AUTHORITY IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: Theory and Practice edited by Bernard Hoose, *Ashgate*, **Aldershot 2002, Pp. xii + 253, £45.00 hbk**.

This book, a collection of fifteen essays, forms part of a project sponsored by the ecumenical Queens' Foundation, Birmingham, whose principal partners are Anglican, Methodist and URC. The aim of the collection is to highlight problems within the Roman Catholic Church associated with 'authority', that is, its nature, exercise and lived experience, and, as editor Bernard Hoose of Heythrop College, London puts it, to articulate 'the strong conviction within a large section of the Roman Catholic community that where authority is concerned, things simply cannot remain as they are: they must change, and they must change soon'(p. ix).

The essayists are mostly Roman Catholics, and leading theological lights. In fact, the 'things' which must change form the now well-ventilated litany of needs to do with collegiality: i.e. to reform the papacy, to reduce the excessive concentration of power and decision-making in the Roman curia, to devolve church government to conferences of bishops and to local bishops, to change the way episcopal appointments are made, to bring about a greater participation in government by the laity, and to review the training of future-priests so as to eschew the 'caste system' – those who 'see themselves as set apart and ontologically changed through ordination' (p. 238) – and to ensure instead the adoption of collaborative attitudes that do not sideline women. There is at the moment, it is said, a 'growing tendency in Vatican circles to attribute a quasi-infallibility to curial documents', with teaching coming 'from the centre and not . . . from proper consultation' and with Vatican officials silencing 'theologians with whom they do not find themselves in immediate agreement' or who refuse to toe 'the current party line' (p. 11 and 245). All these problems between the magisterium and theologians as with ecclesiastical governance in general within the Roman Catholic Church, need urgently to be confronted, editor Hoose declares, since they not only impair the internal life of the church but throw up further obstacles to ecumenism.

This hardback is grouped around six loosely-defined themes. Gerard Mannion, Hugh Lawrence and Nicholas Lash tackle the history and nature of authority, whilst Francis Sullivan and Richard Gaillardetz address doctrinal issues to do with the *sensus fidei* and the reception of doctrine. Paul McPartlan and Nicholas Sagovsky explore the ecumenical dimensions of authority and its exercise, one the oriental, the other the Anglican. Next come two essays, one by James Sweeney, the other by David McLoughlin, on the 'organisational culture' within contemporary Roman Catholicism, and these are followed by offerings from Margaret Frazer and John O'Brien on

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those whose voices are often marginalised in the church, namely women and the poor. Bernard Hoose draws the collection to a close with his 'Where Do We Go From Here?'

Globally speaking, all the essays are about 'synodality' and its revisionist implications for the day-to-day governance of the church. By its nature, a book like this is bound to be bitty. The reader will not find here a sustained, systematic treatment of the topic, but instead a veritable smorgasbord of savouries. A few of these are singularly disappointing, essays which unfortunately are written with a flimsily-veiled *slancio* and which pay scant regard to biblical exegesis, the function of holy orders within ecclesiology, or even the philosophical context of late modernity. It seems to be taken as a dogma that the purpose of the eleventh century Gregorian Reform movement was to bring about the triumph of a 'hierocratic ideology', which 'enjoyed a late Halloween summer in the hands of the Ultramontanes of the nineteenth century' and which expressly 'sought to exclude the laity from any form of ecclesiastical governance' (p. 77). Yet amidst the gristle, there is also much red meat, with some well-modulated if challenging contributions to the debate. Thus the serenely erudite and limpid pen of Paul McPartlan convincingly demonstrates how much the West can learn from the East and its eucharistic ecclesiology. Nicholas Sagovsky rightly points out the riches of the 1999 ARCIC II document *The Gift of Authority*. Richard Gaillardetz does indeed throw new light on the vexed issue of the reception of doctrine and David McLoughlin, despite the odd jangle, rightly pulls us back to a foundational perspective by showing how the root of communion is embedded not in ecclesiology but in the Blessed Trinity (p. 186).

It is unsurprising that the present 'crisis of authority' in late modernity should raise searching and far-reaching questions for contemporary catholicism. But as a diocesan priest with hands-on experience of parish, hospital and university ministry – all of which would have been unimaginable without the generous collaboration and hard work of numerous christian faithful – I found the argument of *sola structura* unconvincing: that if only we changed the Church's 'political' structures, then all would be well. Moreover, the incessant lobbying for internal devolution of power from Rome left me anxious, wondering what impact this would have on our already busy Conference of Bishops with its limited resources. Indeed, for me it was Nicholas Lash who put his finger on the root-cause of the current crisis of ecclesiastical authority and obedience. As Lash argued, the Church is at the service of Christian discipleship: she exists to be a school of formation that helps us grow in holiness, friendship and understanding. This is why 'authority is . . . a far wider term than governance' (p. 68).

PHILIP EGAN

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