

**BISHOP RUBIN'S PRESS CONFERENCE
ON THE
PREPARATIONS FOR THE EPISCOPAL SYNOD¹**

On 21 May the Secretary General of the Episcopal Synod, H. E. Most Rev. Wladyslaw Rubin, titular Bishop of Serta, gave a conference to journalists at the Press Office of the Holy See on the preparation of the second General Assembly of the Synod, which will open on 30 September next. The text of Bishop Rubin's report is as follows.

Activities of the General Secretariat of the Synod

1. The General Secretariat of the Synod, enlarged in accordance with the proposal of the last Extraordinary Assembly in 1969, approved by the Sovereign Pontiff and comprising the Council composed of 15 Fathers, began preparation of the forthcoming Synod Assembly from its very first meeting in May 1970.

At the meeting various problems were tackled regarding the course of the work of the Synod Assembly, how, for example, to make the debates more effective, to conclude the discussions with a final document, to outline a panorama of the present state of the Church in order to be able to detect the most important and urgent problems, which can form the subject-matter of a subsequent Synod.

In this way continuity and programming of the subjects to be examined at meetings of the Synod, are ensured.

According to the proposal of the last Synod Assembly the Secretariat of the Synod was to circularize the Episcopal Conferences, asking them to indicate what subjects-in their opinion-were most urgent. From the series of subjects indicated, the Secretariat was to select some, more urgent and universal, to submit to the Sovereign Pontiff so that he could determine

¹ Osservatore Romano, June 3, 1971.

the ones that would constitute the object of discussion at the forthcoming Assembly of the Synod.

On the basis of talks with the Bishops and of the documents and the desires of various Episcopal Conferences, the Holy Father, convening the forthcoming General Assembly, proposed the subject of the ministerial Priesthood. Furthermore, through the Secretariat of the Synod, he asked the Episcopal Conferences to indicate other possible subjects.

The Episcopal Conferences — in addition to expressing unanimous agreement and a deep sense of gratitude to the Sovereign Pontiff for the choice of the ministerial priesthood as subject — suggested many others. Among the latter a certain number had the approval of many Conferences. At the October session, the Council of the Secretariat of the Synod, after a careful examination of the answers given by the Episcopal Conferences, chose a group of subjects to be submitted to the Pope. His Holiness decided that the second subject to be added to the one on the ministerial priesthood would be "justice in the world".

The subjects having been chosen, the immediate preparation was begun.

2. There is a rich documentation on the priesthood. In the first place, the conciliar and pontifical documents; then the proposal and observations of the Episcopal Conferences; and finally the document drawn up by the International Theological Commission.

On the basis of these documents, the Council of the Secretariat of the Synod drew up a short text in which, by and large, the main points of the subject were indicated. Subsequently the Commission specially formed to prepare the document that was to serve as a working paper for the Episcopal Conferences and for the Synod, drew up a draft which, after further examination by the Council of the Secretariat of the Synod, was finalized by a group of theologians. Approved by the Pope as a study document, it was sent to all the Bishops.

On the basis of this document, the Bishops were to consult their priests, and consult one another within their own Episcopal Conferences in order to supply directives to the Bishops designated to take part in the Assembly of the Synod, as representatives of the world Episcopate.

3. The second subject — justice in the world — was chosen by the Pope, as we said, only after the meeting of the Council of the Secretariat of the Synod, which took place in October 1970. Its elaboration necessarily began later than that of the first subject. For this reason, it was sent to the world Episcopate about two months after the first one.

The elaboration of this subject was as follows. A rough draft was made before the meeting of the Council, which took place in the month of May. Naturally both the suggestions of the Episcopal Conferences that indicated the subject, and the proposals of some Bishops, as well as those of experts specially consulted were taken into account. From study of the subject by members of the Secretariat and some specialists, an abundant material emerged which was used in drawing up the document of the special Commission, constituted during the last meeting of the Council last January.

In its final form, the document was sent to the Bishops. Also this document on justice — like the one on the priesthood — is a background document, or rather a working paper, offered to the Bishops to study the subject which is on the agenda of the forthcoming Assembly of the Synod. They are necessarily documents that consider the subjects in general and are therefore incomplete. We wish to stress that they are documents to stimulate thought and call for a contribution, an integration from the Episcopal Conferences, which will enrich them with the experiences and needs that emerge in their various churches. In this way the ecclesial community and the principle of collegiality will have their expression and deep and fruitful significance.

PRESENTATION OF THE DOCUMENTS

A) DOCUMENT ON THE MINISTERIAL PRIESTHOOD

The subject of the ministerial priesthood is such a vast one that it can be considered from different points of view. To have useful guidelines, it was thought advisable, during the preparatory work, to offer a general view of the problem with the selection of some particular aspects. The method seemed to us best suited to the character and aims of the Synod Assembly.

The document, therefore, is divided into three parts, connected by an internal harmoniousness and a logical development: the introductory statement, the doctrinal and the practical part with the indication of some problems.

1. *Introductory statement*

The introductory statement describes the situation in which the priest lives and acts today. This situation is characterized by some phenomena, particularly secularization, which influence the identity of the Church and therefore, as a consequence, also the identity of the priests. The latter often feels confused, as it were, and perhaps also frustrated. Uncertainty or crisis invests his identity, his ontological and sacramental nature. There are priests who wish to obtain some professional qualifications or engage in social and political activities; priests who no longer distinguish clearly enough a Catholic priest from a minister of another religious denomination and layman; priests who no longer grasp the difference between ministerial priesthood and the common priesthood of the faithful, priests who wish to get the heart of problems of the world and to conform with the way of life of the people.

The Church must meet this situation. She wishes to tackle it through the Synod, undertaking to declare what the priestly ministry is according to the perennial faith of the Church, recently confirmed by Vatican II.

2. *Doctrinal section*

The programme and task of the forthcoming Synod Assembly is therefore to set out precisely the faith of the Church on the priestly ministry. The Church's answer is clear: the "reality" of the priestly ministry has been given to the Church in the mystery of Christ and flows from divine revelation, as the latter is manifested in the Scriptures understood according to the tradition of the Church.

According to these sources, the priestly ministry is not just a historical institution, but is an essential element that belongs to the economy of salvation. It is based on the "reality" of the eschatological mystery of Christ and on his historical decision to make his apostles and their successors participate in the latter. The Church discovered its loftiness and its full sense gradually; its novelty transcends all human ways. It is for the magisterium alone to declare authentically what the ministerial priesthood is according to the faith of the Church.

The ministerial priesthood has the archetype and the principle of the mission entrusted by the Father to Christ. Historically it has its origin in the mission of the apostles. From her beginnings the Church was aware of the priestly ministry. The way to become participants in the consecration and mission of Christ the head of her body is the sacramental gift of the Spirit, received by the imposition of hands. Priestly consecration is seen, therefore, as an action of the Spirit through which is conferred a "reality" that is continually permanent, even if the one who has received it should become unworthy.

Consecration is a sign of peculiar divine possession and of conformation to Christ the servant of God and shepherd. The hierarchical priesthood differs essentially, and not only in degree from the common priesthood of the faithful, given by God by means of baptism. Only the ministerial priesthood confers the faculty of acting in the person of Christ the head, so that the Christian promoted to priestly ordination participates personally in Christ's priesthood, representing Christ himself, in the community and before it, inasmuch as he is the head of the community.

It follows that the priestly ministry is not a mere function or a community exercise *ad tempus*, nor just a certain "presidency", far less can it be considered a spiritualization of worldly structures. Destined to represent Christ the head and shep-

herd by a permanent ontological reality, the priest has the specific mission of announcing, with eschatological force, Christ the saviour of the world, in order that he may gather the brotherhood of mankind in the eucharistic sacrifice and lead them through Christ, in the Spirit, to the Father.

He must also manifest the principle of identity and unity of the Church in communion with the other priests under the guidance of the Bishop. At this point comes the subject of celibacy. The document, confirming the doctrine of Vatican II, exalts its opportuneness and aims, recalling that it is a question of a free choice, that it respects the dignity of the person in that no one is obliged to undertake the ministry. Subsequent abandonment of celibacy is considered an act of infidelity in itself, and appeal is made to the practice of the Oriental Church, according to which unmarried men who have received ordination are never allowed to marry without having to cease exercising the ministry.

3. *Practical problems*

The problems examined are universal even if they do not always appear in the same degree of intensity or cannot be solved in the same perspectives. Of the many, some have been chosen, the solution of which largely depends on the doctrinal principles set forth in the second part, that is: problems connected with the nature of the priestly ministry and its specific mission, with the community action of the Church and the spiritual life of pastors, with the relationships between priesthood and celibacy and finally those connected with the "style" of life of priests. A synthesis follows.

The priestly ministry is unfolded in specific activities. First of all in the *ministry of the word*, that is, the preaching of the Gospel of salvation, the announcement in the Spirit of the admirable deeds carried out by God and the calling of men to participate in the paschal mystery. In order that Christ's example may be reproduced, it is necessary to propose the Gospel according to the character of the listeners, their conditions and their necessities.

The manifestation of the ministry of salvation is the purpose of the *missionary task of the Church*. Today missionary

impetus has slowed down considerably. To remedy this, deeper faith is needed and more heartfelt appreciation of the goods offered to men by faith and in the Church.

It is the right of the faithful that priests should celebrate *the sacraments*, for them and with them. The ministers must exhort them to receive them with due preparation. The faith of the faithful must be purified of all magical concepts of the sacraments, but no one should be denied them when he can receive them with fruit. Care must be taken to avoid pushing into the background the peculiar efficacy of the sacraments, and attributing exclusive importance to the profession of faith or personal response. Two dangers are to be avoided: conceiving the Church as the assembly of the perfect and depriving her of her own identity.

With regard to *reconciling the ministry with other activities in the temporal community*, the following points must be kept in mind: real safeguarding of the exercise of the ministry (the priest must be free from everything that prevents the ministry or makes it difficult); the priesthood is not just a profession, but a sign of unity. When called upon to make choice or express technical judgment, let the priest do so in a personal way and with discretion, also consulting the Bishop, in weightier matters. It seems advisable that the priest should not become involved as an active militant in the cause of any political faction. Whatever the criteria may be, it must be recognized that the priesthood is not a certain additional activity, but the very heart of the Christian existence of the priest.

The community consciousness of the Church entails the development of *an organic apostolate*, unitary and global. Any activity that conflicts with this requirement greatly disturbs the faithful.

In every diocese the priests, including religious, make up one presbytery, together with the Bishop. This does not mean a levelling of authority or the acceptance of the majority principle in the solution of problems. The relations between priests and Bishops must be seen in the framework of spiritual communion, where words such as "friendship, cooperation, brotherhood" find their full meaning. In this context the golden norm of the early Church, "nothing without the Bishop", can be understood. Priestly associations are to be encouraged:

but difficulties are created by those constituted independently of the Bishop and taking on the appearance of a kind of defence group of their own rights against the Bishop.

In the *relations between priests and laymen*, it is necessary to have clear ideas, to distinguish the specific activities of laymen, which are exercised under the guidance of the authority of the Church and those which, on the contrary, are exercised as a participation in the hierarchical ministry and are therefore directly subject to the Church authority; and finally temporal activities in which the authority of the Church is exercised in a more distant way.

With regard to the spiritual life of pastors, the following fundamental points are emphasized: objective participation in the sacred authority requires that the priest should be assimilated to the internal dispositions of the Word Incarnate, including humiliation and *kenosis*; the priest's spirituality is centered on the Eucharist, associated with prayer, spiritual ascetism, confession, poverty and the other virtues clearly indicated.

A careful consideration of the priest's role and ministry leads to the conclusion that the reasons for conferring the priesthood only on those who accept the *charism of celibacy*, are still valid. Pastoral problems, however, including the shortage of priests, raise the question if it is not opportune to think of promoting to the priesthood, in some particular cases, men of mature age, whose family and professional life is above reproach. The solution cannot disregard the general good of the whole Church.

From the principle that the priest is the peculiar sign of Christ's presence in the Church and in the world, consequences can be drawn regarding the priest's way of behaving, his style. While it is not possible to establish a priori forms, it will be necessary to reflect on the community sense, the opportuneness of common life, evangelical poverty, the priest's remuneration, assistance for old and sick priests. Thought will also have to be given to the necessity of adequate preparation of the clergy, to its specialization and continual formation in three fields: intellectual, spiritual and pastoral.

B) DOCUMENT ON "JUSTICE IN THE WORLD"

First of all a few words could be said on the close relationship of this subject with the first one. The priest's activity takes place in the world, and though it is of the spiritual order, it cannot disregard problems that are fundamental for the society in which the priest is carrying out his mission. The main problem of society today, which contemporary man experiences, is the problem of justice between men and between nations. It can be said that this is a central problem of the present period, of history. There is a close bond, therefore, between the mission of the priest, who proclaims the good news, and the life of the men whom he addresses, since the latter aspire, today more than ever, to building a world based on justice.

Drawing up this document, the Commission took as its starting point certain situations that are noted in the life of today. In spite of enormous technical progress, a great many injustices exist, while on the other hand there is growing awareness of the value of the human person and of the dignity of the nations which was not fully appreciated up to a short time ago. For this reason, the men of today are very sensitive to all forms of injustice, discrimination, oppression, persecution of individuals and communities, and of whole nations. But above all those who are most sensitive to the various forms of injustice are the young, who reject everything that does not, in their opinion, make man free from every form of oppression.

After this preliminary affirmation, the document offers a description of the state of injustice in the world, stressing, first of all the growing awareness of human rights in the various forms of life in the contemporary world. The text is along the lines of *Populorum Progressio* stressing the right of every man and every people to complete human development.

While on the one hand awareness is growing of the rights and the dignity of the human person, on the other hand humanity suffer. These injustices have their origin in political, cultural and economic domination. The document points out various forms, stressing the growing inequality between the pri-

vileged minorities and the rest of men, obliged to live in a state of dependency, injurious to the dignity of persons and of whole nations. For methodological reasons these forms of injustice are not studied thoroughly. Since it is a text of introduction to study, it has been preferred to leave a broad margin of thought and contribution to the individual Episcopal Conferences.

Certainly, there is no lack of efforts to make the world a more just place; the document notes this and praises those responsible. Then, too, the Church is also questioning herself to examine her commitment in the service of men.

For this reason, the most important part of the document is dedicated to a study of justice in the world in the light of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church.

From the document as a whole it emerges that the prerequisite for the promotion of true justice is a *change of heart*. For this reason the document stresses the importance of education geared to commitment and to action. The type of education for which the Church appeals, as a *necessary* instrument to implement justice, is education that prepares for participation in the construction of a more human world, that will train men for a commitment to work for justice. Here the document appeals for the *metanoia* that transforms hearts, for systems of education that express our values, promoting, animating and raising up communities of brotherly participation, relations based on mutual exchange, acts that can testify to the friendship existing between these communities, straining to reach an overall justice.

This education is based on a Christian vision of man and humanity: a vision that comprises human dignity, freedom and the universal brotherhood of the human family and that indicates the meaning of projects that men formulate for earthly life.

These values must lead to choice in the name of justice. Education to justice, therefore, must help everyone to make free, conscious choice, the fruit of personal reflection, based on experience of life in the concrete.

In particular the document appeals to the young who, in view of their peculiar sensitiveness, can give a useful impetus to the construction of a more just world. It exhorts them, however, not to forget that violence generates destruction, while the building up of a more just world calls for competence, adequate means, the spirit of sacrifice, mutual understanding and collaboration.

From the standpoint of pastoral action, the most important part is the last one, because it contains some practical indications that the Synod is called to study and suggest.

First of all it will have to consider the deplorable fact that the Christian social message is not adequately known everywhere or put into practice by Christian communities. Then it will have to conceive Christians that it is not enough to speak about justice but that it is necessary to implement it at various levels.

It will then have to ask for a new effort for effective education in the practice of justice, and finally propose and stimulate some concrete actions of solidarity in favour of justice in the world.

The document concludes with the hope that man created by God, redeemed by Jesus Christ, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, confirming the human values of dignity and brotherhood may promote justice in the world.

EPISCOPAL ORDINATION ANNIVERSARIES

Let us pray for our Bishops on the occasion of their ordination anniversaries.

1. Most Rev. Teodulfo Domingo July 2, 1957.
2. Most Rev. Carmelo Morelos July 5, 1967.
3. Most Rev. Juan Sison July 25, 1947.
4. Most Rev. Alejandro Olalia July 25, 1949.
5. Most Rev. Manuel del Rosario July 25, 1955.
6. Most Rev. Pedro Bantigue July 25, 1961.
7. Most Rev. Antonio Mabutas July 27, 1961.