

INSTALLATION

BISHOP Peter Lei will be installed as Bishop of Hong Kong tomorrow afternoon, April 20, in his Cathedral Church.

Installation does not increase the authority of the Bishop or give him any new powers or privileges. It is a symbolic ceremony, an outward manifestation of the union between the Bishop and his diocese.

To say that it is symbolic is not to say that it is unimportant. Men need symbols. Bishop Lei received notice of his nomination to the See of Hong Kong in a letter. Juridically, nothing more was needed: from the moment he received that letter, all the burdens of the diocese were his to bear, and all the powers needed for bearing that burden were already his. Humanly speaking, something more was needed. A letter would be fully sufficient for the nomination of a mere administrator; indeed the reception of a letter is itself a satisfactory symbol of the nomination of an administrator, for administration consists very largely in sending letters to others. A bishop must be very much more than an administrator.

'A diocese is that portion of God's people which is entrusted to a bishop to be shepherded by him with the cooperation of the presbytery. Adhering thus to its pastor and gathered together by him in the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and the Eucharist, this portion constitutes a particular church in which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church is truly present and operative.'

Vatican Council II was not indulging in rhetoric when it gave that description of what a diocese is and how it is linked with its bishop. In taking over the care of a diocese a bishop is not merely taking over an administrative post: he is entering into a union of charity with the priests and people of that diocese, a union sealed by the Holy Spirit.

This union is both interior and exterior. It has its juridical side, but it is primarily spiritual. It should engage not only the minds but also the hearts and the emotions of both the bishop and his flock. All this seems to demand something more than a newspaper announcement that a new bishop of the diocese has been appointed. It is almost necessary to enshrine so grave an event in symbolic action, an exterior sign aptly announcing an interior reality.

In civil society, the accession of a new head of state is symbolized in a coronation or in inauguration ceremonies; for civil rule too has interior as well as exterior aspects. Much more should the accession of a new bishop be symbolized in a public ceremony: the union is closer and more mysterious, and it has an interior strength through the Holy Spirit such as no civil state can aspire to.

The ceremony of installation is designed to arouse in the hearts of the faithful a keen awareness of their unity with the Bishop and with one another. It give the priests of the diocese an opportunity of manifesting their determination to give the Bishop full loyalty.

Yet the ceremony is directed primarily at the Bishop himself, reminding him with all solemnity that he is from now onwards wholly at the service of the diocese, that he is wholly committed to 'gathering together in the Holy Spirit through the Eucharist and the Gospel that portion of God's people that has been entrusted to him.

At that solemn moment, it is well that he should be surrounded by those for whom he must labour, that they may sustain him in that moment of recognised responsibility in the Lord.