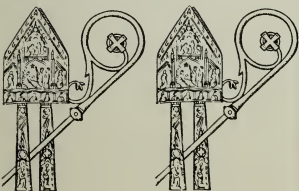
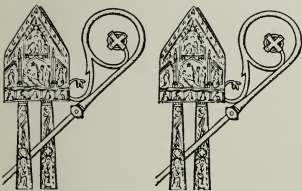
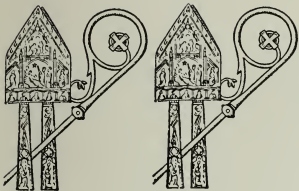
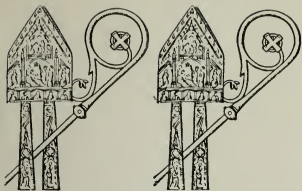


Catholic Church, Pope (1963-
1978: Paul VI) -
On collegiality -
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ON
COLLEGIALITY

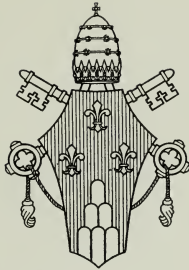
Ad Vos Imprimis

LETTER

TO ALL BISHOPS

POPE PAUL VI

December 18, 1964



ON COLLEGIALITY

**Letter entitled *Ad Vos Imprimis* sent by
POPE PAUL VI
to all bishops on December 18, 1964**

OUR thoughts turn first of all to you while we await the dawn of that happy day in which the memory of the Incarnation of the Word of God is renewed and this mystery is celebrated. We believe there is no better way of celebrating the touching solemnity of the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ than to unite our soul to yours, and to add

our praise to God to the choir with which you preach Christmas, to add our prayers to those which rise from your hearts, and our joy to the joy with which the entire body of the Catholic bishops looks to Christ, who appeared among us as the least of the brethren, but also as our true Saviour, Master and Lord. With a truly moved spirit we join you, venerable brothers, in celebrating the return of this most happy solemnity.

2. The solemnity of Christmas has always given occasion to the Church, gathered in the magnificent and mysterious concord of Catholic unity, to fulfil with supreme joy its duty of professing the faith and of burning with charity. This year, however, the Constitution on the Church—which we approved together with all those among you who took part in the last meeting of the third session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council—leads us to manifest with a new and powerful impulse on the occasion of Christmas that firm and close bond by virtue of which the episcopate is the supreme participation in the priesthood of Christ. In that constitution, in fact there is clearly demonstrated the doctrine of the collegial bond which unites the order of the bishops in a singular and magnificent communion.

3. Could there be a more suitable time than this happy solemnity, venerable brothers, to recall this communion, the existence of which we have recognized concordantly as the providential and admirable gift of the Holy Ghost? Moved by sincere piety, good Christian families gather round the crib in their homes. Every upright and sensitive man has sentiments of emotion and joy during this period which predisposes one so well for holy and sincere affections. How much closer, then, should be those united in spirit in the celebration of this great mystery of the coming of the Lord to earth, whom He called to act in His name, whom He made His ministers, friends and brothers, and for whom He prayed to the Heavenly Father that they might be united in His love?

4. This year, therefore, venerable brothers, we shall celebrate that communion by which all of us are united, gathered round the crib of our most beloved Saviour. Let us render honor to Him, showing that we have well meditated and understood His supreme desire: "that they may be one" and proclaiming our resolve to put it into practice in the future with ever greater faithfulness. Let us recall those sacred words which exhort us to this concord: "If . . . we walk in the light"—says the Apostle St. John—"as he also is in the light, we have fellowship with one another."¹

5. Let us remember also that significant saying of St. Cyprian: "*Episcopatus unus est, cujus a singulis in solidum pars tenetur*" [the episcopate is one, and each shares in it substantially.]²

6. We also might recall those words which St. Ambrose wrote to the Emperors Gratian and Valentinian in 381 A.D. regarding our office in the venerable episcopal college: "*Totius orbis romani caput Romanum Ecclesiam, atque illam sacrosanctam Apostolorum fidem ne turbari sineret, obsecranda fuit clementia vestra; inde enim in omnes venerandae communionis jura dimanant*" [We must beg your clemency not to allow the Roman Church, the head of the entire Roman world, and that sacrosanct faith of the Apostles to be disturbed; from it flow to all the rights of this venerable communion.]³

7. Finally, if you like, let us consider again the phrase of St. Augustine: "*Ego in Ecclesia sum, cujus membra sunt illae omnes Ecclesiae, quas ex laboribus Apostolorum natas atque firmatas simul in Litteris canonicis novimus; earum communionem, quantum me adjuvat Dominus, sive in Africa, sive ubicumque non deseram*" [I am a member of the Church, as are all those Churches we know to have been born of the labors of the Apostles and confirmed as well by canonical letters; I will not abandon communion with them, so help me God, whether I am in Africa or wherever else.]⁴

8. We ourselves, bishops of the Church, who have always nurtured in us this will and this manner of feeling, must meditate with ever greater diligence on the significance of episcopal collegiality, assess its responsibilities, investigate its mystery and discover its strength, particularly now when the relative doctrine has been authoritatively stated. It seems to us that all this did not happen without the mysterious will of God. Our times, discordant and confused in the doctrinal field, like that divided kingdom of which the Gospel speaks, always threatened with ruin yet at the same time ever more intensely and as if instinctively yearning for a certain practical unity, need an example of true and complete spiritual concord, of a higher aid to guide them toward unity and to strengthen them in concord and in brotherhood.

9. And here behold the Holy Church rising like a standard raised among the peoples, showing itself in the flower of that admirable unity once more proclaimed, strong with that inner unity of faith, love and discipline which links among themselves the episcopal order and the holy people of God. It really seems that by divine Providence, it is able to infuse in mankind new life and new hope.

10. May the magnificent vision of this eminent and wholly singular work accomplished by God truly shine forth before our minds, accustomed to contemplate creation. The doctrine now proclaimed concerning the true and unchanging constitution of the Church, leads us to bless and thank the divine author Jesus Christ who, fulfilling the prophetic promises exactly, thus constructed His Church. Let us admire, venerable brothers, the universality of this Church, that is to say, its perfect unity and vast catholicity.

11. Let us exult in humility for having been called by God to give form and consistency to this wholly singular religious society, visible and at the same time spiritual; we the pastors of the people of God, promoters and custodians of its true nature, of its inner unity, of its internal and external activity, of its upright organization. The Council

which is now going on has brought about the time in which it is given to us to know through experience how much fulness and strength that communion can attain which unites us to the Church.

12. That illustrious martyr and African bishop, St. Cyprian—after a question which does not affirm a truth but expresses a warning: “*Qui cathedram Petri super quem fundata est Ecclesia, deserit, in Ecclesia se esse confidit?*” [Does he suppose still to remain within the Church who deserts the chair of Peter on which the Church was built?]—exhorts us with these words: “*Quam unitatem firmiter et vindicare debemus, maxime Episcopi, qui in Ecclesia praesidamus, ut episcopatum quoque ipsum unum atque indivisum probemus*” [Particularly must we bishops who preside over the Church firmly uphold this unity so that we will demonstrate the episcopate itself as one and undivided.]⁵

13. Therefore, while we celebrate together with you around Christ’s crib this mystery of ineffable union, we open up to you our spirit, trusting in the hope of the copious fruits of good which will come to the Church from this collegial bond thus confirmed. For the Church, in fact, it is necessary that each one of us feel responsible for the good of all; that each is illumined by genuine faith and observance of the sacred canon laws; that arbitrary innovations be eliminated, that an exemplary love for good traditions be retained.

14. It is also necessary that all take part in the sufferings by which the Church is oppressed on many sides and seek to alleviate them, that attacks by the enemies of God and the deceits of the profane and corrupted world be strenuously and concordantly rejected, that the preaching of the Gospel throughout the world be adequately sustained by all in a spirit of brotherly collaboration, and that, in a word the Cross of Christ, of which the immense and glorious burden is above all incumbent on our souls, may be carried in unity and with mutual edification.

15. Let no one evade a commitment so noble and grave; let no one be content with his own ministry when the apostolic ministry encompasses the world. Let no one be alone in thought and action, since all take part as if in a single chorus, of which the concordant notes must proclaim the glory of God and announce on earth the peace of Christ.

16. Confident that these our sentiments will find a response in your souls we wholeheartedly bless each one and all of you, while praying the Redeemer that He impart to you and the elect communities entrusted to you the most copious gifts of grace.

¹ I *John* 1:7.

² "On the Unity of the Church" V; PL 4, 516.

³ *Ep.* XI, 4; PL 16, 986.

⁴ "*Contra Cresconium Donatistam*," III, 35; PL 43, 517.

⁵ PL 4, 516.

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