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Authority in the Church: The Search for Balance

Authority has been a persistent issue in the Church. Our century is no exception. We know that there is no single ideal nor effective model of authority. Neither charismatic leadership nor strong institutional rule works in every situation. Clearly we struggle for the right balance between the two. That is the Catholic way.

In this time of serious ecclesial and societal readjustment Catholics find themselves once more caught up in a new search for the right balance. This issue of *New Theology Review* with articles by Bishop Matthew Clark of Rochester, New York, Jesuit scholars Francis Sullivan of Boston College, and John A. Coleman of Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles, Professor Georgia Masters Keightley of Trinity College in Washington, and Dr. Ronald Modras of St. Louis University, provide us with a variety of perspectives on the issues at hand.

Bishop Clark, reflecting out of the experience of a recent synod process in his diocese, discusses forthrightly many of the tensions and questions facing those in pastoral authority today. He wrestles with the challenge of combining the lived understandings of people in his community with the overarching teachings of Catholicism. Father Sullivan out of his long experience of teaching theology at the Gregorian University in Rome probes the meaning of authority from the perspective of an ecclesiology of communion. Fr. John Coleman, doing what he does best, examines what sociological viewpoints might add to our understanding of effective Church authority. Professor Keightley underscores the importance of lay leadership in the Church in light of the documents of Vatican II. She illustrates her viewpoint in part by reference to the Lay Letter on Economic Justice issued by a group of prominent Catholic lay leaders at the time of the release of the Bishops' Pastoral Letter on the Economy. While the contrast she makes does not hold up perfectly since there was important lay input into the

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bishops' letter, it does raise her basic point. Finally, Dr. Ronald Modras of St. Louis University looks at Church leadership during the critical Nazi era. Though he writes of the past, the questions he poses remain contemporary: how has the Church reacted in more recent situations of genocide and political terror in Argentina, Rwanda, Bosnia, and Croatia and how will it react in similar situations should they arise elsewhere?

Certainly there are other issues central to the debate on Church leadership that call for further exploration. I would single out a couple. The first would be a better understanding of somewhat subtle, but very real nonetheless, change in the understanding of leadership taking place in reformist circles in Judaism in Jesus' day. These changes clearly impacted his and the early Church's approach to ecclesial leadership. Briefly stated this change involved a shift from the *inherited authority* connected with the Temple priesthood to the *earned authority* associated with the Pharisaic-rabbinic tradition. The second has to do with the importance of symbolism in ecclesial leadership. The current intense debate, within and outside of El Salvador, about the contrasting leadership style of Archbishop Romero and his present successor who recently accepted a military appointment highlights the basic issues involved in this question.

While the essays in this issue hardly exhaust the question of ecclesial leadership, they make an important contribution to a discussion that must continue to remain in the forefront of Catholic consciousness. Hopefully they will assist those in the forefront of discussions on this issue, especially in projects such as Common Ground.

In our final essay Dr. Jacobus Schoneveld, a noted ecumenical leader in Europe, reflects on the future directions of that continent. What he has to say has relevance for the North American scene as well, for the question of ecclesial leadership and its relationship to public culture has assumed a new vibrancy of late. Fr. Richard Neuhaus has elevated the stakes to a new level in recent issues of *First Things*. Catholic leaders will need to decide whether they will follow, or reject (as I believe they must in light of Vatican II's Declaration on Religious Liberty) his new call for the re-Christianization of America.

With this issue we announce the beginning of an editorial transition. From its inception ten years ago *New Theology Review* has been jointly sponsored by the Catholic Theological Union and the Washington Theological Union. For the first decade primary editorial responsibilities have rested with CTU. That is about to change. Beginning with the February 1998 issue, Professors Kenneth Himes and Robert Waznak of WTU will assume the role of co-editors with Professor Edward Foley of CTU coming on board as associate editor. In light of this we

now request potential contributors to *New Theology Review* to direct their manuscripts to the new editors. You may send submissions to THE EDITORS, *New Theology Review*, Washington Theological Union, 6896 Laurel Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20012.