

# Accountability and Leadership in the Catholic Church



# Accountability and Leadership in the Catholic Church:

*What Needs to Be Improved*

By

Brian Dive

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*In Memoriam*

Ann Bullman  
Helena Mahoney



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## FOREWORD

Brian Dive has several decades of experience in large multinational organisations working in staff development and organisation design. In recent years, he has advised numerous large organisations and government departments about structure; how to ensure that those at each level in an organisation have sufficient empowerment to become fully effective and gain greater satisfaction. He has written extensively about these matters. In this book, he offers suggestions to the Church based on his experiences. Some might say, thinking of Matthew 28:20, that the Church has done well enough for a couple of millennia and has no need to embrace “new” thinking. However, in the twentieth century the Church readily adopted new technological breakthroughs to assist with its mission. In 1931 Vatican radio established only the sixth short wave broadcasting service in the world (assisted by Guglielmo Marconi). The Vatican website demonstrates an impressive mastery of twenty first century digital means of communication. And, according to recent comments from John W. O’Malley S.J.<sup>1</sup>, the Vatican adopted microphones and amplifiers before the House of Commons and typewriters before the British Foreign Office. Furthermore, there is the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and the Vatican Observatory. Recent popes have made extensive use of the technological marvel we call international air travel to visit local churches all around the globe. The conclusion from these observations is that the Church does not turn inwards on itself but rather looks outward towards the world and utilises whatever useful modern ways of doing things come to hand. In fact, in Chapter 1, Dive quotes from comments made by Pope Pius XII in 1950: “The Church welcomes all that is truly human ... [she] cannot shut herself up, inactive, in the privacy of her churches and thus neglect the mission entrusted to her.”

Given the above uptake of “new thinking” the book suggests, drawing on the fruits of a career spent in applying late 20<sup>th</sup> century understanding of organisations, possible steps towards the streamlining of existing Church structures and procedures.

The book is very readable and the source of many surprising insights.

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<sup>1</sup> *Commonweal*, August 9, 2019.

First, he thinks that the 5500 or so bishops scattered around the globe are hampered by lack of assistance from above as the gap between a bishop and the pope is too large. And anyway, is it reasonable to expect the pope to be able to engage effectively with this number of bishops? Ad limina visits are expected to occur every five years or so; that is about 20 bishops per week passing through Rome! (Recent reports indicate that Pope Francis has introduced some changes to way ad limina visits proceed.) It is clear to all that there is something seriously wrong with the process of appointing bishops. How can it be, even in cases where the incumbent is terminally ill, that there is still a hiatus of several months or longer after his death before a successor is appointed? A telling observation from Dive is that, in the organisations he has worked for, a significant amount of senior executive time is expended in assessing the potential of upcoming staff and, where appropriate, ensuring they have the correct experience to eventually take on senior roles. In the case of a retirement or death a list of appropriate candidates is at hand, and a new appointment is made promptly.

Second, Dive comes to the conclusion that, apart from electing a pope, there is no well-defined role for a cardinal! He suggests that an important task for each cardinal could be to interact with a small group of bishops to assist them in their work and to offer advice, and perhaps coordination, when needed. Perhaps a special task could be in assisting bishops promote the vision of the church being presented by the pope.

Third, Dive addresses the frequent comments and reports that somehow the Roman Curia seems not to function as a service to the remainder of the Church but rather is often seen as an obstruction. Pope Francis and his Council of nine Cardinal Advisors has embarked on a process to reorganise the Curia and apparently are in the process of putting these recommendations into place. But yet, the process of achieving buy-in and implementing genuine change remains unclear. The issues here are familiar to those involved in change management in any large twentieth- or twenty first-century organisation. Again, Dive can draw on extensive experience of managing such in the secular world. With these credentials, he has much to offer our Church.

*Michael Pender, Professor of Geotechnical Engineering,  
University of Auckland (and concerned Catholic layperson)*  
September 2019

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This subject of this book was suggested to me by a Catholic priest, Gerald Arbuckle S.M., who, when reading some of my work on accountability and leadership said, “You must write on these topics in relation to the Catholic Church.” When we later met up in Oxford, to talk it about it further, this book started to take shape. Father Gerald has provided great encouragement and support during the writing of this book – for which I am very grateful.

In preparing this book, I interviewed people, involved in the running of the church, from around the world, laity and clergy, from parish administrator to cardinal. I interviewed some who had left the priesthood or the religious life. I particularly sought the views and experiences of those who had worked and lived in Rome.

Many of those I interviewed preferred to remain anonymous. This is disappointing – not only because it reveals a mood of anxiety in the church at the present time, but because it prevents me from thanking them, by name, for all the help, and the insights, they gave me. To any who might be reading this – my warmest thanks. Among those who were happy for me to mention them by name, I am particularly grateful to Fr. Michael Doody S.J., for his insights into Jesuit training and development and the history of the Jesuits in the US and Latin America. I was pleased to interview Fr. Alex Hill, previously an Anglican vicar, who became a married Catholic priest in England, enabling me to contrast the different approaches to leadership training and development of both churches (and to help me understand the situation and motives of Anglican priests who decide to ‘do a Newman’). Other priests who willingly gave of their time to speak with me include Rev. Canon Dr William Hebborn, Fr Emmanuel Ojeifo, Fr Con Foley, Fr John Craddock SM and the late Fr Bob Lee SM. I am also indebted to many Catholic laypeople. Professor Michael Pender at Auckland University commented most helpfully on the early manuscript and also wrote the Foreword. Agnes Fox-Murphy gave me a good understanding of the work of a parish administrator. Anne and Paul Littleton read closely the draft manuscript, suggesting a number of improvements. Graeme Wright pointed me towards material he knew of which helped me appreciate how the lack of clear accountability in the curia and the Vatican State has made for all kinds of dysfunctional behaviour. Brian Mahoney in Spain, an expert in international leadership development, gave me some very helpful feedback

on an early draft. This book is dedicated to Brian's wonderful late wife, Helena, and to the late Ann Bullman, a close friend of my wife – both of whom were exceptional Catholic wives and mothers.

One great challenge while writing this book has been trying to 'keep up' with the dynamism of Pope Francis who has, in a very short period of time, instigated reforms in a number of areas, changing the synod of bishops (*Episcopalis Communio*) reviewing the curia (the review is ongoing as I write, but an initial draft of some proposed curial reforms, *Praedicate Evangelium* was leaked this year), proposing new norms for reporting and investigating cases of sexual misconduct among the clergy (*Vos Estis Lux Mundi*), and he has opened questions about such matters as married priests, deaconesses, and the discipline of Communion. (None of these measures have, so far, addressed the major issues – of structure, and of leadership 'discipline' – raised in this book.)

I am grateful for the help I have received from Adam Rummens and his team at Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

The image on the cover of this book is a photograph of the spire in Notre Dame de Paris in flames, taken during the fire of 15 April 2019 which destroyed the spire and much of the roof of the cathedral. It is an image chosen as an emblem of the severity of the crisis currently afflicting the Catholic church, but also as an emblem of hope; because Notre Dame de Paris was not destroyed. The rose windows of Notre Dame – icons of eternity – were not destroyed. A worldwide appeal to secure the necessary funds has ensured that Notre Dame is to be restored. Most importantly, two months after the fire, the Archbishop of Paris celebrated Mass there (wearing a hard hat). Mass there continues.

Finally, I am very fortunate that both Anne, my wife and Bernard, my son, have had significant editorial experience in the past. They read the various drafts, identified errors and woolly thinking and suggested needed changes and improvements in style. I am indebted to my daughter Lizzy and my daughter-in-law Melissa, for their support, not to mention their patience, during this process. The book is a much better product as a consequence, although, given the nature of the topic, I have to acknowledge I am accountable for any shortcomings that remain.

London  
September 2019

# INTRODUCTION

## AN ENDURING MISSION, AN EVOLVING STRUCTURE

*“The Church must be forever building, and always decaying, and always being restored.”*

—T.S. Eliot “Choruses from ‘The Rock’”

### **1. Infallible, not Impeccable**

Can the structure of the church be changed? St John Henry Newman observed, in an essay on the history of the church, that “the kingdom of Christ, though not of this world, yet is in the world, and has a visible, material, social shape. It consists of men, and it has developed according to the laws under which combinations of men develop. It has an external aspect similar to all other kingdoms. We may generalize and include it as one among the various kinds of polity, as one among the empires, which have been upon the earth.” He observed, equally, that to treat it merely as such, is not to perceive its ultimate significance – for the “Christian history is “an outward visible sign of an inward spiritual grace”, and God “is acting through, with, and beneath those physical, social, and moral laws, of which our experience informs us”, “so that all that exists or happens visibly, conceals and yet suggests, and above all subserves, a system of persons, facts, and events beyond itself.”<sup>1</sup>

Newman would, in his remark that the “visible, material, social” form of the church “subserves a system of persons, facts, and events beyond itself”, caution against regarding the “visible, material social shape” as the ultimate explanation of the life, and the “history”, of the church. To consider the church merely as a “visible, material social” reality, is to neglect its “inward” aspect: it is to take the notions by which “visible, material social” realities are understood to be sufficient to a reality which is more than “visible, material social”. To maintain this, though, is not to maintain that

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<sup>1</sup> John Henry Newman “Milman’s View of Christianity”, *Essays, Critical and Historical*, Vol. 2 (1871; London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1907), 196, 192.

the church cannot be assessed as a “visible, material social” reality, in the terms in which other such realities are assessed. It is merely to acknowledge that such reflections cannot make for a complete, comprehensive account of the church. In *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845), Newman observed that “certainly it is a sort of degradation of a divine work to consider it under an earthly form; but it is no irreverence, since our Lord Himself, its Author and Guardian, bore one also. Christianity differs from other religions and philosophies, in what is superadded to earth from heaven; not in kind, but in origin; not in its nature, but in its personal characteristics; being informed and quickened by what is more than intellect, by a divine spirit.”<sup>2</sup>

In his “Preface” (1877) to the third edition of his *Lectures on the Prophetic Office of the Church*, Newman maintained that “Christianity ... is at once a philosophy, a political power, and a religious rite: as a religion, it is Holy; as a philosophy, it is Apostolic; as a political power, it is imperial, that is, One and Catholic. As a religion, its special centre of action is pastor and flock; as a philosophy, the Schools; as a rule, the Papacy and its Curia.”<sup>3</sup> Newman observes that while the “prophetic” office of the church – the teaching office of the church – is sustained by the “gift” of “infallibility”, its “regal” office – relating to its existence as a “political power” – is not sustained by a comparable “gift”. While the church may have the gift of infallibility, with regard to its “formal teaching”, this “aid ... great as it is, does not secure her from all dangers as regards the problem which she has to solve; nothing but the gift of impeccability granted to her authorities would secure them from all liability to mistake in their conduct, policy, words and decisions, in her legislative and her executive, in ecclesiastical and disciplinarian details; and such a gift they have not received.”<sup>4</sup>

My concern, in this book, is to consider some of the “disciplinarian details” of the church – the way in which the church organizes itself – and to suggest – based on a knowledge of how other earthly “combinations of men” are organized – ways in which these “disciplinarian details” could, and should, be improved.

My approach, in this book, is to consider some features of the church as an organization, comparable, in certain respects, to other organizations. Are there better and worse ways in which organizations can be structured? If certain generalizations can be made, about how organizations

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<sup>2</sup> John Henry Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1909), 57.

<sup>3</sup> John Henry Newman, *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, Vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1901), xl.

<sup>4</sup> Newman, *Via Media*, Vol. 1, xliii.

should be structured, then does the church, when those generalizations are applied to it, seem to be well structured or not?

The past century has seen the development of, if not a “science” of organizational design, then at least an ever-increasing collection of insights – emerging from the work of numerous writers on management, and on organizations – into what makes for a “sound” or “healthy” organization – insights into what good organizations look like. If the church is an organization, like other organizations in certain respects, then do the insights of “organization design” experts offer any suggestions as to how the “disciplinarian details” of the church might be best ordered? The church may be unlike any other organization, in certain respects, but are those respects in which the church is different from any other organization such that the “principles” of “sound organization design” should not be applied to the church, or to certain features of the life of the church? Even if the “principles” of “sound organization design” might be applied to the church – since it is, after all, an organization – could there be cases where the principles of “sound organization design” should be suspended – superseded by “higher” principles? It is not impossible that this should be so, but one cannot tell if this is so, in a particular case, unless one “tries out” the principles in question, by applying them to the particular case; and one cannot “try out” these various principles, unless one is aware of them.

My concern is that there does not appear to be much awareness in the church, and its authorities, of what the principles of “sound organization design” are, and of what those principles suggest, as to how the “disciplinarian details” of the church might be ordered. I would, then, offer an assessment of what Newman might call the “regal” or “disciplinarian” structure of the church, as a contribution to an ongoing conversation within the church – a conversation that cannot but be ongoing, as its leaders are obliged, every day, to make “regal” and “disciplinarian” decisions. Newman himself insisted that the “regal” office of the church must be subordinate to the “prophetical”. “Theology is the fundamental and regulating principle of the whole Church system. It is commensurate with Revelation, and Revelation is the initial and essential idea of Christianity” – and “theologians” are “ever in request and in employment in keeping within bounds both the political and popular elements in the Church’s constitution.”<sup>5</sup> I would not, in this book, stray into the bounds proper to the “Theology” which is “commensurate with Revelation”; and I recognize that it is for the “theologians”, not myself, to determine precisely what those “bounds” are. My claim is simply that if one applies the standards of sound organization design to the church, one

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<sup>5</sup> Newman, *Via Media*, Vol. 1, xlvii, xlvi.

can recognize that the church has certain structural weaknesses that can, as a matter of fact, be rectified.

Pope Benedict XVI was, according to Tracey Rowland, “hostile” to the “mentality” that would regard the church in terms of “power structures”: “he does not see the church as one large multinational corporation with franchise operations across the globe, the bishops as the executive staff, the pope as the CEO and the laity as the shareholders.”<sup>6</sup> I would not, either, wish to understand the church in such reductive terms. One need not, however, regard the pope as a “CEO” to recognize that he is in a position of authority, and responsibility, with regard to the bishops. One need not regard the church as merely a “large multinational corporation” if one is to recognize that it has structures of authority, and a worldwide presence. One need not obtrude into the “bounds” of theology, if one is to reflect on whether the current structures of the church are suitable for the demands, and responsibilities, that its “authorities” have to fulfil, given its worldwide mission.

I maintain, then, three things:

1.) *The hierarchical structure of the church is not well designed*, because the pope is the only meaningful formal authority above the bishops, and there are so many bishops – there are about 5,300 of them – that the pope cannot exercise a direct, effective leadership of them. (There are another 700 leaders who have the pope as their true “superior”: the heads of religious orders, and the heads of various curial dicasteries.) Since the pope cannot, in practice, carry out all that is required for the direct leadership of 6,000 leaders, and yet those leaders do require direction, the curia has occupied (without a proper title to do so) a position of authority *vis a vis* the bishops; and because the *de facto* authority of the curia in this respect is not properly recognized or constituted, the curia is not made properly accountable for its exercise of this authority. A “layer” of leadership, with well-defined powers, accountable to the pope, is needed in between the pope and the bishops. *A bishop should be directed by a leader who would, in turn, be directed by the pope – a leader who might be termed a “pastoral Cardinal”.*

2.) *The church has neglected the leadership training and development of its priests and bishops.* What is more, the bishops tend to be selected by the curia in a process that is unduly secretive, and in which the “selectors” rarely meet or know the candidates. There is not a clear, open process in which the

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<sup>6</sup> Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 89.



qualities required for a particular bishopric are defined, and in which a particular person is identified as having those qualities. The selectors are not trained in how to identify the right individuals. They seem, often, to be making selections without a full, detailed and independently verified knowledge of the individuals being selected. What is more, once bishops are selected, they do not seem, in many cases, to be given a clear “brief” as to what is required of them, and they are not given enough support to acquire the skills and capabilities they will need, if they are to fulfil their responsibilities properly. *The processes by which the bishops are selected, trained, and supported need to improve. They are currently usurped by the curia.*

3.) *Leaders in well-designed organizations are often supported, and, to some extent, restrained, by various disciplines and “controls”, often sustained by “support” departments, operating “to the side” of the main “line” of authority (as, for instance, a leader in a large organization will often be subject to various financial disciplines, sustained by the finance department, and might have access to an accountant or “business partner”, belonging to that department, for support with financial matters). There will, in many organizations, be departments “to the side” of the main leadership structure, responsible for maintaining certain disciplines. There will, moreover, be departments – as, for instance, internal audit – whose raison d’être is to assure the organization that proper disciplines are in place, and are being observed. In some crucial areas of the life of the church, by contrast, there is scarcely any consistently observed discipline. The leaders of the church need support, and oversight, from above, and “from the side”, so that they are not taking decisions “in isolation”, as it were. Two ways in which this support, and oversight, can be provided are:*

- i.) by the establishment of more rigorous, consistently applied “disciplines”, supported by dedicated “departments”, throughout the church;
- ii.) by the strengthening of some of the forums that already exist, in which church leaders consult with the laity, and with one another, in making decisions, so that those forums can become a genuine source of discipline.

On what basis can I make these assertions? I have spent fifty years trying to assess and to improve organizations, many of them global organizations – whether assessing the structures of organizations or trying to improve the ways in which organizations form and develop their leaders. Over the course of this time I have worked with more than a hundred organizations, in both the private and public sectors, and in some seventy countries. My approach

to assessing the “disciplinarian detail” of how the church works is, then, a matter of applying an understanding of “what makes an organization healthy”, that I have developed over many years.<sup>7</sup> I have, in preparing this book, conducted interviews with individuals in a variety of roles in the church – from priest to cardinal. I have also canvassed the views of some who have left the priesthood. I am a practicing Catholic, and I am aware that the church, as Benedict XVI once observed, in an interview he gave at the time he was Cardinal-Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, is “not a party, nor an association, nor a club”. Not everything in the church is subject to the decisions of its members.

## 2. Sacramental and Hierarchical

When Cardinal Ratzinger remarked that the church must not be regarded as merely “a party, nor an association, nor a club”, he went on to observe that “her deep and permanent structure is not democratic but sacramental, consequently hierarchical.”<sup>8</sup>

That an organization is “hierarchical” evidently need not mean it is “sacramental”: most organizations are, in one way or another, hierarchical, in the sense that leaders are, or should be, responsible for taking decisions that are different from the decisions taken by those whom they lead – decisions that orient, and set the terms for, the decisions of those whom they lead; that is, in part, why leaders are needed. The kind of “hierarchy” involved in this sort of case, however, is ultimately a matter of practical necessity, and it seems likely to be something quite other than the “hierarchy” that Cardinal Ratzinger was thinking of, when referring to the “sacramental”.

Cardinal Ratzinger, in *Salt of the Earth*, characterizes “hierarchy” not so much as a matter of “sacred rule” as of “sacred origin”.

The correct translation of this term [hierarchy] is probably not “sacred rule” but “sacred origin”. The word *arche* can mean both things, “origin” and “rule”. But the likelier meaning is “sacred origin”. In other words it communicates itself in virtue of an origin, and the power of this origin, which is sacred, as it were the ever-new beginning of every generation in the Church. It doesn’t live by the mere continuum of generations but by the presence of the ever-new source itself, which communicates itself

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<sup>7</sup> I have written three books on what makes for a healthy, well-functioning organization: *The Healthy Organization* (London: Kogan Page, 2002); *The Accountable Leader* (London: Kogan Page, 2008); *Mission Mastery* (London: Springer, 2016).

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Ratzinger and Vittorio Messori, *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 47.

unceasingly through the sacraments. That I think is an important, different way of looking at things: the category that corresponds to the priesthood is not that of rule. On the contrary, the priesthood has to be a conduit and a making present of a beginning and has to make itself available for this task. When priesthood, episcopacy and papacy are understood essentially in terms of rule, then things are truly wrong and distorted.<sup>9</sup>

Sacramental rites are rites in which the “sacred origin”, Christ, is present. Sacraments, for Catholics, are – to use the phrase of St Augustine – “outward and visible signs of an inward and invisible grace”. They involve “outward” signs, which indicate the presence of an “inward and invisible”, divine action. The sacraments are signs that are appointed by Christ; they can only be appointed by Christ, because Christ acts in them or through them. The “hierarchy” here, then, is the hierarchical relationship between Christ and the church; and the church cannot alter what Christ has established – it is, itself, constituted by Christ. The members of the church cannot, on their own authority, create “sacraments”. Seven sacraments have been recognized as such by the church: the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Holy Communion, and Confirmation); the sacraments of healing (Reconciliation, and Healing or the Last Rites); the sacraments at the service of communion (Marriage and Holy Orders). There is a hierarchical relationship between Christ and the church, with regard to the institution of the sacraments. There is, moreover, a “hierarchical” relationship between the clergy and the laity, with regard to the celebration or performance of sacramental rites: there are some sacraments – such as Holy Communion – which can be performed only by ordained priests; and the capacity to perform these sacraments is itself conferred by a sacrament – that of Holy Orders – which can be performed only by a bishop.

The “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”, *Lumen Gentium* (1964) from the Second Vatican Council, declares that “the Lord Jesus, after praying to the Father, called to Himself those whom He wanted and appointed twelve to be with Him, whom He might send to preach the Kingdom of God (see Mk 3:13–19; Mt 10:1–42). These apostles (see Lk 6:13) He established as a college or permanent assembly, at the head of which He placed Peter chosen from their number. He sent them first to the children of Israel and then to all peoples (see Rom 1:16), so that, sharing in His power, they might make all peoples His disciples, and sanctify and govern them, and thus propagating the church, being its ministers and

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Salt of the Earth: Christianity and the Catholic Church at the End of the Millenium* trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), 190–91.

pastors, under the guidance of the Lord, all days until the end of the world.”<sup>10</sup> The “mission” of Peter and “the Twelve”, the apostles – ministering to and guiding the church – continues in that of the pope and the “college” of bishops. The “mission”, and the authority associated with it, is ongoing “even to the consummation of the world.” The Second Vatican Council sought to bring out the various dimensions of “priesthood” in the church. Priesthood in the church is a participation in the three “offices” of Christ – prophetic, sacerdotal, and regal. There is the “common priesthood” of all those who are baptised, and, for the laity, this priesthood involves witnessing to Christ, participating in the Eucharistic sacrifice (by prayer, thanksgiving, receiving the sacraments) and acting in the world so as to manifest Christ. There is, moreover, the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood – that of the ordained. The “common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood” differ – according to *Lumen Gentium* – “essentially and not only in degree.”<sup>11</sup> Those who are ordained by the church are empowered to act as representatives of the church and, on occasion, of Christ – with the highest form of acting “in the person of Christ” occurring in the offering of the Eucharistic sacrifice, in the person of Christ, and in the name of the church. Cardinal Avery Dulles has observed, in *The Priestly Office*, that “in theology, the idea of representation is not juridical but organic.”

The priest is configured to Christ in order that Christ may act in him as an instrument. The church, as Christ’s mystical body, uses its priests not to pray or worship in its place but to be the organs through which it prays and professes its faith. The acts of the church and of Christ as its head cannot be performed except by those who are publicly and sacramentally qualified through ordination. These acts, pertaining intimately to the order of salvation, cannot be done vicariously, by someone who has merely delegated power.<sup>12</sup>

Why must priests be formally ordained, if they are to carry out these acts?

The sacraments are public acts of the church as such, and cannot be celebrated by an individual or a particular congregation except in union with the bishop and the body of bishops. Only through ordinations conferred by the apostolic body can individuals enter into the public ministry ... The

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<sup>10</sup> *Lumen Gentium* par. 19, in *Vatican II: The Basic Sixteen Documents* ed. Austin Flannery, O.P. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996), 26.

<sup>11</sup> *Lumen Gentium* par. 10, in *Vatican II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Avery Dulles S.J., *The Priestly Office: A Theological Reflection* (New York, Paulist Press: 1997), 14.

ordained are not mere delegates of the assembly to which they minister. They receive their gifts through apostolic succession in office, which confers upon them the sacred character of order, empowering them to act in the name of the church and in the name of Christ as head of the church.<sup>13</sup>

The Second Vatican Council characterizes the distinction between the “common” (or lay) priesthood and the ordained priesthood as “essential”. What, though, of the distinctions in the degrees of authority that exist within the order of clergy? Avery Dulles suggests that the “priestly” function was originally possessed – and is still only possessed in its fullness – by the bishops. The presbyters, or priests, emerged as an order of “associates” or “assistants” of the bishops. By as late as the third century, according to Dulles, there is “no indication”, in the evidence available, “that presbyters are expected either to preach or to celebrate the Eucharist”; the “ordination ritual for the presbyter given by Hippolytus speaks only of the presbyter’s tasks in the government of the people of God”. It is only by the fourth century that “the presbyters had taken on a leadership role in the celebration of the liturgy and in preaching”; and it is by the middle ages that “the presbyters were increasingly seen as the normal presiders at the Eucharist, and hence as having everything requisite for ministerial priesthood.”<sup>14</sup> All of this would suggest that, within the “ministerial” order, there can be developments in how the authority of the priestly role is distributed or delegated. There are degrees of authority from priests (or presbyters), to bishops, to the pope. That the church has some such hierarchy is a matter of practical necessity. If, though, Christ ordained a particular office within the church – the apostolic authority possessed by the bishops in communion with the pope – he did not, it seems, determine how those possessed of this authority should organize themselves. Over time, distinctions have emerged – such as that between priests or presbyters, and bishops. These distinctions are in accordance with the “deep and permanent structure” of the church. Why could not further distinctions, over time, emerge?

Dulles observes, in *Models of the Church*, that “the New Testament ... does not impose the three-tier hierarchical system (bishop, presbyter, deacon) today familiar to us. Theologians are coming to admit, in increasing numbers, that these hierarchical distinctions are of human institution, alterable by the will of men. But any restructuring of the Christian ministry should be something more than a reflection of the contemporary Zeitgeist.

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<sup>13</sup> Dulles, *The Priestly Office*, 35.

<sup>14</sup> Dulles, *The Priestly Office*, 9–10.

It should take full cognizance of the biblical roots and of the special mission of the Church.”<sup>15</sup>

When Ratzinger observes that the church is “sacramental”, his observation accords with the claim, in the first section of *Lumen Gentium*, that “the church, in Christ, is a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race.”<sup>16</sup> Dulles suggests, in *Models of the Church*, that the “sacramental” model of the church is one of several models – all, in their way, necessary, none quite sufficient – for conceiving of what the church is. The church ultimately, Dulles maintains, is a “mystery”, as it has in it something divine, eluding definition or comprehension – as “the union of the human with the divine, begun in Christ, goes on in the Church”. The church, as such, is “not fully intelligible to the mind of man”, and “like other supernatural mysteries, the Church is known by a kind of connaturality”<sup>17</sup> Since the church is a mystery, no concepts are fully adequate to it; but it may be known through various “models”, which work – up to a certain point – to illustrate its nature; and there are a number of “models” which, in this regard, are of use in illustrating something of the reality of the church. Dulles identifies several main models as being of use, in this regard: the model of the church as an “institution”; the model of the church as a “community” (a mystic communion, the “body of Christ”, the “people of God”); the model of the church as a “sacrament”; the model of the church as a “herald” (proclaiming the Gospel); the model of the church as a “servant” (working to bring peace, justice, healing, to the world, revealing thereby the love of Christ); the model of the church as a “community of disciples”. He suggests that all the models need, in various ways, to be supplemented by the others, or to be developed by insights associated with the others, but he suggests, equally, that the models that seem most adequate to the full reality of the church are the model of the church as a “sacrament” and the model of the church as a “community of disciples”.

Sacrament, as applied to the Church, is a somewhat technical concept having four characteristics taken from sacramental theology. It means a reality founded by God in Christ, a visible sign of an invisible grace, a true embodiment of the grace that it signifies, and an efficacious transmitter of the grace signified and embodied. The Church may be called a sacrament

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<sup>15</sup> Avery Dulles S.J., *Models of the Church* (New York: Image Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed 2002), 155.

<sup>16</sup> *Lumen Gentium* par.1, in *Vatican II: The Basic Sixteen Documents*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 10.

insofar as, having been founded by Christ, it signifies, embodies, and carries on the saving work of Christ, who is himself the original sacrament of God.<sup>18</sup>

Dulles observes that the notion of the church as a “sacrament”, a sign of Christ, has the potential to make for a certain “complacency”, but it has, equally, the potential to stimulate “honest criticism”. “This ecclesiology does not encourage any deification of the actual form of the Church’s life, for it acknowledges that the symbolic expressions of grace are never adequate to the life of grace itself. The church is continually called to become a better sign of Christ than it has been.”<sup>19</sup> The sacramentality of the church is a task – a summons “to become a better sign of Christ” – as well as a gift.

### **3. Creativity in the Service of Mission: Changes in Governance in the Church**

The Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the growth of the church under the impulse of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31) and of ways in which the church became increasingly conscious of its central mission, namely to present a “witness” of Christ’s life and teaching, even “to earth’s remotest end” (1:8). The Holy Spirit assumes a central role in Acts, initiating and directing missionary activities at key turning points (e.g. Acts 8:26, 29, 39; 10:19; 13:2; 15:28; 16:6-9). It is the Holy Spirit who causes the church to emerge, inspiring unity, new governance structures, and dramatic missionary activity, as new opportunities and challenges are presented.

The story begins in Jerusalem where the faith became established, and the first small community flourished (chapters 1-5). The picture given by Luke is an idyllic one – a picture of a community in which people lived in harmony and were deeply committed to living Gospel values. Luke wrote that the disciples all “joined constantly in prayer” (1:14). He later developed this statement when he described the four main qualities of the emerging Church. He wrote that the disciples “remained devoted...to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (2:42).

“Fellowship” or “community” did not only mean that people were of one mind and heart, but also, they acted in ways that showed this unanimity, especially in collecting and distributing money for people who were poor. Financial assistance was a key way of uniting the community and it was evidence of authentic fellowship and commitment to the mission

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<sup>18</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 214.

<sup>19</sup> Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 66.

of Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 4:34-35). This community of sharing would have contrasted dramatically with the wider, non-Christian society where the poor would have been neglected.

Luke proceeded to describe three forms of governance.

*The first type* was quite simple. Members of the community in Jerusalem “had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45). That is, the community was so small that the needs of those who were destitute were known to all members. So, believers dispersed funds readily and directly to the needy.

With the rapid increase in the size of the community, administrative adjustments had to be made to ensure that needy people could be identified and then assisted. *A new governance structure emerged* to cope with the situation. The apostles received the funds and they took responsibility for ensuring that they reached the poverty-stricken members. “There was not a needy person among them, for as many owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need” (2:34-35). Now donors provided aid to the poor indirectly, via the apostles. The apostles ensured that the gap between the mission and reality was identified and responded to by the appropriate authorities.

*This second form of governance, however, did not last long. It was not coping with the increasing size and cultural complexity of the Jerusalem community.* It was, in fact, becoming unjust. So, dissension erupted in the once tranquil prophetic community. Greek-speaking Jewish Christians, called Hellenists, complained to the apostles that their widows “were being neglected in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1). They blamed the Hebrews that is Palestinian Jews who spoke Hebrew or Aramaic, for disregarding the widows. The widows formed a distinct group in society. In traditional Jewish culture where women depended for their identity, rights and security on men, widows lived a precarious existence. The Hellenists who complained carried out a “prophetic” act, because they had identified just where the mission to the marginalized was being overlooked. It would have been a brave act.<sup>20</sup>

What had gone wrong? The problem was not only owing to cultural tensions between the different parts of the Jerusalem community. There had been a breakdown in the governance structure. A serious gap had developed between the Gospel imperative to aid the poor and the reality of unresolved

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<sup>20</sup> Gerald Arbuckle, “Sponsorship’s Biblical Roots and Tensions,” *Health Progress: Journal of the Catholic Health Association* 87, no.5 (2006): 14-15.



poverty within the Jerusalem community. And the apostles had not seen the gap because they had become too busy with their various duties as leaders of the community (see Acts 6:1). *A new structure had to develop that took into account the rapidly changing situation in the church.*

The Apostles responded to the prophetic intervention of the lay Hellenists by calling “together the whole community of the disciples” (Acts 6:2). They stated the problem and asked the community for help in resolving it. If they continued to distribute food to needy people in the rapidly expanding community, this would interfere with their primary task of teaching, governing and forming the church according to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “It is not right,” they said, “that we should neglect the word of God in order to wait on tables” (6:2). So, *they decided to establish a new governance structure* that would both free them from this burden and ensure that the mission of Jesus to marginalized people would continue. *The Apostles instructed the assembly to choose “seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” whom they would then “appoint to this task”* (6:3). The apostles could then be freed to devote themselves “to prayer and to serving the word” (6:4). This decision was well received by the community.

Seven lay people were selected according to clearly set out criteria – that is, they had to be men “of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” (6:5). They were then formally mandated by apostles to undertake new governing roles: “they had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands of them” (6:6). With this mandate, the seven men were officially appointed to a ministry of the church. Luke observes that the new governance model operated successfully. The community was again living with internal harmony and the apostles were freed to fulfil their ministerial duties (see 6:7).

In this case, the Apostles, moved by the Spirit, responded to the concerns of lay people, recognizing that a change was needed in the governance of the church, if it was to continue to carry out its mission. The change, here, did not involve any significant alteration of the “sacramental economy” of the church; it was a change motivated by a recognition of a particular, practical need, to which a practical response was required. The main “structural” change to the church that I would propose – creating a role in between the pope and the bishops – would be a change of this kind. The rationale for this role is akin to that which was involved in the creation of the role for “the seven men” in Acts: just as the Apostles could not carry out the distribution of food personally, since, with the growth of the church community, that task became more complex and time-consuming, so the

pope cannot carry out, personally, all that is involved in the direct leadership of the bishops.

A leader must have a direct relationship with those over whom that leader has authority, with those for whom that leader is accountable – a relationship that involves not simply direction, but counsel, support, and assistance in thinking through solutions to problems. It is through such personal contact and mentoring that leaders are able to support those whom they lead in growing, learning, developing. *The role of bishop in the Catholic church is, in itself, challenging; but, more than that, it is, given the current structure, one of the loneliest in the world:* bishops simply do not receive the counsel and support they need. It is simply impracticable, for obvious reasons, for the pope to provide this support himself: he cannot have an intensive caring, nurturing, relationship with more than 5,000 bishops. Should a bishop turn to the curia for support, the bishop is confronted with a set of departments – an organization, not a person – which is not designed to provide such support (and bishops tend to find on their ad limina visits to Rome that such support is not usually available). Bishops can, it is true, counsel one another, in certain matters; but they need counsel from one who is aware of the larger situation in which they are acting, and who has the authority to take decisions that set the direction for how they should act, in relation to that larger situation. To delegate this task of counselling, supporting, and direction-setting to figures other than the pope – to a layer of “super cardinals” or “pastoral cardinals”, in between the bishops and the pope – is not to infringe on the teaching authority of the pope, which is unique and which does not admit of being delegated.

The pope, as the “servant of the servants of God”, has a responsibility for ensuring that bishops are in place who are fitted to being pastoral “servants” of the priests and people to whom they are assigned, and he has a responsibility for ensuring that those bishops are themselves “served” in the right way, provided with the support, counselling and direction that they need. One way in which he might fulfil this responsibility, would be to appoint individuals who are capable of providing that support, counselling and direction, individuals who would be answerable directly to him for how well they have provided that support, counselling and direction.

“Mission,” writes Pope Francis, “is at once a passion for Jesus and a passion for his people.”<sup>21</sup> Our eyes must always be focused on Christ, the

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<sup>21</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 268.

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

primary source of the church's identity. All ministries and governance structures must ultimately be evaluated in light of this focus.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. An Open Church

“Structures [of the church need to] be suitably channelled for evangelisation of today's world rather than for her self-preservation”

—Pope Francis I, *Evangelii Gaudium*, par. 27.

The structures of the church are not always well understood, even by its members. Most Catholics experience the church primarily in and through their local parish. They will know their local priest. They might, on certain occasions, encounter their bishop. They might be aware that there are numerous titles in the church – Canon, Dean, Monsignor (with various levels of rank), Papal Nuncio, Auxiliary Bishop, Coadjutor Bishop, Episcopal Vicar, Apostolic Delegate, Bishop, Archbishop, Patriarch, and Cardinal – but they will have very little sense of what those titles mean, and what powers, if any, are associated with them. The plethora of titles creates the impression of a steep hierarchy, comprised of roles of ever increasing authority; but it seems that only two of those titles – priest, and bishop – have any distinct authorities associated with them (in that a bishop has a certain disciplinary authority over the priests in his diocese, and a priest is, in principle, answerable for the state of his parish – though of course much of what he does there requires the voluntary cooperation of his parishioners). If, though, the church does not have as many hierarchical “layers” as the plethora of ecclesiastical titles might suggest, that does not seem to prevent the bearers of some of the more exotic ecclesiastical titles from comporting themselves in an authoritative, even authoritarian manner.

There is, within the church, a stress on the importance of “obedience”. Some members of the church make vows or promises of “obedience.”<sup>23</sup> Priests, in being ordained, make a promise of obedience to

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<sup>22</sup> See Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Catholic Identity or Identities? Refounding Ministries in Chaotic Times* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 121-225.

<sup>23</sup> The “religious” clergy, monks or nuns, make vows of “obedience” to their superiors. I will not, in this book, be considering the situation of the “religious” clergy. I will be concerned with the “secular” clergy, with the secular priests and bishops, since they make up the primary line of authority, from parishioner to pope. I am not concerned, in this book, with the full significance of “obedience”, as a religious value. There can be significant dangers in taking “obedience”, understood as submission to the “will of a superior”, to be the primary virtue in religion. The proper assessment of the place of “obedience” in the religious life, however, is a

their bishop (and his “successors”); and bishops, in the rite in which they are appointed to their role, make a promise of obedience to the “successor of Peter”, the pope. If a priest makes a promise of obedience to a bishop, then that implies that the bishop is entitled to direct that priest, under certain conditions (and in relation to certain matters). There is scope, in this regard, for some kind of “oversight” to be established, to ensure that those conditions are being observed – to ensure that leaders, to whom such promises are made, are not misusing the authority conferred by those promises. (A priest who feels that he has been presented with a false, or abusive, claim to “obedience”, could in principle report this to an independent arbiter – the Congregation for the Clergy – who can review the situation, and determine whether the conditions for such a claim have been fulfilled.) “Command” or “direction”, however, does not, of itself, require any promises of “obedience”: a relation of “command” or “direction” can be established without formal vows or promises of “obedience”. An accountable manager, in any organization, is in the position of being able to set certain aims and tasks to those whom that manager leads; that manager will expect those directions to be acted on, and will be entitled to take certain disciplinary measures if they are not. Those who are directed by a manager are not expected to make an undertaking of “obedience” to their manager. The relationship of an employee to his or her manager does involve something like an implicit “contract”: to accept a role reporting to a manager, is to recognize that the manager is entitled to direct one, in matters relevant to that role, and to the work of the organization. This implicit “contract”, however, is something quite different from a formal promise of “obedience”. There can, then, be formal structures of leadership without formal promises of “obedience”. To suggest that a bishop could have a “leader”, other than the pope, is not, then, to maintain that that bishop should make a promise of obedience to that leader. (If such a leader, a “pastoral cardinal”, were to be created, it might, of course, be possible for the pope to require or command his bishops to obey – in certain clearly defined matters – the “pastoral cardinal” to whom they were assigned, as acting in his name; but this is, ultimately, a question for canon lawyers, or theologians.) What is of cardinal importance, here, however, is that a proper approach to

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matter for a constructive dialogue between psychologists and theologians. For an account of how “obedience” is understood in the Dominican tradition, as – ultimately – “obedience” to the truth, as a matter of a community coming to a “common mind” through the search for truth (rather than something that presupposes an opposition between two isolated wills – the will of a “superior”, and the will of the one “under” the superior), see Herbert McCabe, “Obedience” in *God Matters* (London: Continuum, 1987), 226–234.

understanding organizational structure involves conceiving of roles in terms of *accountability* rather than “command”. Leaders are required to exercise leadership because they are *accountable for* achieving something (and they are accountable for the work of those they lead, which is aimed at achieving something). One should think about roles not in terms of “who can command whom”, but in terms of “what is the incumbent of the role required to do, what do they need in order to do it, and to whom are they answerable for doing it”.

It is not always clear, to those within the church, who is answerable to whom for what. Most are aware that clergy make promises of “obedience”, and this can, itself, make for the belief that the church is “disciplined”, “orderly”, and the like. Yet this is simply not the case. To those outside, the church appears opaque and secretive. The church, certainly, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had a defensive attitude with regard to “the modern world” (an attitude that, if sometimes excessive, was not altogether unjustifiable, given certain attitudes towards the church emerging in the modern age, attitudes of “*écrasez l’infâme*”). That defensive attitude has not disappeared (just as the hostility which was, in part, an occasion for it, has not disappeared). The Second Vatican Council seemed, to many, to encourage an attitude of openness towards whatever, in the modern world, is good in itself, and in harmony with Catholicism. Yet it still seems that, whenever there is uncertainty, and stress, in the life of the church, there is an instinct, in many senior leaders, to try to resolve matters internally, to enshroud them in secrecy. To some, it looks like a secrecy arising from a desire for control, or a secrecy arising from a wish to conceal that which would, if revealed, be infamous. Even the proliferation of “official” roles and titles – the function of which is far from self-evident – can look sinister, from this viewpoint: these “official” forms can look like the expression of a “system” that acts, of itself, without any clear purpose (a Kafkaesque bureaucracy, with a life of its own, disconnected from anything meaningful); or (to the more conspiratorially minded) these forms can look like a kind of “cover”, an appearance that conceals the “real” exercise of power, conducted by those who act “behind” the official structures (“behind” the structures, and so, in an unacknowledged and unaccountable manner).

One significant problem, with the current structure of the church, becomes evident when one asks the question – “who holds bishops to account?” One of the worst problems, experienced by the church in recent decades, has been the “sex abuse scandal”, where, in cases in which priests had abused children, bishops seemed concerned less with achieving justice and healing for the victims of abuse, than with concealing the fact that the

abuse had occurred – settling with the victims (requiring confidentiality of them) and moving the perpetrators of abuse on to other posts in the church (where many of them committed acts of abuse all over again). Rod Dreher, making use of the insights of Richard Sipe, a psychologist and sociologist of the sexual behaviour of priests, has suggested that one of the important factors, making for the systemic corruption here – a corruption involving an instinct to conceal the crime, protect the “reputation” of the institution, and an egregious unwillingness to render justice to the victim – was that, despite making vows of celibacy, many priests were breaking those vows, engaging in sexual relations (heterosexual or homosexual relations with consenting adults), and then, because of those vows, concealing their sexual activity, in a way that made for a “culture” of habitual secrecy and concealment about such matters. Dreher quotes Sipe claiming that “sexual activity between an older priest and an adult seminarian or young priest sets up a pattern of institutional secrecy. When one of the parties rises to a position of power, his friends are in line also for recommendations and advancement. The dynamic is not limited to homosexual liaisons. Priests and bishops who know about each other’s sexual affairs with women, too, are bound together by draconian links of sacred silence. A system of blackmail reaches into the highest corridors of the American hierarchy and the Vatican and thrives because of this network of sexual knowledge and relationships.”<sup>24</sup> The need for “silence” arises, of course, because of the requirement that priests be celibate, and because of the expectation that they should be of exemplary virtue. Dreher adds that the failure to identify this problem for what it was, and the failure of journalists to report it accurately, was due to the ideological commitments (and blinkers) of “conservatives” and “liberals”: conservatives wanted to maintain the reputation of the institution, and were inclined to trust their bishops, as authorities appointed by God; liberals wished to avoid any occasion of stirring up “anti-gay” feeling (a risk, here, since some of the networks of “sacred silence” comprised sexually active gay priests), as they were sensitive to the risks of stigmatizing and scapegoating. The existence of such a “system of blackmail” facilitates the covering up of not simply sexual irregularities and failings, but sexual abuse. When “one of the parties rises to a position of power”, then there is the potential for such a compromised person to be subject to, and to exert, all kinds of undue influence. The cases of Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and Cardinal Keith O’Brien were cases of senior church leaders, sexually active, implicated in such networks of “silence”, making use of their power,

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<sup>24</sup> Rod Dreher, “The Only Way Through Purgatory”.

<http://www.theamericanconservative.com/dreher/douthat-on-uncle-ted-mccarrick-purgatory/>