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Although sharing much common ground when it comes to philosophy and ministry, often Mary and Bob find themselves approaching ministerial concerns from different angles... *He said - She said* is a venue to share differing perspectives and provide food for thought.

## Democracy – Republic – Hierarchy

*Mary's Perspective:*

Democracy is government by the people. A republic is a form of government in which the state is ruled by representatives of the citizen body. A hierarchy is a system or organization in which people or groups are ranked one above the other according to status or authority.

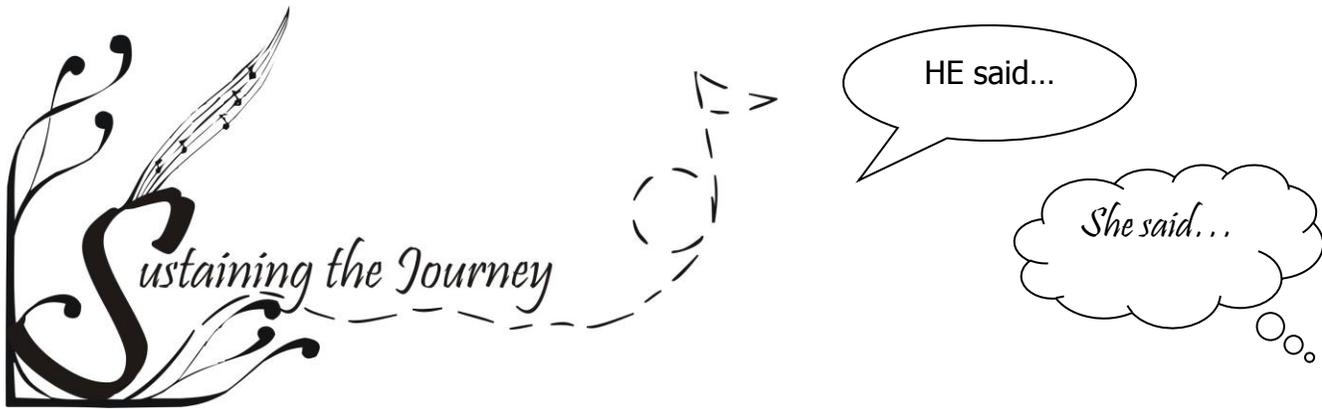
These are basic definitions, but I think they are worth reviewing. We are at an interesting point in time, locally, nationally, and internationally, when these different forms of governance have come into the spotlight. We first discussed this as a blog topic before the news came that the Bishop of Cleveland was going to become the Archbishop of Philadelphia. Once again a diocese in transition, we are now being shepherded by a diocesan administrator, awaiting the appointment of an Ordinary (bishop of Cleveland).

Slimy politics and a general contempt for social graces have become the norm amongst the leadership of the United States. As I was complaining to Bob about this – I mean, having a spirited discussion while we walked – he reminded me about the difference between a democracy and a republic. Ours is supposed to be a representative government, where those we elect speak for those they represent. I could have some opinions here, but I learned long ago it's better to keep those opinions to myself. It's also better for my mental state and blood pressure if I simply turn off the "talking heads" and deep dives into analysis of every eye roll, smarmy comment, and political move.

Between our work with the National Pastoral Musician's Association, and playing at various parishes around the diocese, we have encountered many musicians, pastoral staffs, and parishioners who all have opinions about how the Church "should" be run. Not surprisingly, these opinions don't always agree. Some folks are, admittedly, "cafeteria Catholics" – meaning, they would like to choose what parts to support, and what rules should be treated more as guidelines. I've heard some say, "Bishop says we should do this – but WE'RE not, except maybe for times when he is visiting..." "This" can refer to a norm in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, such as a unified posture during liturgy, or matters of PSR curriculum, even the use of certain music at Mass. It's as if they feel that we should have a vote, or dictate how the hierarchy exercises their ministry.

But the key word there is hierarchy. Sometimes we would do well to remember that the Church is not a democracy, nor a republic. The Church embodies a hierarchical structure where there are definitely rankings according to status or authority. And let's not forget apostolic succession.

I've often heard Bob say, "If my pastor wants me to play 'Take Me Out To the Ballgame' while he cartwheels into Mass, it's my job to ask how many verses... my ministry ultimately is to support his ministry!" Now, while I would certainly



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hope that's not literally what his pastor requests (I do help there sometimes!), the spirit of his comment is so true. Like it or not, the pastor has higher ranking than me. Just like the bishop has higher status than the pastor, and the cardinal ranks higher than the bishop, and so on. The spirit behind this structure is that the Spirit is involved IN the structure.

We are in an election year when politics take the forefront of many news cycles. I pray for a truly representative government – though I don't have much hope for that some days. I also pray for a softening of hearts (and egos) that support and respect Church hierarchy. I suspect the process of appointing an Ordinary of Cleveland will take time, and sometimes it's hard to be patient. Ultimately, we need to trust that God is involved in this process, and things will happen in God's time.

So what's the takeaway? In matters of politics, it would be prudent to get to know the issues and the candidates running to represent your voice, so that you can make wise choices. In ministry, it is appropriate to do whatever we can to support the ministry of those in Church hierarchy. And there is even a place to pray that your pastor doesn't ask you to play Take Me Out to the Ballgame!

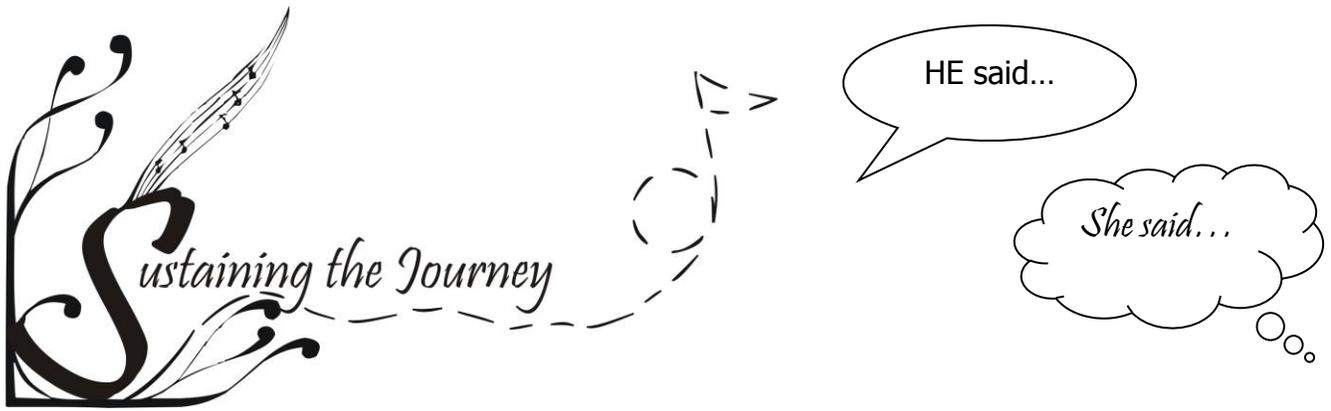
*Bob's Perspective:*

Hierarchy is a difficult concept for westerners to embrace. In this country we have the ability to vote on issues, political representatives, officials and certain aspects of the law – that's how a republic works (which, as Mary pointed out, is somewhat different from a democracy [which we are not]). Consequently, there is no option to vote or negotiate for anything in a hierarchical institution. If the head of the hierarchy is benevolent, he or she may allow for some discussion or advice from their advisors, but at the end of the day it's the sole decision of the head. All of the lives under his or her rule are subject to obey. It's a pretty simple concept – but at times, it can be a hard pill to swallow. This is especially true if one's opinions are not congruent with those of the leader.

While it's true that there have been leaders over the years who have abused their authority, by and large the Church has overcome her shortcomings and remains a strong entity in today's world. Why is that? The Church may be run by human beings, but it's guided by the Holy Spirit (God himself).

A defining moment in the relationship between God and humanity can be found in the book of Exodus ([Ex. 20:1-3, 7-8, 12-17](#)). If one were to read this passage they would note that God didn't hand down guidelines or suggestions. They were (actually are) commandments. The Ten Commandments basically consist of short phrases that offer no further negotiation or explanation. The nation of Israel didn't create, concoct or negotiate the Ten Commandments and then hand them to God, saying, "This is what we are willing to do." Rather, the Ten Commandments were handed down to them (and us) by God. God didn't ask the nation of Israel to vote on their acceptance. There was no debate or political process. As the head, God sent down the law and the masses were (and still are) subject to obedience.

In the days when Jesus walked this earth in human form, he was open and welcoming – but he never negotiated his position. Take, for example, the Gospel story of the Rich Young Man ([Mt. 19:16-30](#); [Mk. 10:17-31](#); [Lk. 18:18-30](#)). In short,



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a young wealthy man asked Jesus what he needed to do to get to heaven, besides following the commandments. Jesus told him to sell all his possessions, give the proceeds to the poor and follow him. This wasn't what the young man wanted to hear, so he turned and went away. Note that Jesus didn't call out to him and say, "Well, that's okay, let's see what we can adjust or negotiate to make it work for you." Jesus didn't negotiate his position. The young man asked him and Jesus gave him the answer.

If we truly believe that the Church is guided by the Holy Spirit, then we're bound by the same model. In the Code of Canon Law, the office of the Pope is described as follows:

*The bishop of the Roman Church, in whom continues the office given by the Lord uniquely to Peter, the first of the Apostles, and to be transmitted to his successors, is the head of the college of bishops, the Vicar of Christ, and the pastor of the universal Church on earth. By virtue of his office he possesses supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church, which he is always able to exercise freely. (Code of Canon Law #331).*

However, let it be said that the internal structure of the hierarchy is more complex than what we're able to discuss in such limited space. To those who may be more curious as to the governmental structure of the Church, (I think it's fascinating) the Code of Canon Law ([http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic\\_lib2-cann460-572\\_en.html#CHAPTER\\_VI](http://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/eng/documents/cic_lib2-cann460-572_en.html#CHAPTER_VI)) gives a very thorough explanation of the hierarchy of the Church. Interesting reading.

*Mary's Reaction:*

Interesting reading? Perhaps. Tedious reading? Perhaps a bit more accurate. However, it is a governing document of the Church, so well worth our knowing (at least generally) what's in there. Having edited a couple of scholarly papers where I had to check references, I will suggest that one might choose not to sleep with the *Code of Canon Law* book at the bedside... I found that gives me nightmares... just sayin'!