Comment:
Governance in the Church

As Anthony Archer argued, in *The Two Catholic Churches: A Study in Oppression* (SCM Press, 1986), the effect of the Vatican Council in Britain was to promote an agenda shaped by the values and beliefs of the generation of middle-class Catholics whom the Butler education act of 1944 enabled to get to university.

One aspect of this, as Eamon Duffy and John McDade note in the June 2000 issue of *Priests and People*, has been the collapse of the symbol system that prevailed in ordinary parish life: Rosary and Benediction, Stations of the Cross, litanies, Friday abstinence from meat, and so on, a vast range of devotional practices. The new emphasis on Sunday Mass as community celebration, welcome in so many ways, makes it embarrassing for individuals in the congregation not to go forward to receive holy communion. Partly, it is taken for granted that we are all worthy; mainly, it is because the 'bad' Catholic (as Michael Portillo described himself in the recent biography) feels quite out of place now, in the average parish, as he would not have done thirty or forty years ago. In many other parts of the Catholic world, the non-communicant, 'lapsed' and anti-clerical, still feel included, however ambivalently.

Much has been lost, as well as gained. Paradoxically, though the sense that we might have of what the Church actually is, theologically, was vastly expanded at Vatican II by the biblical metaphors, recalled especially in *Lumen Gentium*, in practice the Catholic Church is now perceived more than ever as one more hierarchical institution on the model of any vast international organization, under the control of the functionaries at 'head office' in Rome.

While it does not matter much to the millions of Catholics in most other parts of the world, how power and authority are exercised in the Church is of great practical and theoretical interest to those who believed, in the heady 'sixties, that the papal style of governing affairs in the Catholic Church would be replaced by something more 'collaborative'. 'What happened to the reforming spirit of Vatican II?', as the contributors to *Governance and Authority in the Roman Catholic Church: Beginning a Conversation* (London: SPCK £35.00), edited by Noel Timms and Kenneth Wilson, ask. These essays, by 'experts in theology, psychology and sociology', argue that the Catholic Church would become 'increasingly authoritative' not only for Catholics but for all people of good will, 'seeking moral leadership in a complex and rapidly changing

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world', if her 'traditionally authoritarian style of governance' could be reformed.

The Church here is very much the Church as perceived in western European perspective. A key reference is *Ministry and Authority in the Catholic Church*, by Edmund Hill OP (London: Geoffrey Chapman 1988): a plea for the 'planned dissolution' of the Latin Church into a number of autonomous patriarchates. Helen Alford OP's account of the 'fragmentation of the Dominican sisters (in contrast with the friars)', is cited (*New Blackfriars* 1996). There are quotations from *Collaborative Ministry: Communion, Contention, Commitment* (New York: Paulist Press 1993), a noteworthy study by the young Scots priest Norman Cooper, killed in a mountaineering accident shortly after his book appeared. Much other work, sociological research as well as theological reflection, backs up the argument.

It is always a good question to ask, in an argument, what the interlocutors fear. The fear, here, is that failure to deal constructively with the centralizing and authoritarian control systems within the institution marginalizes the voice of the Catholic Church in the grave moral debates of our day. (Most people would think that the voice of the Catholic Church is already heard far too much; presumably the idea here is that the voice would be saying rather different things from what we hear now.) Pope John Paul II himself is said to be 'an open and attentive listener, [who] thinks in collaborative terms'; but (surprise surprise) 'the attitude of the Curia and the machinery of government' prevent the 'reform of the central government of the Church' which would allow the Church to become 'the community of disciples of Christ sharing a fundamental baptismal equality and personal dignity' as which *Lumen Gentium* is said to have 'defined the Church'.

How authority and governance are exercised in any institution is of great interest and often of social and political concern, whether it is IBM, an Oxford university college, Mr Blair's cabinet, President Clinton's administration or President Putin's, or indeed any of the other millions of organizations across the globe. Few of these government or commercial institutions are anything like as transparent and sensitive to criticism as the Vatican already is, for all its legendary obscurantism (think of North Korea). Besides, would 'an increase of organizational dysfunction', in many other institutions besides the Catholic Church, be such a bad thing as this book assumes? Many institutions work as well as they do only in virtue of a certain element of anarchy.

The vast majority of Catholics, even in middle-class Western Europe and North America, are quite indifferent to how the Church is run, at parish as well as diocesan level, as any one who has tried to

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create parish and deanery councils knows: is that the fault of the Vatican? Or of the local clergy? May it not be the case that, for most of the faithful, most of the time, the Church is not perceived as that kind of organization at all?

Highlighting issues of authority is fine. Better structures for 'dialogue and decision-making' are no doubt desirable, and studies such as this help to focus the issues. But it is important to remember that the vitality of the Catholic Church, in all its often raw and bizarre forms, of celebration, lamentation, mourning, asceticism, resistance, solidarity, intellectual enquiry, and so on, has never depended much on structures of governance. For better or for worse, and mostly for the best.

F.K.

Imitating God: The Truth of Things According to Thomas Aquinas

Catherine Pickstock

How should one respond to the death of realism, the death of the idea that thoughts in our minds can represent to us the way things actually are in the world? For such a death seems to be widely proclaimed by contemporary philosophers.

In summary, they argue that since we only have access to the world via knowledge, it is impossible to check knowledge against the world in order to see if it corresponds with it. This is a powerful and some might say unanswerable contention, and yet if we accept it, it seems to follow that there can be no such thing as truth at all. But how can Christians accept such a state of affairs, or accommodate themselves to it, since truth has always been held to be a predicate of God himself, and of Jesus Christ, the truth incarnate?

In what follows, however, I wish to argue that Christians do not need to accept these secular conclusions. Rather, I want to suggest that a

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