

12-1-2004

# Governance, Accountability, and the Future of the Catholic Church, edited by Francis Oakley and Bruce Russett

Paul F. Lakeland  
*Fairfield University*, [pflakeland@fairfield.edu](mailto:pflakeland@fairfield.edu)

## Peer Reviewed

---

### Repository Citation

Lakeland, Paul F., "Governance, Accountability, and the Future of the Catholic Church, edited by Francis Oakley and Bruce Russett" (2004). *Religious Studies Faculty Publications*. Paper 30.  
<http://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/religiousstudies-facultypubs/30>

### Published Citation

Lakeland, Paul F. "Governance, Accountability, and the Future of the Catholic Church, edited by Francis Oakley and Bruce Russett." *Theological Studies* 65.4 (2004): 885-886.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Religious Studies Department at DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Studies Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@fairfield.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@fairfield.edu).

these topics. However, over and above these important considerations, B. provides a valuable direction to the revitalization of marriage and a helpful method for addressing the issue's complexity.

*Niagara University, N.Y.*

JUDITH A. MERKLE, S.N.D. DE N.

GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND THE FUTURE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. Edited by Francis Oakley and Bruce Russett. New York: Continuum, 2004. Pp. 240. \$26.95.

Among the appreciable number of books that have appeared in the last two years in the wake of the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, this one stands out for several reasons. Originally a series of conference papers delivered in 2003 at the Thomas More Center at Yale University, the essays collected here attend much more to underlying issues of church structures than to an account or analysis of the sexual abuse itself. Second, with only one exception they show careful attention to historical scholarship. Third, they seem mercifully bereft both of rhetoric and hyperbole. Finally and above all, they implicitly but nonetheless forcefully make the point that, in examining an issue so fraught with emotion and full of such implications for the future of the Church, there is no substitute for the facts.

"The facts" in this case are those germane to a discussion of patterns of church governance that careful historical scholarship can uncover from study of the early Church and patristic sources (Francine Cardman), the medieval Church (Brian Tierney), constitutionalism (Frank Oakley), canon law (John Beal), and the lessons of the American experience (Gerald Fogarty). Collectively, these distinguished scholars support and amplify the respectfully worded critique that Peter Steinfels offers to the distressingly unhistorical opening paper by Bishop Donald Wuerl. It is hard to tell if the juxtaposition of bishop and scholars is editorial or organizing genius, but it is certainly instructive. The approach of a sincere and intelligent bishop is so completely at variance with that of scholars who are all, to a person, committed to the Church. Perhaps the demands of episcopal leadership conflict with the messy ambiguity of history. But, unfortunately, episcopal unwillingness to confront the truth is one of the causes of the present disorder.

The chapters that follow Bishop Wuerl's opening address and Peter Steinfels's accomplished response are divided more or less evenly between the historical discussions listed above and a series of papers applying theological skills to the governance crisis. This latter group includes an essay on the theology of accountability (James Heft), two on the sexual abuse crisis itself (John McGreevey and Tom Reese), one on financial accountability (Francis Butler), one on the parallel problems in the Irish Church (Gerald Mannion), and one on the lessons of the Asian ecclesial experience (Peter Phan). Also included is a brief essay by Donald Cozzens (originally an after-dinner speech at the Yale conference) and an afterword by Bruce

Russett, in which he introduces the interesting notion of a “decent consultation hierarchy,” setting the bar as low as he can in the “democracy in the Church” debate.

This collection is invaluable because it shows that good scholarship on ecclesial issues puts a series of very difficult questions to today’s Church. Current Roman Catholic ecclesial practice is intensely hierarchical, at best paternalistic. It is mired in clericalism and places the laity in a catch-22 situation in which their struggles for legitimate voice in church matters—voice that Vatican II strongly suggested was their right and responsibility—cannot be attained because they currently do not have the voice with which to call for voice! Bishop Wuerl’s oversimplified view of the historical continuity between the mind of Christ and the details of Catholic polity, all too representative as it is of official ecclesiology, attempts to enchain the theological imagination in the fetters of the status quo. The essays here make clear that it is just not that simple, and that attention to history allows us to proclaim loudly that present patterns of church governance were not always so, and consequently need not always be so.

The question that such a valuable collection leaves us with is this: what is it about the Church that it can possess such outstanding scholarship in depth, and seemingly not allow it to reach into the arena where church practice is actually fashioned? There are good grounds and sound historical precedent for allowing the laity a greater role in church governance. There is ample evidence that the mantra, “the Church is not a democracy,” obscures more than it illuminates. And the connection between clericalism and lack of accountability seems unarguable. These and many other points are argued forcefully in this fine collection. But is anyone listening?

*Fairfield University*

PAUL LAKELAND

ORDERING THE BAPTISMAL PRIESTHOOD: THEOLOGIES OF LAY AND ORDAINED MINISTRY. Edited by Susan K. Wood. Collegeville: Liturgical, 2003. Pp. x + 275. \$26.95.

Currently there is a renewed interest in the role and function of ordained ministry within the Catholic Church, especially with the publication of *Sacramental Orders* (2000) by Susan K. Wood, *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood* (2003) edited by Dean Hoge and Jacqueline Wenger, *Unfailing Patience and Sound Teaching* (2003) edited by David Stosur, and *Deacons and the Church* (2002) by John N. Collins. These works deal primarily with various problems, debates, and discussions regarding sacramental ministry, especially the themes of authority, hierarchy, and liturgical leadership. Yet these studies each focus on a rather specific area of ministry, such as the role of the bishop, priest, or deacon without considering how the three orders relate to one another, or how the threefold orders function in relation to the laity. The book under review helps to fill that void and is a welcome contribution to the fields of sacramental theology, ministry, and ecclesiology.