



## POPE FAVORS LIMITED TERM OF OFFICE FOR BISHOPS

ARCC President Leonard Swidler

In 1970 my wife Arlene and I translated a "Special Issue" of the *Tübinger Quartalschrift*, the quarterly of the Catholic Theology Faculty of the University of Tübingen, signed by all the faculty, including not only Hans Küng, but also **Joseph Ratzinger!** The point of the book (in English titled: *Bishops and People*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970) was to argue for priest and laity participation in the election of bishops and a limited term of office of bishops. Here are some key paragraphs from the introductory essay signed by all of the faculty

Leonard Swidler

Correctly understood, authority does not exclude criticism, but stands ready for criticism. Criticism is a method of authentic conversation for the purpose of greater effectiveness....The authentic method of criticism demands that regulations be considered carefully, and that it be possible in decisive questions to enter into dialogue with those affected by such regulations; those so affected demand today to be listened to in a decisive way and thus to co-determine future regulations. A social structure that is determined by the old model of master and servant is outdated....

Thus the question can also be asked whether in the future the *episcopal office* should always remain a lifetime office.... While it is taken for granted in a democracy of Western stamp that the cabinet and chief of state remain in office only a certain time, in fact only so long as they enjoy the confidence of the electorate, in the church bishops are named by the pope, and for life.... And yet, does not the decision to assign such an office [bishop] for a lifetime conceal enormous dangers for the vital formation of the pastoral care of the diocese? Through such a regulation, the pastoral care of an entire diocese can be determined or at least greatly influenced in a very unilateral manner for decades. And beyond this: Does there not lie here a source of danger for the bearer of the office himself as well? The office-bearer is endangered by the knowledge that his power will continue for the rest of his life; at the same time he endangers this office and thus respect for authority itself by the one-sidedness—understandable as it may be humanly speaking—with which he exercises it....

This is our suggestion: *The term of office of resident bishops should in the future be eight years. Another term or a prolongation of the term is possible only as an exception, and only for objective, extreme reasons stemming from the political situation within the church....*

More important than the question of a limitation of this term of episcopal office, it will be said, is the question of the election or the naming of the bishop. Perhaps this is also true. It would in our opinion be idle to argue over which question is more important. In the past years, a number of things have been said and written on a new mode of election, a broadened electorate, and the manner of ratification by the pope. The entire complex of

questions urgently needs a reconsideration, which should not be shunted aside by an appeal to the stipulations of a concordat. The election of a bishop by a broader electoral body seems unconditionally desirable for the significance of the episcopal office and the necessity of its vital contact with the diocese, and it presents an apt setting for the suggestion of a temporal limitation of office. [*Several following essays by faculty do argue in favor of the election of bishops—Swidler.*]

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## FROM THE EDITOR

This issue of *ARCC Light* will be largely concerned with the problem of the naming of bishops. Charles McMahon's marvelous examination of the early creation of bishops shows quite clearly that things have not always been as they are now: the People of God had a voice in choosing their leaders and the independence of the local churches was **respected**. Such respect only completely died (except when it is convenient for Rome to pretend it exists) with the rise of absolute monarchy and finally the centralization of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. And what does the ever-centralizing papal monarchy look for in its bishop candidates? Most fundamentally, it looks for administrators and canon lawyers - those are the fast tracks to advancement in the Church.

Beyond that is largely up to the individual pope. Paul VI, who, aside from being of a fairly modern bent, had also suffered from the stupidity and unfeeling bullying of Papal bureaucrats all his professional life, looked for intelligent candidates with strong pastoral gifts. John Paul II had different priorities. His litmus test was absolute, unquestioning obedience to him or to his version of the Magisterium on the issues of importance to him, especially issues of sexuality, beginning with birth control. He also didn't want bishops who were too intelligent (recall that Karol Wojtyla failed to get his graduate degree in Rome and he was suspicious of anyone who might emerge as more intelligent than he - which, according to specialists in his field, was not as difficult as one might think). The result of John Paul's requirements was a generation of Stepford Bishops - automatons who were party hacks, company men who asked permission to go to the bathroom.

Only God knows the extent to which the long-festered problem of abuser priests grew and was treated in an especially cynical way because of John Paul II's insistence on absolute, unquestioning obedience and his preference for being a traveling gadfly over being a papal bureaucrat who devoted some time and effort to minding the store. John Paul II didn't want problems: he wanted to be loved by the young and feared by their elders. He doubtless told himself the fear was toward God but from the stomping around he frequently did in the presence of bishops and cardinals, his bishops probably thought that admitting there

was a pedophile problem in their diocese could cost them a promotion or even their jobs. Rome said "take care of it" and for not very intelligent company men the simplest solution might seem to be to sweep it under the rug and send ever-larger monetary donations to Rome.

And what, then, of Benedict XVI? What kind of bishops can we expect during his pontificate, which he himself said upon his election would be short? His first important exercise in Archbishop-making – for Poland – was an absolute disaster. One is tempted to say that it was a disaster precisely because Benedict used the old boys' club network, which had hidden a number of important facts about the Polish Secret Police's infiltration of the Roman Catholic clergy and hierarchy from Rome so as not to upset John Paul II. Did Cardinal Ratzinger's 23 years as head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith so mark him as part of the Curia, the do-it-the-way-it-has-always-been-done system, that he can not or will not break out of it? One must hope not.

Benedict XVI is a conservative Bavarian: pleasant, polite, obedient, rigorously devoted to his work, as fair as he can possibly be within the parameters of his very traditional theology. He is somewhat shy and timid, afraid of many things, such as the disappearance of the Catholicism he loves from the Europe in which he was bred and raised. Indeed, European to the core, he loves what is old, established and beautiful, and fears what is new. But, how old is old? Is there even a point at which something - an idea or a system - is so old that it becomes novel and new? Pope Ratzinger's beloved old is Baroque (Mozart) and even Medieval (Gregorian Chant) - but is it Roman? Can he go beyond the aesthetic beauty and seeming rationality of the intervening centuries back to the end of the Roman Empire and the first years of the Church for inspiration on the picking of the shepherds of the Church?

Although Benedict is certainly conservative, he is just as certainly extremely intelligent and a theological scholar. Hopefully, his years in the Curia have left him with some residual respect for intelligence and erudition.

If Pope Benedict continues some variation on the present system of naming bishops, and he is afraid of pastoral bishops, if he, too, has a doctrinal litmus test for his bishops, he should at least be able to find some intelligent bishops for us, bishops with whom we can exchange ideas and engage in fruitful dialogue. No one is going to cavil with any appointments of Benedict XVI - he is too widely respected intellectually. That is why he has the prestige to widen the process for the naming of bishops - IF he is willing to take the time and trouble to do it. This Pope, even in a short reign, could also name one-quarter or more of the next College of Cardinals IF he is willing to beat the bushes of the Church to find the kind of intelligent, THINKING, collegially minded cardinals we need, and if he is willing to institute more powers for them to give them leverage against a pope even more fearful or more demagogic than he.

Let us hope and pray that Pope Benedict will use the time, talents and power he has to bring about these needed reforms.

Christine M. Roussel

## LIVING VATICAN II: THE 21ST COUNCIL FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

BY GERALD O'COLLINS (PAULIST PRESS, NY, 2006)

"Living Vatican II: The 21st Council for the 21st Century" is certainly a title to warm the heart of any member of ARCC, especially those over the age of 60 who were children under the

Tridentine Church and had the good fortune to live through the excitement and hope of the period of the Council itself. The author of this book is just such a Catholic.

This very personal journal and analysis of "living" Vatican II is written by an Australian Jesuit theologian. Father O'Collins was educated in England, received his degree at Cambridge, and has taught at the Gregorian University in Rome since 1974. His sole career - teaching - provides many of the strengths of this memoir/analysis but also a number of its weaknesses, as will hopefully become clear in the course of this review.

The author was a soon-to-be-ordained theology student in the Jesuits when the Council began and a doctoral student when it ended in 1965. In some of the more interesting early parts of this book, O'Collins discusses how the Council affected him, his learning environment, his theology and the teaching that occupied his entire career. Thus, in the first chapter he tries to examine "How Vatican II Changed My Church" by digesting some salient points of the major Council documents. It is a very basic review, though one would wish for more. Rather more useful, in my opinion, is Chapter 2 "Facilitators or Gatekeepers?"

One of the themes of O'Collins' book is the importance of reception of a council's teachings. In Chapter 2, he identifies and discusses some of the institutions that were created to implement the teachings of Vatican II and their degrees of success. This is a useful resource, as are the notes at the end. He is, however, realistic enough to know that most of the small minority who voted against the major groundbreaking documents of Vatican II were members of the Curia who could be counted on to continue to obstruct reforms and be gatekeepers of the Tridentine Church. They also are discussed here, as are - very briefly - some of the lay movements. One wishes this meaty chapter were more than 30 pages.

O'Collins insists rightly that a council must be received with creative fidelity that is suitable to its time and the Church's - and world's - needs. As an example, he takes the example of the Council of Nicea and its creative reception by an extraordinary family of future saints, the Cappadocians, comprising Saints Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Macrina. Using the examples of the responses of the Cappadocians, he illustrates his conclusion which is worth quoting:

Thus we may glean . . . four tests of creative fidelity in the reception of conciliar teaching and decrees: (1) a deeper experience of salvation that comes through real sensitivity to the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit; (2) a richer experience of life-giving worship in the community; (3) fidelity to biblical witness; (4) a generous service of those who suffer. These are still four daunting tests in the twenty-first century when we commit ourselves to living by the teaching of Vatican II. (60)

Fr. O'Collins' chapter on liturgical progress (or lack thereof) is interesting, occasionally even mildly venturesome, such as when he outlines his "dreams" for priests, bishops and liturgical commissions (lots of luck, as we say in NY!). Mostly his points are sensible and well-put, such as this question asked in relation to the present struggles over translations of the text of the Mass:

Is the aim to introduce a strangely formal and old-fashioned language that priests and people use only when talking to God? Will the health of the English-speaking areas of the church be promoted or even maintained by a special sacral language that sounds remote, archaic and awkward? Such



language hardly agrees with the kind of language for prayer used and recommended by Jesus himself. He spoke to God and about God in a simple, direct and familiar way . . . It's very difficult to imagine Jesus encouraging us to start using words like "beseech" and "deign." (74-75)

"Receiving the Council's Moral Teachings" is probably, on the whole, the weakest chapter in "Living Vatican II." O'Collins' years of teaching and his knowledge of the history of questions as well as the sources are his strengths, but this methodology, from the magisterial heights, simply does not work when discussing the problems raised by modern science and the everyday moral dilemmas faced by the Catholic. Having never been in a parish, in the trenches of lay life, he seems almost afraid of these issues and he avoids most of them or quotes the Catechism or the writings of John Paul II, especially "Veritatis Splendor." He appears to be as out of touch with lived reality as Pope John Paul, who he seems to idolize, was. However, since most of "Living Vatican II" was written at the end of John Paul's reign, this might simply represent job protection.

Some of the best parts of O'Collins book deal with ecumenism and interdenominational teaching. In passages such as "Ecumenism at the Gregorian," one learns the Jesuit's secret: he is as close to being a High Anglican as an orthodox Roman Catholic can be!

Seriously, and in all fairness to Father O'Collins, he *is* a man of Vatican II, albeit a cautious one. His memoirs deserve to be read with care - there are some pearls there, such as this passage toward the end:

[further dreams for the Church] a reform in the selection of bishops, a greater representation of the local churches at the papal elections, and a more effective presence of Catholics and other Christians in the world of mass communications. [Further] . . . a dream Vatican II took over from Pope John XXIII, who expressed it in the words of St. Augustine: "Let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is doubtful, and charity in everything." . . . Sadly in some parts of the Western world we have to endure much polarization and distrust not only in the world but also within the church. I dream of a church and a world in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit will liberate the whole human family from all forms of fear and greed and draw them into the eternal mystery of love. Without such love, any reforms in the Catholic Church would remain at best mere cosmetic decorations." (169-170)

I'd settle for the decorations, but, as someone wrote, that is another story.

Christine M. Roussel

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## The Case for Electing Catholic Bishops

It is probably fair to say that the average American Catholic paid little attention to the bishop of his or her diocese before the events of recent years, specifically the child-abuse scandals and the intrusions of some bishops into the presidential election of 2004. Catholics tend to be focused more on their parishes than on the chancery downtown. Now, we have experienced the bankruptcy of dioceses and the possibility that parish properties will be liquidated to pay the damages caused by child-molesting priests. The damages have already passed the one-billion-dollar mark and are expected to ultimately pass \$2 billion, to say nothing of the

costs that dioceses have been paying to lawyers to defend themselves.

The role of the bishops in the recent scandals has largely been to cover up child abuse by transferring abusing priests to new parishes and to resist the efforts of attorneys to obtain settlements for victims and to open up personnel records through the discovery process. This has inevitably brought the office of bishop into disrepute and has damaged, and in the eyes of many Catholics, destroyed the credibility of a large number of Catholic bishops.

In order to carry out his function as a pastor and teacher, a bishop must have credibility. The situation in the U.S. has reached the point where the *a priori* credibility of a person with the title of bishop has been severely damaged.

- In Florida, two successive bishops in one diocese have resigned after accusations of child abuse.
- In Massachusetts, a cardinal archbishop was forced to resign because of his infamous and repeated cover-ups of priests guilty of child abuse, later to be rewarded with a prestigious post in Rome.
- In California, a cardinal archbishop is accused of shielding child-molesting priests and sending one of them back to Mexico to avoid prosecution.
- In Pennsylvania, a grand jury report made it clear that only a limited statute of limitations saved a cardinal archbishop from indictment and possible incarceration.
- In Colorado, a bishop convinced the state legislature to kill a bill extending the statute of limitations for child molesters by falsely contending that it was intended as an attack on the Catholic Church.
- In Missouri, a bishop has decimated the lay organizations built up over decades to serve the people of the diocese so that he could gain total control over the diocese.
- In Nebraska, a bishop has refused to take any part in the national bishops' efforts to investigate child abuse and to devise methods to eliminate it; so far, he has received no resistance from his fellow bishops, as far as is known to the public.
- In New York, a group of priests of a major archdiocese have campaigned for a vote of no-confidence in the Cardinal Archbishop, characterizing his relationship with his priests as "defined by dishonesty, deception, disinterest, and disregard."
- In Illinois, a recent statement signed by a third of the priests of a diocese states that the recently appointed bishop "makes decisions without consultation, is unavailable for advice or discussion, and has an arrogant, off-putting manner." One priest said that the bishop's style "is often described by people as pretentious and arrogant, and it just drives them crazy. We have a difficult situation here and it's gotten more difficult from the beginning."

This is only a small sample of the kinds of abuses that have been perpetrated in recent years by American Catholic bishops.

A critical question to ask is: How did the Catholic Church in America become burdened with so many dysfunctional bishops? The vast majority of them were appointed by the recent Pope by a process in which the papal nuncio collects secret recommendations, mostly from American bishops, and then passes on a short list to a Vatican body that makes a selection and presents it to the Pope. The Pope would generally not have the slightest acquaintance with the candidate. The main criteria for selection would appear to have been not just the candidate's commitment to the promulgation and defense of the Catholic

Faith, but also an unwavering commitment to the policies of the Vatican Curia and little appetite for independent thinking and action. The evidence for this is that a significant number of American bishops have demonstrated that they are willing to protect the image and reputation of the Church at the expense of vast numbers of abused children. This situation raises the question of how this state of affairs is to be avoided in the future. To examine this question, we need to review the history of the selection and appointment of bishops in the Church from the earliest times forward.

### Ministry in the Early Church

The Church in the first century is best seen by considering the middle third of the century, following the death of Jesus, as separate from the final third, following the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the deaths of James, Peter, and Paul. (It appears that we know nothing for certain of what became of the rest of the Eleven and Matthias.) What we know about the Church in the middle third is contained in the authentic letters of Paul (1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, and Romans – the other six letters attributed to Paul are now widely believed to have been written in his name after his death). There is scant evidence in the Pauline letters that there was any office of what we would call a bishop during the middle third of the century. As leaders, Paul mentions apostles, prophets, and teachers. In any case, present-day scholars (including Raymond Brown and John Meier) find no convincing evidence for the existence of what we now know of as a bishop during the first three decades of the Church.

The principal writings of the last third of the century are the four Gospels (with the Acts of the Apostles) and what have been called the deuteropauline epistles. In the latter, the titles presbyter and bishop (*episkopos*) are used interchangeably, so the office of bishop as we know it is not yet well defined. Moreover, there is no evidence from the NT writings that bishops were consecrated by members of the Eleven or that Peter was a bishop in Rome or even that Rome had a single bishop/overseer until the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century at the earliest.

At the time of the letter of Clement of Rome to the church at Corinth in around the year 96, the leaders of the house churches appear to be referred to as presbyter/bishops. However, in the letters from Ignatius of Antioch to various churches between about 108 and 117, the office of bishop as we now know it began to be more clearly defined, primarily in the churches that Ignatius knew. For the next three centuries, the bishops of the local churches acted as independent leaders in communion with each other, and one of their main functions was to collaborate in the definition of the canonical scriptures and to combat various heresies. There is a clear tradition that the bishops were elected locally, or at least communally approved.

- In the letter of Clement (1 Clem. 44:3) he stated that the presbyters were to be appointed by men of good standing "with the consent of the whole Church."
- In the 15th chapter of the Didache it is stated that "You must, then, elect for yourselves bishops and deacons who are a credit to the Lord, men who are gentle, generous, faithful, and well tried."
- The Apostolic Tradition written by Hippolytus in Rome around A.D. 215 clearly emphasizes that bishops are to be elected by the whole people: "Let the bishop be ordained after he has been chosen by all the people."

- In the Apostolic Constitutions it is stated that "a man be consecrated bishop who is blameless in every respect and who is elected by the people."
- Cyprian of Carthage noted (Ep. 67, 5) that a bishop is instituted "in virtue of the vote of the whole brotherhood and of the judgment of the bishops."
- Thus, there can be no doubt that bishops were elected by all the people in the pre-Constantinian era.

### The Post-Constantinian Era

In 313 Constantine, who was at that time the emperor of the Western Roman Empire and Licinius, the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, issued the Edict of Milan, which made legitimate all religions of the Empire, especially Christianity. After that, the Church began to be increasingly integrated with the State, and the office of bishop assumed increasing political importance. As the prestige of the office increased, it became more and more coveted by the upper classes of the society, but the people continued to play an active part in the election of bishops. A famous case in point is the election of Ambrose by acclamation in Milan in 374. Later Pope Celestine (422-432) stated that "the one who is to be head over all should be elected by all." Additionally, he said "no one who is unwanted should be made a bishop; the desire and consent of the clergy and the people is required."

In a letter to Gaul, Pope Leo the Great (440-461) said "At the very least let no action be taken until the citizens have voted and the people given their testimony. And let the opinion of respected men be sought, along with the choice of the clerics. For these practices are customarily observed in the ordination of bishops by those who are acquainted with the rules of the fathers." At another time he said, "It is essential to exclude all those unwanted and unasked for, if the people are not to be crossed and end by despising or hating their bishop. If they cannot have the candidate they desire, the people may all turn away from religion unduly."

### The Church in the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages, feudal lords assumed increasing influence over the selection of bishops, because not only had bishops become rulers of territories and their attendant wealth, but they also exerted an inherent influence over the subjects of the various kingdoms. Therefore, the feudal lords wanted to have the bishops under their own dominion. They also wanted to be able to reward their relatives and people who had done services for them by putting them into the episcopal positions in their respective territories.

The reaction against the usurpation of the selection of bishops by feudal lords came in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Council of Rheims in 1049, presided over by Pope Leo IX, declared that "nobody should be promoted to government in the Church unless he has been elected by the clergy and the people." Gregory VII at the Synod of Rome in 1080 recalled that the canonical method of designating bishops was by election by the clergy and people, and the Lateran Council of 1123 declared that "nobody is to consecrate somebody who has not been elected canonically to the episcopate."

As time went on, the role of the people in the election of bishops diminished, and the elections devolved to the clergy in the towns of the cathedrals. This practice led to debates and conflicts over the qualifications of candidates and the rules of the

elections, and often there were appeals to the Pope to settle such disputes. Thus, the papacy became increasingly involved in the selection of bishops, and this culminated in the proclamation by Urban V in 1363 that he reserved the right to designate "patriarchs, archbishops, bishops, abbots, and abbesses throughout Christendom."

As reported by Jean Gaudemet, a professor at the University of Paris and an expert on canon law and medieval history (Concilium 1980/7), "The right to dispose of bishoprics allowed many peoples' appetites to be satisfied. The size of the revenues and the prestige of the title attracted many candidates. The popes could in this way gratify their families and familiars in the way that the feudal chiefs had formerly been able to do. And their own clientele was swollen by those of their entourage, and especially the cardinals who pressed the claims of their own dependents to the rich bishoprics. Princes, too, asked the pope to appoint their relatives, officers and counselors to benefices. The requirements of residence and therefore of the duties of bishops was interpreted widely, and this facilitated the disposal of bishoprics for personal ends. Further, the requests were only one side of the coin; profits were the other. From the middle of the thirteenth century onwards, the bishop had to make a financial contribution to the pope over and above the expenses of the chancellor, on the occasion of his confirmation or nomination .... which amounted to a third of the annual revenues of benefices. On top of this the papacy added the 'annates,' that is to say, the first year's revenues of benefices granted."

Gaudemet characterized the effects of the takeover by the papacy in the following way: "When the bishops were chosen by the [cathedral] chapter, often enough among his own people, he would usually come from the diocese. Entrusted with its care, he remained faithful to it, and the mystical marriage contracted on the occasion of his consecration hardly suffered any break. This is why he ruled so long, terminated only by the death of the prelate. When the bishop came to be nominated, the story was different. Chosen by the pope, the bishop often belonged to the latter's circle or to that of those who had petitioned on his behalf. The diocese to which he became assigned was often unknown to him, and even if he resided there he was not very attached to it. After a few years he would move on to another see, either at the will of the Holy See or at his own wish. Transfers, which are in principle contrary to the mystical bond between the bishop and his church and which was for long regarded as exceptional and unseemly, became the norm. Family reasons, the attraction of a more agreeable residence, or of a more profitable benefice, the proximity of princes or kings, dictated these changes. The interest of the faithful was no longer the governing factor in the development of episcopal careers which converged on Rome ... or Avignon."

It should be obvious that our present situation is strikingly similar to the one that existed in the Middle Ages.

### **The Post-Reformation Church**

The election of bishops vs. appointment by the pope was the subject of a prolonged and vigorous debate at the Council of Trent in 1563. The Council was held in an atmosphere influenced by the Lutheran reform, which held that the function of the ministry was to serve the Word of God as opposed to the Catholic position that the priesthood was "defined exclusively by its sacramental function seen as the power to consecrate the Eucharist and to absolve sins." (Jean Bernhard, Concilium, 1979) "It is obvious that

with a ministry interpreted in this way the laity have only an extremely limited role to play in the choice of their own bishops. The church's ministers, indeed, are not seen rising from the grassroots community but rather as descending to the community from on high."

A critical issue in the debate was the primacy of the bishops in council in relation to the primacy of the pope. The principal groups that were not able to agree were the respective delegations from France, Spain, Germany, and Italy. The latter wanted to preserve the prerogatives of the pope; the French wanted to have election of bishops by the clergy and thereby strengthen the authority of the bishops. The Spanish and certain ambassadors wanted to preserve the right of sovereigns to nominate bishops. The Germans argued that the cathedral chapters had the right to elect the diocesan bishop, "and the curia [in advising the pope] should not limit itself to making sure that the candidate was able to pay his nomination fee." In the end, the reformers failed to get what they wanted. The pope exerted pressure to essentially maintain the status quo, and the bishops fell into line.

### **The Church Today**

Papal appointment of bishops has remained the norm until the present, with some notable exceptions. The bishop of Basel in Switzerland is still elected by the cathedral chapter in that city. The first bishop of the U.S., John Carroll was elected by his fellow priests and appointed on the strength of this election by Pope Pius VI in 1789. This mode of selection has not been repeated since then, but this is purely a matter of papal discretion that could be changed at any time.

Any organization that requires administrative services and in which decisions have to be made must have a leadership structure. However, this need carries with it the danger that the leadership structure would develop into a power structure and the tendency of power to corrupt, in the words of Lord Acton. According to the author of the Gospel of Mark, Jesus recognized this when he told his disciples "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But, it is not so among you; whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave to all." (Mk10: 42-44)

Recently, the overall performance of the Catholic bishops, especially in regard to the clergy-abuse crisis, is widely seen as unacceptable. For the most part in recent years they have been chosen from the ranks of canon lawyers and administrators, rather than pastors. Small dioceses are treated as "farm teams" to supply bishops to larger dioceses. This practice carries with it several serious problems. The first is that a bishop thereby becomes accountable and responsible only to the hierarchical structure above him, rather than to the priests and people in his diocese. The results of this shift of loyalty are obvious in the ways that bishops have covered up abuses by priests in our ongoing national scandal.

Another consequence of this practice is that it sets up a career ladder. This has the tendency to divert priests from pastoral work, which is supposed to be their primary vocation, toward climbing up the ranks of prestige and power. The corrupting influences of this process are plain for all to see. The people of God are clearly not being well served by this abandonment of the tradition of the marriage of a bishop to his diocese. This

unacceptable state of affairs is likely to continue as long as the relatively recent practice of appointing bishops from the Vatican continues. In the present time of many social, political, moral, and national problems, it is vital that the bishops of the U.S. regain their former credibility and position of respect. It is highly unlikely that this will happen until the Church in the U.S. returns to the traditional method of local election of bishops.

### Summary and Recommendation

It is clear that for more than half of the history of the Catholic Church bishops have been elected in their dioceses. Therefore, there is no fundamental reason why the present system must continue; this is purely an administrative issue, not a theological issue. Returning to the traditional method would not solve all the problems of the Catholic Church; elections never guarantee perfect results. However, returning to the practice of election of bishops would be the single most effective way to assure the accountability of bishops to their dioceses and to restore the credibility to the office.

This kind of change can come at a stroke if initiated from Rome, but that is not likely to happen unless the desire for change is manifest from the faithful at large. Thus, the primary short-term goal is to convince the faithful that such a change is not only desirable, but that it is consistent with the long-standing traditions of the Church.

What has already been done is obviously possible. It is likely that the change will be initiated in some American diocese that decides that it will accept only a bishop whom it has elected. This will take the action of the priests and the support of the people of the diocese. The purpose of ARCC is to bring about structural change in the Church. One of the three main goals of Voice of the Faithful is also for structural change in the Church. The role of ARCC and VOTF should be to get this process in motion.

Charles McMahon

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