

The Shahan Centenary

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On our pilgrimage towards the Centenary of the Laying of the Foundation Stone of the National Shrine (September 23, 2019-2020), our journey continues to intersect with significant events and the lives of people whose vision and efforts have helped to make this commanding church of national pilgrimage a reality. We began this centennial journey on August 15, 2013, with the solemn commemoration of the blessing given by Pope (Saint) Pius X to then Monsignor Shahan to begin the fund raising efforts for this church. In January 2014, we celebrated the centenary of the publication *Salve Regina / Mary's Shrine*, the "bond of union between ... collectors and contributors and the glorious work they [were] founding." (See "Celebrating a Century of *Salve Regina* and *Mary's Shrine*." *Mary's Shrine*. Fall/Winter, 2013: 8-11.) This November 15, 2014 we celebrate the centenary (1914) of the Episcopal Ordination of Thomas Joseph Shahan, the founder of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception.

The life of Thomas Joseph Shahan [Sheahan] began in Manchester, New Hampshire in September 1857. The actual date of birth is somewhat of a biographical question. The memorial cards distributed at the funeral Mass (March 14, 1932) and the tablet in the Founder's Chapel of the National Shrine, give the date of birth as September 11. Interestingly, the issue of *Salve Regina* published one month after the funeral (April, 1932) by Monsignor Bernard McKenna, personal secretary to Bishop Shahan and the first director of the National Shrine, reported the date of birth as September 10, even though the information on the death certificate — also given by McKenna — is September 11. This is not unusual, as *Salve Regina* and other publications written or edited by McKenna frequently give two different dates within the same issue or the same publication for the same event. This can be explained as one of the "faults" in an oral tradition, if that is what this actually was. Significantly, legal documents such as passports, passenger manifests, and biographical publications for which Bishop Shahan would have provided the information himself and which required a witness, stipulate September 10 (1857) as the date of birth. Accordingly, Monsignor Edward A. Pace, a life-long friend and the founding dean of the School of Philosophy at



Thomas Joseph Shahan, the founder of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, 1914.

The Catholic University of America (CUA), gave the date of birth in the University necrology as September 10. All this being said, current research by this author, which relies on legal documents attested to and signed by the deceased during his lifetime, believes September 10 to be the correct date of birth.

In 1859, the Shahan family moved to Millbury, Massachusetts where Thomas began his academic life in the Millbury public school system. In 1872, he entered the Sulpician College at Montreal (Canada)

where he began his priestly formation and studies. Graduating in 1878, he entered the American College at Rome that same year. Four years later, he earned a Doctorate of Divinity and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Hartford (Connecticut) on June 3, 1882 at the Basilica of Saint John Lateran, by Raffaele Cardinal Monaco La Valletta, Vicar General to Pope Leo XIII. In 1889, Father Shahan joined the staff of The Catholic University of America, which was being organized by Bishop Keane, the first and founding rector. Thomas J. Shahan's association with the University would last the rest of his life.

Following three years of study in Berlin, Paris, and Rome, where he earned degrees in civil and ecclesiastical law, Shahan returned to Washington and CUA, where he occupied the Eugene Kelly Chair of Ecclesiastical History for the next eighteen years. His depth of knowledge amazed and impressed both colleagues and students, who were convinced that he was familiar with every book ever written. In 1909, this "man of books" became the fourth and eventually, the longest tenured rector of CUA (1909-1928). Time and history would regard him as the "most learned" of the rectors of the University.

One year after becoming rector, Monsignor Shahan wrote of his dream concerning the problems plaguing the nascent university and the erection of a National Shrine to Mary, "I have always felt ... that if this superb building could be raised to the glory and honor of God, all the problems of the University would soon solve themselves in its shadow. ... a glorious Church sheds a warm emotional, sacramental light, and speaks with a divine eloquence that nothing can equal. ... no one would think he had truly seen the capital of the nation unless he had paid a visit to this Church ... a monument of artistic truth." By 1914, the cause for the construction of the

National Shrine was a reality, complete with papal approbation and benediction for those soliciting and donating the funds, and a personal papal donation. Things were going well and more was yet to come.

Less than a year after his personal audience with Pope Pius X, Monsignor Shahan was named Titular Bishop of Germanicopolis (July 24, 1914).

At this time in the Church, the episcopacy consisted of two classes of bishops: 1) residential or diocesan, and 2) non-residential or titular (for a current definition, see Canon 376, and appropriate commentary). Practically speaking, a diocesan bishop is appointed to an active see and a titular bishop is appointed to a see that is a vestige of the past and exists only in title.

Germanicopolis took its name from Germanicus Julius Caesar, the grandson of Augustus. It is located in the mountainous province of Isauria, Turkey, not far from modern-day Bursa. Prior to Shahan, this particular titular see was held successively by two American bishops: Mullen upon his retirement as Bishop of Erie, Pennsylvania (1899) until his death one year later, and Koudelka, upon his appointment as Auxiliary of Cleveland (1907) until his appointment as Bishop of Superior, Wisconsin (1913). The see of Germanicopolis has

who will be able to teach others” (2 Tim. 2:2, emphasis added). This passage refers to the first three generations of apostolic succession: that of Paul, then to Timothy, and then to the generation Timothy would teach. Scripturally, this helps to define and delineate the concept of succession or lineage to the Apostles. By definition then, Apostolic succession or episcopal lineage is the authoritative and unbroken transmission of the mission and powers, which Jesus conferred on Peter and the Apostles, to the present pope and members of the hierarchy; it is the uninterrupted substitution of persons in the place of the Apostles by the consecration of bishops and the transmission of Holy Orders.

The need for proper succession and lineage was important for the early Church. Pope (Saint) Clement I (A.D. 92-99) wrote to the Church at Corinth, concerning a local dispute: “The Apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ ... they appointed their first fruits, when they had proved them by the Spirit, to be bishops and deacons unto them that should believe. This they did in no new fashion ... it had been written concerning bishops and deacons from very ancient times ... ‘I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith.’” (Clement of Rome, First Epistle to

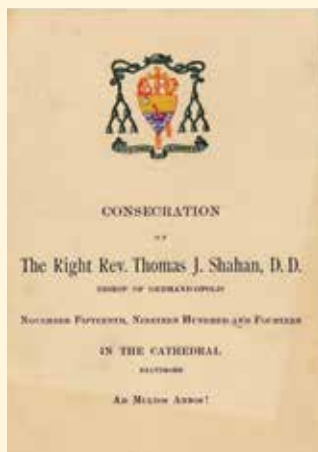
the Corinthians 42:1-2, 4-5, translation by J. B. Lighfoot). In terms of apostolic succession, according to Tertullian (A.D. c. 160 – c. 225), Clement was “ordained” by Peter, “chief of the Apostles.”

On Sunday, November 15, 1914, Thomas J. Shahan became part of this order of succession. Shahan was consecrated by James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, who was consecrated (1868) by Archbishop Martin John Spalding (1848), consecrated by Bishop Benedict Joseph Flaget, P.S.S. (1810),

by Archbishop John Carroll (1790), by Bishop Charles Walmesley, O.S.B. (1756), and so on, back to Scipione Cardinal Rebiba, who was consecrated May 14, 1541 and was elevated to the rank of cardinal December 20, 1555. To date, there is no scholarly information or written record as to the consecrator of Bishop Rebiba, although



Bishop Thomas J. Shahan and James Cardinal Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore.



been vacant since the death of Bishop Leonello Berti, OMI, Vicar Apostolic of Luang Prabang, Laos, in 1968.

Episcopal Lineage

The role of the bishop as shepherd, carries with it the task of preserving the truth of the teachings of Jesus passed on to the Apostles in an oral tradition. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “The things which you have *heard* from me through many witnesses, *you must hand on to trustworthy men*



Cardinal Rebiba

there is speculation that he was consecrated a bishop by Cardinal Carafa (Pope Paul IV).

The overwhelming majority of the living hierarchy, including Pope Francis, belongs to the “Rebiba line,” which is to say their episcopal lineage can be traced to Cardinal Rebiba. The two co-consecrators of Bishop Shahan, Bishop Denis Joseph O’Connell of Richmond and Bishop Joseph Nilan of Hartford, are part of this line even though Bishop O’Connell was consecrated by Cardinal Gibbons and Bishop Nilan by Archbishop William Henry O’Connell of Boston. A study of their lineage reveals that their episcopal lineage differs until Cardinal Albertoni (1666), at which time it converges with the other consecrators, concluding with Rebiba.

To underscore further the ancestry and heritage that was at work in this particular episcopal ordination, it is to be noted that Maurice Peter Shahan [Sheahan, Sheehan, Shehan], the father of Thomas J. Shahan, attended Saint Charles College, a minor or preparatory seminary operated by the Sulpicians at Ellicott City, Maryland, from 1854 to 1856. One of his classmates was James Gibbons. After leaving the seminary in June 1856, Maurice Shahan married Mary Ann Carmody in October. Thomas J. Shahan was born the following year. The Shahan family is remembered in Memorial Hall (20W).

Emblems and Symbols of the Episcopacy

The ritual for the Order of a Bishop includes the imposition of certain ecclesiastical symbols of office and accoutrement. This segment of the article will address those items of Bishop Shahan which are either still in use at the National Shrine or visible in the Founder’s Chapel.

The Crozier [crosier] is the most recognizable symbol of the role of bishop as shepherd. The name comes from the Medieval Latin word, *crocia* (crook), although it has also been called “the rod.” The bishop holds the crozier in his left hand—using the right for blessing—with the crook facing the people. Guillaume Durandus (ca. 1230-1296), Bishop of Mende (France), explained the significance of the crozier thusly:

“The Staff is sharp at the end, straight in the middle, and crooked at the top; this means that the bishop ought to goad on the idle, to direct the feeble with his own rightness, and to gather the wanderers together.” (*Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, III, xv, §4.) During liturgical ceremonies when the crozier is not being used, an altar server or “crozier bearer” uses a *vimpa* (a long piece of material worn over the shoulders) to grasp the crozier in order not to touch it with bare hands. Originally, a smaller cloth was attached to the crozier itself for the use of the bishop. The reason for both was/is purely practical: to prevent the discoloration of the crozier from sweating hands and vice versa. The “mitre bearer” also uses a *vimpa* for the same reason.



Among the treasures of the National Shrine is the *Hibernian Crozier of Bishop Shahan*. The 6-ft tall crozier was designed by John G. Hardy of Providence, Rhode Island, with historic suggestions by Mrs. Ellen Ryan Jolly, National President of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (LAAOH); it was made by the W. J. Feeley Co. (1875-1920), also of Providence. The jeweled enamel Celtic cross is an adaptation of the Cross of Cong (a replica of which is also in the Chapel of Saint Brigid, Crypt Church) and is inscribed with the episcopal motto of Bishop Shahan, *Spes mea Christus* (Christ my Hope.) The cross contains a relic of the Irish martyr, Oliver Plunket (1625-1681), Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland. He was beatified by Pope Benedict XV May 23, 1920 and canonized by Pope Paul VI October 12, 1975. The ornamental designs on the base of the crook, the bands, and other details are similar to the crozier of Saint Brendan “the Voyager,” an Irish missionary of the 6th century, depicted in the Queen of Ireland Oratory in the Great Upper Church. (See “Of Pilgrims and Pilgrimages,” *Mary’s Shrine*. Fall/Winter, 2012: 10-11.) The statuette is a replica in miniature of the miraculous and historic statue of Our Lady of Limerick. The shoe of the crozier is reinforced with Irish oak from the birthplace of Saint Brigid of Ireland [Kildare]. (The Crypt Chapel of Saint Brigid, also a gift of the LAAOH, a compliment



The Shahan Hibernian Crozier was used by Cardinal Gibbons for the laying of the Foundation Stone in 1920.

to the *Nuns of the Battlefield Monument*, was blessed by Bishop Shahan in 1927.)

Normally a bishop uses the crozier within “his territory.” Any bishop when celebrating a solemn liturgy outside of his territory may use a crozier with the consent of the local bishop. When several bishops join in a single celebration, such as the Plenary Mass of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, only the principal celebrant uses a crozier. In addition to its use by Bishop Shahan and other members of the episcopacy throughout this past century, the Shahan Hibernian Crozier was used by Cardinal Gibbons for the laying of the Foundation Stone in 1920 and by Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York, at the dedication of the National Shrine on November 20, 1959.



The Ring. A bishop is also invested with a ring worn on the right hand. Like the wedding ring, it symbolizes the betrothal of a bishop to his diocese. The bishop is reminded to love the flock

committed to his care, even as he loves himself, and to keep his people safe. The ring also represents the perfection of the Gifts of the Spirit. There were two styles of rings, the “pontifical” which had a gemstone, usually an amethyst, and the “ordinary” ring which carried the seal of the individual bishop and was used to authenticate documents. Tradition was for the ring of the bishop to be revered or “kissed” as a sign of respect for his office. The first recorded mention of the episcopal ring as a symbol of office is in a decree (A.D. 610) from Pope Boniface IV and in documents from the Fourth Council of Toledo (A.D. 633).



The Gloves. Bishop Shahan was also invested with episcopal gloves. During the Middle Ages, gloves were either knitted or hand sewn, made of cloth or even calf skin. They had a practical purpose, warming the

hands in very cold churches. The back of the glove was ornamented with embroidery or some other form of needlework with an ecclesiastical symbol. The gloves were worn during solemn or pontifical Masses until the Offertory, then again after Communion; also during processions and other solemn services. Early on, the gloves were normally white; later on, they were made of silk and matched the liturgical colors of the feast, except black. Gloves were never worn during Requiem Masses or on Good Friday. The

episcopal ring was worn over the glove.

The sarcophagus of Bishop Shahan shows him in full Roman Catholic pontifical vestments appropriate to a bishop, including the gloves, which are ornamented with the symbol of the Eternal Sun.



Among all the ecclesiastical regalia that day, there was nothing that had greater sentimental and emotional value for Bishop Shahan than the family chalice from Ireland. Simple and elegant, it is completely hand-made of solid sterling silver, gold plated, with a hand-hammered tulip shape cup. The inscription reads: *This chalice belonging to their great grand uncle [Thadeus Sheehan] was presented to the Rt. Rev. Thomas Shahan, Bishop of Germanicopolis, by his cousin, the Very Rev. Provost Patrick Lynch, 1914.* The original inscription around the base of the chalice gives the year 1804 for its creation and first time use, in Ireland, of course.

On November 15, the sermon by Right Reverend Monsignor Thomas Duggan, Vicar General of the Diocese of Hartford and Rector of the Cathedral, spoke of Shahan, the episcopacy, and the Church as teacher of all. His concluding remarks were presented as a wish or blessing at the beginning of the episcopacy of Shahan. One hundred years later, we rejoice in their having been fulfilled.



“Bishop Shahan, may your years in the episcopate be many and fruitful; may you wear the mitre as meekly and as graciously as you have worn the Doctor’s cap, and may the double crown of Pontifex et Doctor adorn your brow amid the shining company of those who shall have instructed many unto justice.” (November 15, 1914) ☩