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THE REFORMED ORDINATION RITE FOR BISHOPS

• **H. J. GRAF, S. V. D.**

I. Introduction

In order to demonstrate the dignity of the episcopal office, the ordination rites for bishops had become longer and longer in the course of time, and at the same time ever more complicated. Thus a simplification of these ceremonies was overdue. After Vatican II gave us a true theology of the episcopate this aim could be more easily achieved.

Anticipating the doctrine of collegiality the Constitution on the Liturgy decided that the ordination of a bishop should become a true manifestation of this doctrine (art. 76). Not only the two co-consecrators were in future to place their hands on the head of the bishop-elect, but all bishops present at the celebration. The Rite to be observed in the Concelebration of Mass of March 7, 1965 contained already a section with detailed prescriptions for the concelebration of holy Mass when a bishop is ordained: no special chapel was to be prepared for the bishop-elect; the prescriptions concerning the oath had been adapted; the postulation and the reading of the apostolic mandate were transferred to the beginning of the ordination rites,¹ and rules for the vesting of the candidate and the co-consecrators were given. Further adaptations of this ordination rite were issued by the Congregation

¹ *Ibid.*, art. 122-125.

of Rites on July 17, 1965. All these regulations were already incorporated into the book "The Rites of Ordination and Episcopal Consecration."² This was a first official text; it had the confirmation of the Apostolic See (July 14, 1967) and has been used subsequently also in the Philippines. These changes anticipated a number of the reforms of the new ordination rite for bishops, published by the Vatican in December 1968.

Only after the Gospel of the Mass the ordination begins; it is concluded before offertory. This avoids the former fragmentation of rites. In order to stress the unity of the sacrament of holy Orders the whole celebration is called "ordination". Also the structure of the ceremonies is much like that of the ordination of priests and deacons, however with appropriate changes.

As bishops, the two co-consecrators are now mere assistants of the bishop-elect who is still a simple priest. Two priests are in future to fulfil this task, preferably two of the diocesan presbyterium of the future bishop.³ They should be at the side of the bishop-elect during the ordination rites and should afterwards concelebrate during the Eucharistic celebration, so that the new bishop is surrounded during this Mass not only by the bishops with whom he forms the "ordo Episcoporum," but also by his co-workers, the priests. In this way bishops and priests manifest together before all the faithful that "they share in one and the same priesthood and ministry of Christ."⁴ Also the simple priests "participate in and exercise with the bishop the *one* priesthood of Christ and are thereby meant to be prudent cooperators of the episcopal order."⁵

If the episcopal ordination takes place in a church that belongs to the diocese of the bishop-elect (not necessarily his future cathedral, but any church within the territory of his jurisdiction), the principal consecrator can invite the new bishop to act as main celebrant in the Eucharistic celebration from the offertory on. This is an extension of

² Washington 1967. 78 pp.

³ Cf. Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life, art. 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, art. 7.

⁵ Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office, art. 28.

The principal consecrator asks in turn:

Do you have the apostolic mandate?

The priest who made the request, replies:

We have it.

The principal consecrator, wanting the document to be made known to all present, answers:

¡Then let it be read!

It is the Church, the holy people of God, that asks for a shepherd. The pastoral need, the service of the people was the reason why Christ instituted the hierarchy in the Church. The people hear now this document and when it has been read they give in their reply (Thanks be to God) or in some other way, according to local customs, their assent to the choice made by the Pope. If this consent is to mean something, then the document should be read in the vernacular, so that everybody present can also understand.

2. Instruction

Instead of the usual homily of the Mass the principal consecrator addresses now the people and the clergy, and in the second part of his sermon, the bishop-elect. First he explains the position and the role of the bishop in the Catholic Church; then he speaks to the candidate on his future duties.

The consecrating prelate may use the new model address of the Pontifical, or may also (preferably) speak freely, out of the fullness of his heart on the same topics. Once again we see that the text, provided for in the new Pontifical, is strongly influenced by the Constitution on the Church of Vatican II, following in general articles 19-21, but also by the Degree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office, the Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church, and occasionally by the Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life and the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World. There was certainly no Council before Vatican II that spoke so extensively on the role and the office of the bishop.

by the concelebrating bishops and last of all comes the principal consecrator, proceeding between two deacons.

The first part of the Mass is as usual. The lessons may be freely chosen, in part or in whole from the Mass of the day or from among the readings of the Appendix of the new Pontifical. No Creed is said nor a Prayer of the Faithful.

During the liturgy of the word and the ordination rites the consecrating prelate takes the episcopal cathedra. The co-consecrators sit next to the cathedra, on either side. The bishop-elect has a place in the sanctuary, so that he can easily be seen by all, but also in such a way that he and his assistants do not obstruct the view of the people.

The ordination should be held at the cathedra; pastoral reasons, however, especially the active participation of the people will frequently suggest another place: in front of the altar or some other suitable place.

III. The Ordination Rites

The singing of the "Veni creator Spiritus" (standing throughout) or of any other suitable hymn, also in the vernacular, marks the beginning of the ordination proper after the Gospel. The consecrator and his two assistants take their seats, prepared for the ordination rites.

1. Presentation of the Bishop-elect

One of the priests, as the representative of the presbyterium from which the elect has been chosen, and whose head he is to be in the future, addresses the principal consecrator:

Most Reverend Father, the Church of N. requests that you ordain the priest N.N. for the office of bishop.

If the candidate is not to be a residential bishop, but an auxiliary, vicar apostolic, prelate ordinary, etc., the question is the following:

Most Reverend Father, our holy mother the Catholic Church requests that you ordain the priest N.N. for the office of bishop.

the rule laid down in the Instruction of the Congregation of Rites of June 21, 1968⁶ which states that if a bishop only assists at the Mass of a simple priest, he has to lead the liturgy of the word; from the offertory on the simple priest may take over as celebrant of the Mass. The reason for this way of celebrating Mass is the fact that that bishops are "authentic teachers;" the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place among their duties.⁷

Outside his own territory the newly-ordained bishop is to remain one of the concelebrants of the subsequent Mass; the consecrating prelate is also the principal celebrant of the whole Mass. But in this case the new bishop is to get the place of honor at the right side of the principal celebrant. This is the revival of an ancient practice at the Church of Rome. The *Ordo romanus* 34 says that after the ordination "jubet eum dominus apostolicus super omnes episcopos sedere."⁸

II. The Liturgy of the Word

Fully vested for the celebration of holy Mass the consecrating prelate, the concelebrating bishops and priests enter the church in procession. The bishop-elect wears already the pectoral cross and under his chasuble the dalmatic. But he may, for a "rationabilis causa" refrain from using the dalmatic. The reason may be the hot or damp climate or poor health.⁹

If one of the co-consecrating bishops does not want to concelebrate in the subsequent Mass he takes only the rochet, amice, pectoral cross, stole, cope and mitre. If the priests who assist the bishop-elect do not concelebrate they are to wear a cope.

The entrance procession proceeds as usual; after the subdeacon carrying the Gospel book come the priests as representatives of the presbyterium, who concelebrate in the ordination Mass. They are followed by the bishop-elect flanked by his assistants. The next place is taken

⁶ Instr. "Pontificales ritus", n. 24.

⁷ Const. on the Church, art. 25; Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office, art. 12.

⁸ M. Andrieu, *Las Ordines romani du haut moyen—age*. Vol. III, p. 613, n. 42.

⁹ Instruction "Pontificales ritus", n. 17.

The text, newly formulated, is a real improvement, compared with the allocution of the former consecration ritual for a bishop:

Dearly beloved people!

Consider carefully the position in the Church to which our brother is about to be promoted. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was sent by the Father to redeem the human race, sent in turn twelve apostles into the world (Jn 20, 21). These men were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit (cf. Lk 24, 49; Acts 1, 4; 2, 16 f) so that they might preach the word of God and gather every race and people into a single flock to be guided and governed in the way of holiness. But their role was to continue to the end of time. So the apostles selected helpers for themselves and passed on to them the gift of the Holy Spirit they had received from Christ, by an imposition of hands which confers the sacrament of orders in its fullness. In that way by a succession of bishops unbroken from one generation to the next, the powers conferred in the beginning were handed down and the work of the Savior lives and grows in our own time.¹⁰

In the person of the bishop surrounded by his priests, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is High Priest for ever, is present among you. In the ministry of the bishop, Christ himself continues to proclaim the word of God and to unfold the mysteries of faith to those who believe. In the paternal functions of the bishop, Christ adds to his body and incorporates new members in it. In the bishop's wisdom and prudence Christ guides you in your earthly pilgrimage toward eternal happiness.¹¹

Take to yourselves therefore in a thankful and happy spirit our brother whom we bishops make a colleague in our order by laying hand on him. Respect him as a minister of Christ and a steward entrusted with the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4, 1). He has been assigned to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel (cf. Col 1, 5), as well as to minister the Spirit and God's power to make men just (2 Cor. 3, 8 f). Remember the word of Christ which he addressed

¹⁰ Const. on the Church, art. 19 and 20.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, art. 21.

to the apostles: "Whoever listens to you listens to me; and those who reject me; reject the one who sent me" (Lk 10, 16).¹²

You, beloved brother,

have been chosen by the Lord. Reflect on the fact that you have been taken from among men and appointed to act for men in their relations with God (Hb 5, 1). The title of bishop derives not from his rank but from his duty, and it is the part of the bishop to serve rather than to rule. Such is the counsel of the Master that the most important should behave as if he were the least, and the leader as if he were the one who serves (Lk 22, 26). Proclaim the message whether it be welcome or unwelcome; correct error with the greatest patience and in a spirit of teaching (2 Tim 4, 2). Make it your business to pray and offer sacrifices for the people committed to your care and so draw every kind of grace for them from the overflowing holiness of Christ.¹³

As a steward of the mysteries of Christ (1 Cor 4, 1) in the Church assigned to you, be a faithful supervisor and guardian. Since you are chosen by the Father to rule over his family, be mindful always of the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and is known by them (Jn 10, 14) and who did not hesitate to lay off his life for his sheep (Jn 10, 15).

Love with a charity of a father and brother all those whom God places in your care, the priests and deacons who are partners with you in the ministry of Christ, the poor and the infirm as well, and also strangers and aliens.¹⁴ Encourage the faithful to work with you in your apostolic task and do not refuse to listen to them willingly. Never relax in your concern for those who do not belong as yet to the one fold of Christ (cf. Jn 10, 16), since they are commended to you in the Lord. Never forget that the Catholic Church is made

¹² Ibid., art. 21, second part.

¹³ On this last sentence cf. Const. on the Church, art. 26.

¹⁴ Cf. Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life, art. 17; Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office, art. 16 and 18.—Since the same references come up once again in the subsequent examination, they will be mentioned there in full.

one by the bond of charity and that you are joined to the collegiate body of bishops. You will consequently maintain a deep concern for all the churches (cf. 2 Cor 11, 28) and gladly come to the aid and support of churches in need. Give your attention therefore to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit appoints you an overseer of the assembly of God (cf. Acts 20, 28) — in the name of the Father whose image you personify in the Church¹⁵ — and in the name of the Son Jesus Christ whose triple role of Teacher, Priest and Pastor you undertake¹⁶ — and in the name of the Holy Spirit who gives life to the Church of Christ¹⁷ and supports our weakness with his power (cf. Rom 8, 26).

3. Examination

In the former consecration rite for bishops the examination of the bishop-elect had its place before the Mass, where it was the dominant part of the celebration. Now it has been shortened considerably. No questions about the faith of the bishop are asked; he is now nearly exclusively questioned about his willingness to fulfill the duties of his future office. The introduction alludes in the first words to the former text "Antiqua sanctorum Patrum"; its content, however, is entirely different. The people, so the consecrating prelate states, have a right to know about the candidate's willingness to keep the faith and to discharge his duties. For the questioning the bishop-elect rises and stands before the principal consecrator who questions him. The former prescription about the awkward rising and sitting, and the removal of the biretta has been dropped in the rite.

An age-old custom of the Fathers decrees that bishop-elect is to be questioned before the people on his resolve to keep the faith and to discharge his duties.

Beloved brother,
are you resolved by the grace of the Holy Spirit to discharge to

¹⁵ S. Ignatius of Ant., ep. to the Trallians 3, 1.

¹⁶ Const. on the Church, art. 21 (end).

¹⁷ Const. on the Church, art. 48.

the end of your life the office entrusted to us by the apostles which is about to be passed on to you by imposition of our hands?

The candidate answers:

I am.

Vatican II declared that "among the principal duties of bishops the preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place. For bishops are preachers of the faith who lead new disciples to Christ. They are authentic teachers."¹⁸ The Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office finds it necessary to repeat this statement.¹⁹ In view of this insistence we understand more easily the next question:

Are you resolved to be faithful and constant in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ?

The candidate replies:

I am.

As successors of the Apostle who stand in direct line of the apostolic succession the bishops have to take care of preserving the content of faith. St. Irenaeus testified to this already at the end of the second century: "Through those who were appointed bishops by the Apostles, and through their successors down to our time the apostolic tradition is manifested and preserved throughout the world."²⁰ The bishop-elect declares his readiness to take his place in this line of bishops and to be faithful in the task it involves:

Are you resolved to maintain the content of faith, entire and uncorrupted, as handed down by the Apostles and professed by the Church at all times and places?

I am.

Even to simple priests Vatican II attributed the task "to make the universal Church visible in their own locality and lend their full assistance

¹⁸ Const. on the Church, art. 25.

¹⁹ Art. 12.—The same is stressed in the Const. on the Church, art. 21, 24 and 27.

²⁰ Const. on the Church, art. 20.

to the upbuilding of the whole body of Christ (cf. Eph 4, 12).” In doing so they take upon themselves actually the bishop’s “duties and concerned.”²¹ In view of this fact we understand better the question:

Are you resolved to build up the Church as the body of Christ and to remain united to it by your link with the order of bishops under the authority of the successor of Saint Peter the Apostle?

I am.

The second half of the previous question is based on the fact of collegiality of bishops and the primacy of Bishop of Rome. It is true that a man becomes bishop by the ordination rite; but he is allowed to exercise his episcopal office only “in hierarchical communion with the head and the members of the (episcopal) college.”²² The role of the successor of Peter is unique in the “ordo Episcoporum” which is stressed in the following question:

Are you resolved to be loyal in your obedience to the successor of Saint Peter the Apostle?

I am.

The up-building of the local church of which the bishop is the visible principle and foundation of unity,²³ cannot be achieved by the bishop alone. The service of the Christian community must be undertaken by the bishop together with his helpers, the priests and deacons.²⁴ Together, bishop, priests and deacons serve the holy people of God. Deacons and priests are the bishop’s co-workers. Consequently, he should consider the priests who share with him “in one and the same priesthood and ministry of Christ,”²⁵ “as sons and friends, just as Christ called his disciples no longer servants but friends (cf. Jn 15, 15).”²⁶

²¹ Const. on the Church, art. 28.

²² Ibid., art. 21.

²³ Ibid., art. 23.

²⁴ Ibid., art. 20.—Decree on the Bishops’ Pastoral Office, art. 15.

²⁵ Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life, art. 7.

²⁶ Const. on the Church, art. 28.

There are serious reasons for this attitude because the priests "assume in part the bishop's duties and cares and carry the weight of them day by day with all zeal."²⁷ In an atmosphere of trusting familiarity with his priests, in genuine wisdom and prudence the bishop is "to direct and guide the people of the New Testament in its pilgrimage toward eternal happiness."²⁸ These thoughts find expression in the question:

Are you resolved as a devoted father to sustain the people of God in cooperation with the priests and deacons who share your ministry and to guide them in their way to salvation?

I am.

The following question shows that the tasks of the bishop are a *service* to all men, particularly to the poor. The aspect of service is frequently stressed in the Council documents.²⁹ Especially those who need help most, are recommended to the bishop's care. "Both priests and bishops will avoid all those things which can offend the poor in any way."³⁰ The bishop "should manifest his concern for all, no matter what their age, condition or nationality, be they natives, strangers or foreigners."³¹ He should show special concern "for those among the faithful who, on account of their way or condition of life, cannot sufficiently make use of the common and ordinary pastoral services of parish priests or are quite cut off from them. Among this group are the very many migrants, exiles and refugees, seamen, airplane personnel, gypsies and others of this kind."³² A bishop must not be content to name a priest for these tasks. He ought to take a personal interest. All these obligations are called to the candidate's attention when he is asked:

Are you resolved to show kindness and compassion in the name of the Lord to the poor and to strangers and to all who are in need?

I am.

²⁷ Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office, art. 16.

²⁸ Const. on the Church, art. 21.

²⁹ Ibid., art. 20, 21 and 24.—Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office, art. 16.

³⁰ Decree on the Priestly Ministry and Life, art. 17.

³¹ Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office, art. 16.

³² Ibid., art. 18.

In an unmistakable way the last Council showed that a bishop has an obligation toward the *whole* Church, even the whole of mankind, i.e. for the evangelization of those who do not yet know Christ.³³ He has also to be concerned of those who, though knowing Christ, are not members of the Church in the full sense. He should "deal lovingly with the separated brethren, urging the faithful also to conduct themselves with great kindness and charity in their regard, and fostering ecumenism as it is understood by the Church."³⁴ This prescription inspired the following question:

Are you resolved as a good shepherd to seek out the sheep who stray and to gather them into the fold of the Lord?

I am.

A bishop's lot is work; but he must also, according to the word of the Lord "always pray" (Lk 18, 1). In doing he only imitates our High Priest in heaven "who lives forever to plead with God" (Hb 7, 25). "By thus praying and laboring for the people, bishops channel the fullness of Christ's holiness in many ways and abundantly" upon their flocks.³⁵ The bishop-elect declares his readiness to do this when he is asked:

Are you resolved to pray without ceasing for the people of God and to carry out the duties of the high priesthood in such a way as to afford no ground for reproof?

I am.

The principal consecrator, knowing from his own life as bishop, how difficult it is to put these good resolutions into practice, concludes the questioning with the good wish:

May God who began the good work in you bring it to fulfillment.

To be continued

³³ Const. on the Church, art. 23.—Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office, art. 6 and 17.—Decree on the Missions, art. 38.

³⁴ Decree on the Bishops' Pastoral Office, art. 16.

³⁵ Const. on the Church, art. 26.