

### COLLEGIALITY WITHIN DIVINE FRAMEWORK OF THE CHURCH\*

#### THE CHURCH NEITHER DEMOCRATIC NOR TOTALITARIAN

Venerable Brothers, As you well know, the recent Council has placed in greater evidence the community character of the Church, as a fundamental element of its constitution. Considered on its own, it does not give a full account of the Church, which in a more adequate view, is seen as the Mystical Body of Christ, joined together in unity and in distinction of organs and functions. However, communion, in its two-fold relationship as communion in Christ with God, and as communion in Christ with those who believe in him and potentially with all mankind, occupied in a particular way the thought of the Council, especially when it highlighted communion within the Episcopate; and, recalling that the Episcopate lawfully succeeds the Apostles, and that they constituted a particular class, chosen and willed by Christ, it seemed a happy design to take up again the concept and term of collegiality, referring them to the episcopal order. "Just as, by the Lord's will," the Council says, "Saint Peter and the other Apostles constituted one apostolic college, so in a similar way the Roman Pontiff as the successor of Peter, and the Bishops as the successors of the Apostles are joined together" (*Lumen Gentium*, art. 22).

#### *MORE EFFECTIVE COLLEGIATE EPISCOPATE*

So We were the first to deduce a pleasing duty from this re-evocation of the divine design concerning the apostolic office, which announces the message of faith to the People of God, confers on it the mysteries of grace, and guides it on its way on earth and in time—the duty, that is, of conferring wider and more operative efficacy to the collegial character of the Episcopate, being guided in this by the basic concept of brotherhood, which unites all Christ's followers in communion, and which is enriched with greater fullness in the Bishops, since they are inheritors of the titles which Christ Himself bestowed on His chosen disciples, whom He named Apostles (Lk 6:13), to whom was given the secret of the kingdom of God (Mk 4:11), His friends (Jn 15: 14, 15), His witnesses (Ac 1:8), who were destined for the great mission of announcing the Gospel and putting it into effect (Mt 28:19), in a spirit of humility (Jn 13:4) and of service (Lk 22:26), "for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12).

\* On October 11, the Pope presided at a concelebrated Mass in the Sistine Chapel for the opening of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, and preached the following homily.

*STEPS ALREADY TAKEN*

We believe We have already given proof of this will to give practical increase to episcopal collegiality, both by instituting the Synod of Bishops, and in recognizing the Episcopal Conferences, and in associating some Brothers in the Episcopate and Pastors residing in their Dioceses with the ministry that belongs to Our Roman Curia; and, if the grace of the Lord assists Us and brotherly concord facilitates Our mutual relations, the exercise of collegiality in other canonical forms will be able to have wider development. The discussions of the Extraordinary Synod, by defining the nature and powers of the Episcopal Conferences and their relationship with this Apostolic See and among themselves, will be able to illumine the existence and growth of episcopal collegiality in suitable canonical terms and in confirmation of the teaching of the First and of the Second Vatican Council concerning the power of Saint Peter's successor and that of the College of Bishops with the Pope, its Head.

But, before beginning the work of the coming Synod, let us pause a moment, Brothers in the celebration of the Eucharistic Mystery, the culminating point of the unity of the Mystical Body, to remind ourselves, not so much of the juridical aspect of collegiality or of the expressions in which it has been manifested in history, and not even — what is more important, but what We suppose to be present in our minds — of the thought of Christ, whose conception and institution it is, but rather of the moral and spiritual value which collegiality must take on in each of us, and in all of us together.

*CHARITY IN THE UNITY OF FAITH*

Let us reflect: there exists between us, who have been chosen to succeed the Apostles, a special bond, the bond of collegiality. What is collegiality if not a communion, a solidarity, a brotherhood, a charity that is fuller and more binding than the relationship of Christian love among the faithful and among the followers of Christ associated in various other classes? Collegiality is charity.

If belonging to the Mystical Body of Christ makes Saint Paul say: "If one member suffers all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together" (1 Cor 12:26), what should be the spiritual thrill of common sensitiveness for the general interest and also the particular interest of the Church within those who have greater duties in the Church? Collegiality is co-responsibility.

And what clearer manifestation of the character of authentic disciples of His did the Lord will should he possessed by the group of the Apostles seated at the supper of the last farewell if not that of mutual love: "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35)? Collegiality is an evident love which the Bishops must nourish between themselves.

And, as collegiality inserts each of us into the circle of the apostolic structure destined for the edification of the Church in the world, it obliges us to a universal charity. Collegial charity has no confines. To whom, in the end, other than to the faithful Apostles, did the Lord address His last recommendations, raised in the ecstatic prayer which

concludes the final discourses of the Last Supper: "That they may be one" (Jn 17:23)? Collegiality is unity.

Thus, to Our mind, when we deal with the relationships of Bishops grouped in these new territorial associations to which has been given the name of Episcopal Conferences, and when we deal with the relationships between the Conferences and the Holy See and with one another, one consideration must be uppermost in our minds above all others: that of charity, which, in the unity of faith, must pervade the hierarchical communion of the Church.

#### *DANGER OF EXCESSIVE PARTICULAR AUTONOMIES*

Let these two principles of charity and unity, then, be the basis of the guideline for the post-conciliar progress of ecclesial communion at that higher level marked by episcopal collegiality. These guidelines seem to Us to be two in number. One is meant to assign honour and trust to the order of Bishops. We shall endeavour to give recognition in fairer measure to that fulness of prerogative and power that comes to Our Brothers in the Episcopate in virtue of the sacramental character of their election to pastoral functions in the Church, and which derives from their effective communion with this Holy See. Nor shall this line of thought be hindered or interrupted if the application of the criterion of subsidiarity, to which it is directed, is tempered with wise and humble prudence, so that the common good of the Church may not be compromised by multifarious and excessive particular autonomies which would be harmful to that unity and charity which must make the Church "one heart and soul" (Ac 4:32), and would favour ambitious rivalries and narrow-minded selfishness. Nor shall it be forgotten if the other criterion of pluralism will have to be defined in such a way that it does not interfere with the faith, which cannot allow that, nor with the general discipline of the Church, which does not permit arbitrary judgment and confusion to the detriment of the basic harmony of thought and morals in the structure of the People of God, and of the impelling collegiality itself.

#### *MORE ORGANIZED SHARING IN GOVERNMENT OF THE CHURCH*

The other line of thought, which likewise stems from that high esteem which should be given to recognized episcopal collegiality, will also be sincerely followed by Us. It leads the Episcopate to a more organic sharing and a more solid co-responsibility in the government of the universal Church. We are confident that this will come about—as with joy and confidence We hear repeated by many — to the advantage of all, to the relief and support of Our own increased and heavy apostolic task, to clearer testimony to the one faith and the sincere charity which must be witnessed to, at the hierarchical summit of the Church more than elsewhere and today more than ever before, in new splendour and greater vigour. Already, as We were saying. We have set out on this path, and along it, with God's help and your favour, Venerable Brothers, We shall continue to travel. But let it be clear, even in this regard, that the government of the Church must not take on the appearances and the norms

of temporal regimes, which are today guided by democratic institutions that are sometimes irresponsible and going to excess, or by totalitarian forms that are contrary to the dignity of the man who is subject of the man who is subject to them: the government of the Church has an original form of its own, which aims to reflect in its expressions the wisdom and the will of its divine Founder. And it is in this respect that We must remember Our supreme responsibility, which Christ wished to entrust to Us when He gave Peter the keys of the kingdom and made him the foundation of the edifice of the Church, committing to him a most delicate charism, that of strengthening his brethren (Lk 22:32), receiving from him the highest and firmest profession of faith (Mt 16:17; Jn 6:68), and asking of him a most singular threefold confession of love intended to find expression in the primary virtue of pastoral charity (Jn 21:15 et seqq.). A responsibility that Tradition and the Councils attribute to Our specific ministry as Vicar of Christ, Head of the Apostolic College, Universal Pastor, and Servant of the servants of God, and which cannot be conditional on the authority, supreme though it be, of the Episcopal College, which We are the first to wish to honour, defend and promote, but which would not be such, were it to lack Our support.

Charity and unity. This is Our meditation at the opening of the Extraordinary Synod, upon which, with this concelebrated Eucharistic Sacrifice, We implore the light and the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Is not this perhaps the moment, dedicated to reflection on and affirmation of collegiality, on the day of the Divine Motherhood of the Most Holy Mary, to recollect ourselves with our minds deeply moved by the remembrance of the Apostles in the Upper Room, who, while waiting for the Paraclete, were "with one accord devoting themselves to prayer, together with . . . Mary the mother of Jesus" (Ac 1:14)? And in such union of spirits, is not this too the moment to make our own the acclamations of the Liturgy of Maundy Thursday: "Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est. Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor. Exsulemus et in Ipso iucundemur. Timeamus et amemus Deum vivum. Et ex corde diligamus nos sincero."

Amen.

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