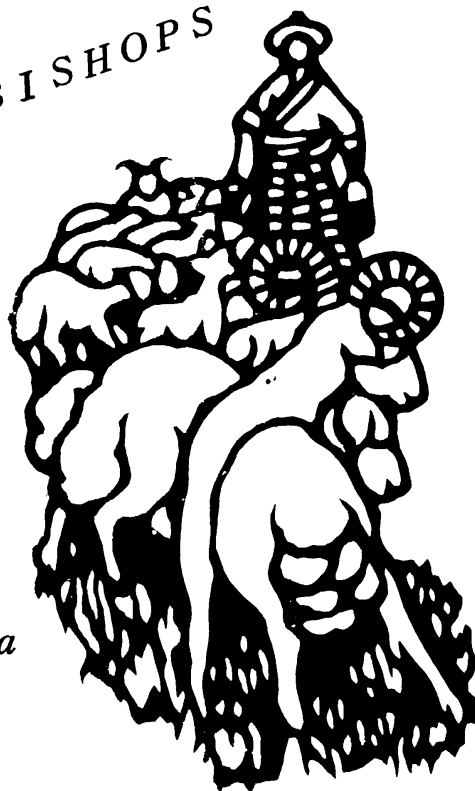


THE PRIMACY OF THE POPE  
AND  
THE COLLEGIALITY OF THE BISHOPS

— *a theological problem*  
*discussed by*  
*the Catholic Church in China*



*by John Tong*

I. Introduction

Recently the first issue of the "Catholic Church in China"<sup>1</sup> published an article by Bishop Tu Shihua. The contents touch upon the primacy of the Pope and the collegiality of the bishops. The paper has both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the bishop, by quoting such examples from Acts of the Apostles, as the election of Matthias, the diaconate, the sending out of Peter and John in order to supervise church affairs, the Jerusalem council, Paul's return to Jerusalem and report on his missionary work, etc., points out that the traditional spirit of the apostles is collective leadership and democratic management. On the negative side, by quoting the teaching of Jesus during his earthly ministry criticizing the apostles for arguing about who is the greatest among them, the bishop clearly says that there is no head of the apostles, and Jesus also

opposes the appointment of a head. Hence, he claims that both Peter becoming the first bishop of the Church of Rome and the Roman bishop as Peter's successor are purely something made up by the Vatican later on.<sup>2</sup>

People outside China also pay much attention to this problem. Most of them look at the relation between the Pope and bishops from the juridical viewpoint. They maintain that by being obedient to the Pope as head of the Church we fulfill all the conditions for being a member of the Catholic Church. Especially, recently in Hong Kong, there are people who publicly in the Sunday Examiner and Kung Kao Po have indirectly or directly expressed this juridical viewpoint.<sup>3</sup>

Among these two opposing views, the former emphasizes the collegiality aspect, the latter puts the emphasis on the primacy aspect. Before making a judgment, let us first examine more deeply what Vatican I and Vatican II have said about this issue, and why they have spoken thus.

## II. The Decree of Vatican I and Its Historical Background

In 1870, Vatican I's Constitution "Pastor Aeternus" declared the papal primacy by stating that the Pope possesses full and supreme power of jurisdiction over the whole Church, not merely in matters of faith and morals, but also in Church discipline and in the government of the Church.<sup>4</sup>

This constitution aroused some serious misunderstandings, especially the accusations in the circular issued by Bismarck, the German Prime Minister, in May 1872, in which he maintained that this definition would make bishops throughout the world into mere executive organs of the Pope. Against this view, a collective declaration was issued by the German bishops in February 1875, to show that they had not become the servants of a foreign power due to this definition, and not only that the Pope would not assume the divine right of the bishops, but also that he is always bound to obey Holy Scripture and Tradition. This declaration was approved by Pius IX in his

Allocutio to Cardinals in March 1875 as a genuine and faithful interpretation of the definition of Vatican I.<sup>5</sup> This declaration is recognized by theologians today as one of the most important documents in the interpretation of the relationship between the primacy of the Pope and the collegiality of the bishops.

In fact, the constitution "Pastor Aeternus" which bears the title of "The First Constitution on the Church of Christ" was to have been followed by a second, the drafting of which was entrusted to Kleutgen, the theologian. Kleutgen was obviously engaged in a constant give and take with the bishops, in the hope of producing a document which would obtain widespread approval.<sup>6</sup> Reviewing this document today, we can discover some important ideas, in chapter 4 of this draft entitled "De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia." It quotes Mt. 18:18 as the scriptural basis for the role of the bishops in the teaching and administration of the Universal Church, and declares that the full and supreme power in the teaching and governing of the Universal Church which is given to the Pope, is also given to the episcopal college united with its head.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, as soon as the first constitution on the papal primacy was discussed and approved, Vatican I was broken off by the Italian revolution and by the war between Germany and France. As many of the participant bishops turned back to their own countries or dioceses to deal with the changing situation, Vatican I was declared to be indefinitely suspended and therefore the constitution of Vatican I became an incomplete document. So many misunderstandings were to arise in the future.<sup>8</sup>

In explaining the constitution "Pastor Aeternus," most of the traditional Catholic dogmatic manuals neglected to mention not only the break-off of Vatican I, but also the two extreme tendencies which the Council was facing. As we should notice, during Vatican I there were many theories which sought to downgrade the power of the Pope, especially Gallicanism which had a long history in France, and maintained that the Pope was bound to obey the decisions of the episcopal council.<sup>9</sup> This is an extreme tendency over-

emphasizing the power of the bishops vis-a-vis the power of the Pope. Meanwhile, on the other hand, there were other currents running among clergy and laity, e.g. Veuillot, the editor of the "Univers" in France, and W.G. Ward, the editor of the "Dublin Review" in England, which affirmed that the papal primacy has no restriction in any circumstances.<sup>10</sup> This is another extreme tendency over-emphasizing the papal primacy. Facing these two extreme tendencies, the majority of the bishops in Vatican I insisted that the former should be solved more urgently, and thus the document was phrased emphatically against Gallicanism. But the minority of the bishops, concerned about the other tendency, continuously raised many reasonable queries. Thus the document was amended to a certain extent and was expounded in detail.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, to fully understand the definition of the papal primacy, we have not only to read the document itself, but also to explore thoroughly the whole historical background and the discussion process of the council.

### III. The Breakthrough of Vatican II

After almost a hundred years, Vatican II continued Vatican I which had been interrupted by war. In the beginning of chapter 3 of the Dogmatic Constitution "Lumen Gentium," issued in 1964, Vatican II showed that its intention was to resume where Vatican I left off.<sup>12</sup> But it is God's providential arrangement that Vatican II made great advances which would scarcely have been foreseen at Vatican I. In recent decades, due to the liturgical revival and the ecumenical movement, the Church could return to the biblical and patristic sources and could more deeply understand and more positively affirm the meaning of "the collegiality of bishops."

In the forties and fifties of this century, Botte, the liturgist, when annotating the prayers in the "Traditio Apostolica" of St. Hippolytus, rediscovered the sacramentality of the episcopate, and pointed out that the several bishops in the episcopal consecration are the representatives of the other bishops in the world, to accept the new candidate into the

college of bishops.<sup>13</sup> Later Congar, the theologian, made another step forward by using the word "college" to express the Orthodox term "sobornost," which is full of theological meanings. And thus he inserted "the communal charity" emphasized by Orthodox theology into "the hierarchical jurisdiction" emphasized by Catholic theology. Therefore, Congar pointed out not only that there is no opposition between the papal primacy and the episcopal college, but also that it is more compatible with the biblical teaching: "those who were with Peter" (Mk. 1:36). Therefore, Congar added, the Pope is "above" the bishops from a juridical point of view; but the Pope is "with" the bishops from an ontological point of view; and thus the "above" is subject to the limit of the "with."<sup>14</sup>

Following the rediscoveries by the above-mentioned theologians, publications regarding the sacramentality and collegiality of bishops flourished on the eve of Vatican II, and deeply influenced the council's understanding of the relationship between the papal primacy and the episcopal college. Therefore, the whole constitution "Lumen Gentium" is a document full of pastoral spirit which stresses the priority of community over individuals by placing the whole people of God before the hierarchy, the institution of twelve apostles and collegiality of bishops before the functions of the individual bishops. Vatican II threw a valuable light on interpreting the relationship between the papal primacy and the episcopal college in the addendum to the constitution "Lumen Gentium" entitled "Prefatory Note of Explanation": "Therefore, it is significantly stated that hierarchical communion is required with the head of the Church and its members. Communion is an idea which was held in high honor by the ancient Church (as it is even today, especially in the East). It is understood, however, not of a certain vague feeling, but of an organic reality which demands a juridical form and is simultaneously animated by charity."<sup>15</sup> Without doubt, the respectful attitude of Vatican II toward communion and charity will be a great help to promote reconciliation in the Church.

#### IV. Expectation of a Dialogue

Having studied the background and the teachings of Vatican I and Vatican II, we can understand how the two opposing views inside and outside China mentioned above are convinced that they are completely correct and thus are coming into direct conflict with each other.

We suggest that, today, in order to break down such opposing attitudes, both sides should build up a friendly theological dialogue which includes openness and listening. Unless we are open to listen and to understand what others really mean, and unless we study fully the teachings of Holy Scripture and Tradition without inter-personal conflict, such theological dialogue can never be achieved.

Most of the ecumenical councils before Vatican II were held to judge heretical doctrine, but Vatican II and all the following synods have invited the representatives of different denominations to share their own views. If the brethren of different denominations can sit together for dialogue, why cannot we, the brethren in the same Church, begin our fraternal dialogue under the continuous guidance of the Spirit of Truth (Jn. 14:17)?

#### NOTES

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7. MANZI, J.D., Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio, curantibus Ludovico Petit et Joannes B. Martin, Tom. 53, Arnhem et Leipzig, 1927, 310C
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15. The Documents of Vatican II, edited by Walter M. ABBOTT, p. 99