this background, let us consider the teaching authority of the Church. Vatican II reminds us of the importance of that authority and of its essentially pastoral preoccupation:

"It is clear, therefore, that sacred tradition, sacred Scripture, and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God's most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls" (Dei Verbum, 10).

In preaching the truths by which believers in Christ strive to live, the Church acts with that freedom from error (infallibility) with which Christ endowed her for the preservation and proper development of what relates to the substance of sacred doctrine and the essentials of moral life. This freedom from substantial error in teaching is a privilege of Peter in defined circumstances; it is also a privilege of the college of bishops when that body is united with Peter and among themselves. Infallibility is protective of apostolic teaching, but such teaching is not a lifeless handing on of doctrines made known to the Apostles; it keeps alive among the faithful the self-revelation of God given us in Jesus Christ.

Infallibility is thus always subordinate to revelation and somehow includes the witness of all the Church's people. Infallible teaching in the Church, however, receives its clear expression and definition only in that magisterium which speaks when the bishops exercise their office in harmony with Peter or when Peter defines.

Thus understood as the Church presents it, infallibility has no overtone of the pretension presumably meant by "triumphalism." It is a provident service for the Church, a fulfilment of the promises of Christ and of His own provision for preserving the faith itself from the attrition of changing times or from compromise with

special pressures in or outside the Church. Through the collegiate episcopate, the local Churches benefit from the gift of infallibility given His Church by Christ; through it, they share in the perpetuity of identity and doctrine with the apostolic Church; through it the local Churches are afforded the possibility of cherishing their differences without danger of defection; through it they maintain the Catholicism that leaves room for every variation consistent with the faith. Infallibility does not mean unilateral or monolithic approaches to Christian life and thought; quite the contrary, it sustains and even invites diversity, excluding only disunity; it draws strength from indigenous traditions, refusing only to be limited to particularisms which impair catholicity.

By the official teaching of the Church, we are given an authentic understanding, clarified when needed by doctrinal definition, of the faith. Infallibility in the Church is a grace given for the well-being of the whole body, its growth in holiness and its progress in truth. Infallibility cannot be separated from the pastoral mission of the Church; its object is not academic precision of linguistic perfection in doctrinal formulations (this is a function, not the objective of Church teaching); its object is the setting forth of the truths of the faith in such a way and at such a time that communion among the members of the Church is strengthened and awareness of Christ's saving Revelation is clarified. Both in its nature and purpose, infallibility involves the entire believing community, but not as if it were the result of a community consensus or dependent upon some explicit community acceptance of apostolic teaching. Rather, infallibility is, in its ordered exercise, an evidence of the effective presence of that Holy Spirit who is the soul of the Church, the principle of her unity.

This is why without the gift of infallibility, the Church would lose identity with her own origins, would preach herself rather than Christ, and would bewilder the

world with an ambiguous Gospel rather than illumine God's People with a faith strong in its unity and clear in its apostolic origin. Unless the Church is faithful to a well-founded awareness of what her infallibility means and exists to accomplish, unless she exercises and lives by it with fidelity, then indeed does her trumpet sound the uncertain note to which no one will bother to respond; then is her voice, intended to be so distinct, lost in the discord of voices which speak with only their own authority (cf. 1 Cor. 14:8-10).

To the authentic voice of the teaching Church all the faithful, bishops included, owe the response that has come to be called "religious assent." The Church is not, as we have seen, a gathering of those who decide in their own minds or even consciences what the Church must be and teach. The Church does not preach the faith through arbitrary processes, but through such institutional structures and charismatic interventions as take into account the entire community and Christ's revelation of the Spirit.

The Church assembles, then, in obedience to Christ and to the teaching of the Apostles as well as in love and in the breaking of the bread. Though an enlightened, truly Catholic conscience is something the Church both instructs and needs, the Church is not the collective consensus of individual consciences on some point. There is much more. Conscience becomes Catholic when genuine apostolic doctrine enters into its formation and finds expression in its decisions. If this be not true, then the Church is left with nothing to say, conscience is left with no norm, and community in faith is scattered. A Catholic believes in the Church as a source of freedom, beginning with release from the bondage of the powers of darkness. If he does not, then the intervention of either the Gospel of the teaching Church in the formation of his conscience will be seen by him as servility or tyranny rather than as the guarantor of freedom.

RELIGIOUS ASSENT

Religious assent is not passivity but a positive consequence of discipleship in Christ. This assent is required of all of us, bishops and clergy as well as laity, when a doctrine is solemnly and publicly defined by the Bishop of Rome or the episcopal college together with the Pope. It is required of us, furthermore, though not definitively, in that ordinary teaching of the everyday Church which underlies our common faith and action. A Catholic abides not only by the extraordinary decisions of the Church but by its ordinary life as well where faith and discipline are concerned.

Such an assent, which follows from and builds community, is required for decisions touching on dogma (like the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Sacrament, for example), but it is also required for certain decisions bound up with the good ordering of the Church. Thus, the renewed insistence by Pope Paul VI upon the requirement of priestly celibacy in the Western Church, a decision with which the vast majority of the episcopal college concurs, should be seen by clergy and laity alike as God's will for His Church at this time. These and like obediences, freely given within a community subject to an authority recognized as authentic, indeed as the instrument of God, are expressions of Christian freedom.

In the five years since the council opened, the Church has undergone many changes, some the most rapid in her history and perhaps the most profound. Such a period is no time to lose patience, above all with the Church, or to attempt to decide, on the strength of one's own insights alone, what things are to be believed or what values are to be affirmed for salvation. Neither can one undertake in such a season to decide on his own, with any reasonable hope of success, what structures are necessary to make the Church a sign of Christ, indeed, an effective, grace-giving sign. Modern man is as prone to sin and as capable of religious error as man has ever been.

We may be tempted to forget that the Church is spirit and life. At a time when it is asserted that men show less interest in the formal expression of religion, we must remember that the Church's message is much more than mere talk, her structure is not simply that of just one more society. The Church transforms the meaning and enlarges the horizon of history; she changes man in the depths of his interiority; she re-interprets his every concept of self and of community.

Harnack, the German historian, once remarked that there is no other fact in all history which mankind needs so much to have brought home to it as this: a man by the name of Jesus Christ once stood in our midst. The Church is a sign to all the world that Jesus Christ still stands in our midst. The Church speaks to man, more forcefully than anything else in his experience, concerning what he is, what he is for and why he yearns to attain something beyond, something outside himself. The Church speaks to man, clearly and unequivocally, of the grace of Christ at work within him, within even the man who never heard of grace but who nonetheless pleads for it in the unspoken, wordless longing of his heart.

The Church reminds man that the grace of Christ seeks always to become tangible in the Church where uniquely it achieves its concrete, historical and sacramental expression. A Catholic can never see Christ as

Even if it be true that the received order prevailing in the Church (the "discipline" as distinct from the teaching on faith and morals) is not, of its nature, irrefragable, nevertheless it is the part of authority in the Church finally to determine when and in what degree the received order may be modified or changed. That the teaching Church consult clergy and laity in such matters or even in the formulation of decisions may often be required as a means by which statements of doctrine or order are made more intelligible or more pastoral. But this consultation cannot annul the teaching authority in the Church by substituting one structure for another. Such a confusion of ministries would be alien to the spirit of the Gospel and to the objective content of the Church's constant Tradition.

As well as being central to the Teaching Church, the members of the episcopate form part of the Church consulted when the Roman Pontiff or other members of the collegial body seek consultation. In addition, each bishop coordinates the faith of his local Church, speaks authentically in virtue of his own office, and enters into the teaching authority of the collegiate episcopate. No defect of communication, personalities or procedures

but one more deity in a modern Pantheon; neither can a Catholic see the Church of Christ as just another of the religious structures on the perplexing fairground of life. Rather, he sees the Church as a mystery, the mystery of that Christ who alone is holy, who alone is Lord, the norm essential for the ultimate interpretation of all reality.

A Catholic then has an especially critical task to perform in contemporary history. He believes that the Church has answers which no other religious community has. He values, of course, every Christian witness, every valid human experience, every man. Yet he well knows that his Christ must always be found in the holy, visible, Catholic Church. Once he has shared in the Mystery of the Church he is forever a man signed and sealed, a man with a mission. He may default his mission or turn a deaf ear to his vocation, but he knows it is there and he knows what it is. His mission is to witness to God in a special way. He is called to serve his fellow-men as a Catholic, to seek their salvation as much as his own and, in both, the glory of God. Those who have heard the call to the Catholic Church and have closed their hearts to it forfeit their identity and deprive their contemporaries by abandoning a work God called them to accomplish in time.

There is an eschatological dimension to the Church even as a community of service; as a community of love, of worship and of faith at work in service, it is primarily holiness the Church promotes, a holiness that cannot be easily measured or arbitrarily dismissed. When all is said and done, it is ultimately holiness that God requires of us; it is holiness that Christ gives and the Church exists to nurture.

In these unsettling times, God may not always speak to us of the need and the nature of holiness in the tranquil terms which we, perhaps naively, tend to associate with sanctity. There are times, of course, when He simply bids us to be still and see that He is God; at other times, ours is one of them, His voice is once again in the tumult, the tempest, the thunder and the sound of flooding waters.

changes the fact that the Christian community never speaks with finality until the authentic teaching voices in the Church have spoken.

Obedience to the teaching Church is an obedience required of all, of bishops, priests and laity, in matters of doctrine and morality. This implies no disposition on the part of the Church or warrant on the part of her bishops to enforce uniformity or indulge in arbitrary judgment; the liberty of the children of God, even when they constitute the visible Church, remains inviolate. Liberty takes into account, of course, the acceptance of God's will for our salvation. The laity and, even more, the clergy by reason of their particular offices, are called to contribute their opinions on what concerns the good of the Church; their call to do so may even oblige in conscience. All understand, however, that humility and responsibility are imperatives not only for those who exercise authority but also for those who seek improvement of that exercise. Each one must express not only his conscience but also the sense of community which unites him to every member of the Church. Otherwise, instead of Christ ruling and His community prevailing, a chaos of a quite contrary inspiration takes over and engulfs God's People.

concluding
reflections

In this Year of Faith, we commend meditation on God's Providence over the lives of men and of nations. Reliance on God's Providence does not mean the fond expectation of divine interventions, as if by magic, to prevent the consequences of folly or irresponsibility. Neither does it mean blind, unthinking and impotent passivity in the face of eternal decrees, despotically predetermined without reference to the human condition or the use of human freedom. Christ, of all men the most responsible, accomplished His freedom in His acceptance of the Father's Providence. By God's Providence, we mean a comprehensive dominion by which God, never losing sight of us, includes all events within His purposes, never ceasing to love us, and never failing to guide and preserve His Church.

Of all the dispositions of God's Providence, none is more merciful or more generous than that by which He so loved the world as to send His only-begotten Son and so loved us as to perpetuate the presence of Christ among us through His Church. As we have stressed in this letter, there is such an identity between Christ and His Church that the attitudes we have toward the Church should be those which relate us to a person. If we have spoken of the Church as a community, even as a family, and have tried to penetrate the mystery of her life under other figures, it has been so that we might the more surely come to an understanding of her relation to Christ whose Bride, whose own Body she is.

It is of the Church as at once a community and yet somehow a personality that the Scriptures most often speak to us; under both concepts Christians have found it easiest to express their attachment to her. Maritain explains this double aspect of the Church when he describes the personality of the Church, transcending any conventional notion of personality, as unifying a multitude spread out through the whole world and through all ages, yet possessing in supreme degree the marks of personality: unity of being and of life, consciousness, memory, perception, voice and a task to accomplish which, also, is one, through all times and places (cf. Maritain's Commentary on Lumen Gentium, in Le Paysan de la Garonne, pp. 256-258).

Thinking of the Church as a person we can better appreciate the needs of the Church and how these needs are met. Pope Paul, speaking of the Church after the council, describes her needs as pressing, urgent, even crying. He reminds us of her need for the filial attachment of all to whom she has given life, her need for their fidelity, collaboration, prayer, the gift of their time and support, the testimony of their lives to her power, her need for generosity, patience, defense, love.

Some of these needs of the Church we can reduce to the needs of the persons who constitute the Church

or whom the Church exists to serve: the members of our families, our fellow parishioners, the citizens of our communities, our neighbors but also our enemies, above all, those to whom apply the words in which Christ describes how the needs of the brethren are also His: "All that you have done for these, the least of my brethren, you have done for me" (Matt. 25:40).

Remembering the sense in which we think of the Church as a person, we can more easily understand how she is the object of faith. The ultimate object of faith is, of course, God. But the Church speaks for God; she teaches by God's authority. Christ is the object of our faith; the Church is Christ's living Body in history. Because faith gives substance to all the things we hope for, being the evidence of things that are not seen (Heb. 11, 1), faith touches on the Church at every turn; the Church walks by faith; she is sustained by faith, responding to God by her faith. But the Church is also the object of faith, the living pledge, within history and in the world, of eternal things that are not yet seen, those things which are the ground, the substance of our hope.

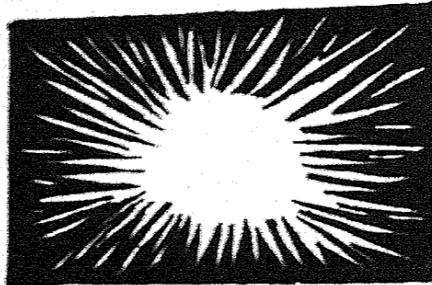
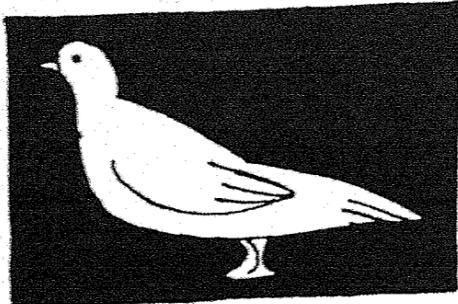
The Church is therefore the object of our gratitude, a gratitude which should be fervently expressed in the incessant prayers we offer for her. Few practices are more conducive to the sense of community than prayer for all the intentions of the Church, the whole Church and all her people: her saints, that they may persevere; her sinners, that, repenting, they may be her consolation and her glory; her poor, her sick, all her children known and anonymous; our Holy Father, the Pope, that he may serve with courage and wisdom, being fortified by the fidelity of our great love; her missionaries, that they may spread her beneficent influence; her bishops, priests, religious, laity, her faithful. In a word, our grateful prayers should be for "all God's holy Church."

These prayers we offer with the Virgin Mother of Christ, especially beloved in our country under the title of the Immaculate Conception, addressing our prayers through her the more confidently because of our grateful awareness of Mary's privileged relations to the Church as these have been proclaimed by the council, the Holy Father and the piety of the people.

The Church is the object of our loyalty. Loyalty includes obedience, not the merely exterior obedience which could be passive and simply carry out instructions, but an inner, spontaneous spirit of obedience which continues among His members the fundamental act of Christ, His unqualified "Yes" to the will of His Father. It is this "Yes" which dominates the whole scheme of salvation, the Incarnation and the Redemption through which, by His obedience, Christ won for us our place in the Church and our restoration to the friendship of God. The loyalty to the Church of which we speak is therefore loyalty to Christ.



GOD'S PROVIDENCE



LOVE OF THE CHURCH

This collective pastoral has had for its theme the nature of the Church, the central theme of the council, as she emerges into the turbulent world of today. That world confronts her with a formidable task: that of formulating the Catholic faith in terms which speak to modern mentalities, particularly in the light of new religious and secular problems. This she must do without pretending that the mysteries of faith can be made any more intelligible to men in one century or culture than to those in another; the act of faith is eminently reasonable but the faith itself illumines rather than explains. It is a light by which we walk, a light whose source is God and therefore inaccessible to unaided intelligence.

That is why it was the business of the council, as Pope John described it, to make the faith shine with new splendor so that it will continue to be "the true light that enlightens all men" (John 1:9). The work of refreshing the faith so that, again in Pope John's phrase, "the teachings of the Church are affirmed anew" cannot be accomplished by impetuous applications of the council, its message or its implications. The progress of the realm of the spirit, the Kingdom of God on earth, is not less

arduous after the council than it was before; it will not be advanced by yielding on what human thought cannot understand or does not choose to accept.

Responding at once to the voice of the Spirit and to a realistic appraisal of the needs of the Church and the times, we ask all, scholars and simple faithful alike, for honest adherence to the teachings of the council. Such adherence must be accompanied in each of us by greatly increased love for the Church, a love which rejoices, humbly but candidly, in belonging to the "elect people and royal priesthood" who are the Church; a love impelling us to share with others, generously and unashamed, the good fortune of the faith so that, with all His brethren finding their place in the Mystical Body which is His Church, Christ may be all and in all (cf. Eph. 1:22-23).

With the Holy Father, we ask that the same love and loyalty shown toward the Church which called the council be shown to the Church which must now interpret the council, implement its reforms and give direction to the spirit of renewal which is its heritage.

We have limited this first collective pastoral letter to the visible structures of the Church and her pilgrim journey through history. This we have done conscious, of course, that the Church on earth is a Church of those who, though they be saints in promise, "have not yet appeared with Christ in glory" (Lumen Gentium, 48). Thus "we are exiled from the Lord" (loc. cit.) and look forward to that day "when Christ shall appear and . . . the glory of God will light up the heavenly city" (Lumen Gentium, 51). In brief, we still seek a city, but we do so as already its citizens; we know the road, however dark, which leads home. It is the Church.

Therefore, we must love the Church as we love nothing else, save only God, if the Spirit of God is to dwell in our midst, redeeming the times and renewing the face of the earth. St. Augustine says it exactly and unforgettably.

"We too receive the Holy Spirit if we love the Church, if we are unified by charity, if we enjoy the Catholic name and faith. Let us believe it, brethren, in the measure that each of us loves the Church, he has the Holy Spirit" (In John tract. 32, 8).

Gaudium et Spes	Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
Lumen Gentium	Constitution on the Church
Optatoam Totius	Decree on Priestly Training
Presbyterorum	Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests
Ordinis	Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church
Christus Dominus	Declaration on Religious Freedom
Personae	

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