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On Power in the Church

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and who found it wanting in relevance or value for their personal lives; these men and women have in this series an opportunity to "give St. Thomas another chance" and to give themselves another chance to see the depth of the author's insights, which may have been distorted by a text-book tradition that deviated from those riches. Whether or not the intelligent reader without philosophical background can derive from a study of the new edition a profit commensurate with the effort required, I cannot say for sure; but if he has the interest and is willing to go at it in a spirit of hard work, I think the effort will be altogether worthwhile. In the words of the overall editor, Fr. Gilby, in the general preface to the whole work, the purpose of the edition is "to share with all Christians a treasury which is part of their common heritage. Moreover, it consults the interests of many who would not claim to be believers, and yet appreciate the integrity which takes religion into hard thinking." For this reason the "needs of the general reader who can respond to the reasons in Christianity" have been kept in mind. As mentioned, the introductions and appendices will be very helpful for the intelligent general reader. And in addition the glossary of terms given in English and sometimes in Latin are enlightening.

The print is easy on the eyes, the sturdy binding in dark blue buckram is attractive and bears Blackfriars' seal in gold as a colophon. Like all hardbound books of our time, the price is moderately high.

FRANCIS E. REILLY, S.J.

On Power in the Church

POWER and Poverty in the Church is a significant and timely book ("an important document," one reviewer has said); it is also a beautiful and inspiring work.¹ The questions it takes up: the Christian understanding of authority; the development of this understanding through the

¹ POWER AND POVERTY IN THE CHURCH. By Yves Congar, O.P. Translated by Jennifer Nicholson. Baltimore: Helicon, 1964. 157 pp.

Church's history; what our attitude should be towards titles, honors, privilege in the Church; the Church and evangelical poverty; the Church and the poor of the world today—are at the heart of the renewal of the Church which Pope John and his Council have brought into action. And its author, the well known Dominican theologian, who has moved *ex umbris* (of suspicion and harrassment from integrist groups and the displeasure of some highly-placed ecclesiastics) into the clear light of full rehabilitation and even honor, is also indisputably at the center of the thinking of the present Council.

If we may be allowed a prenote here, before taking up the book itself: *Der christliche Sonntag* (24 November 1963) reported that Pope Paul VI spoke to the Dominican Master General of his own special esteem and regard for Congar's theological work. "He has had the greatest influence on my own thought," the Pope told the head of the Dominican Order. And the editors of *DcS* add: "His theology is victorious at the Council." "At Rome," *The Tablet* (London, 22 August 1964) reported, "the Père Congar is to be seen, a busy and happy man, one of the number of French intellectual priests who have felt the displeasure of the Holy Office but bear no resentment; only they rejoice a little more fervidly than others at the coming of Pope John, the calling of the Council, and the great wind of change."

But to return to the book under review: its main argument (Part One's, at any rate) is the rediscovery, beneath the transitory accretions brought on by centuries of the Church's history, of the understanding of what the Gospel and the most genuine Christian tradition tell us is the meaning of authority within the Christian community. Through three essays and a brief conclusion,² P. Congar addresses himself to this question, and to the cognate questions of poverty, of legalism, honors and privilege in relation to the Church, and he brings to bear

² The book's contents: I. The Hierarchy as Service: Scriptural Sources and Historical Development; II. Titles and Honours in the Church: a short historical study; III. By Way of Conclusion; IV. Our Pastors Speak of the Church of Poverty and Service.

on these matters the breadth of information and the wide-ranging knowledge of pertinent literature (especially in the areas of Church history and development of doctrine) as well as his remarkable facility of expression, qualities which we have come to expect from even those of his writings which are meant for a wider audience than that of his colleagues. His thesis (with regard to authority) is stated simply enough: the Gospel teaching identifies superiority of rank with the maximum degree of humble and loving service; in the mind of Christ and the New Testament teaching (as well as in the most authentic Christian thought), authority is service, and those who hold authority within the Christian community do not hold it to domineer over the faithful, but to be their servants for the sake of Jesus.

In the Gospel order, as in the order of earthly societies, the great and the first do exist. In earthly societies they make their power felt, they bear themselves as masters; the whole relationship of inequality between others and themselves is a relationship of subjection on the one side, of mastery on the other. The path that, according to the Gospel, leads to the rank of *first* or *great* is quite different, even the exact opposite. It lies in seeking a situation or relationship not of power but of service, of *diakonos*, servant, or *doulos*, slave, common workman. These two terms lie at the very heart of the categories which serve to define Christian existence. (pp. 24-25)

And going beneath the authority=service equation to its theological basis, Congar has this to say:

In our view, the secret of the New Testament concept of authority (as service) consists in the fact that authority is not put forward as a primary datum. It exists as an order of things instituted either by Christ or by the Apostles or by the Church, within the whole field of the Christian life, which is itself the primary datum and is essentially a service. It is a service organically and ontologically because its reality is derived solely from the grace of God or rather is derived from God as Love and Grace, that is God for us, God in touch with us, God with us, God bending down towards us, God given to us.

The hierarchical offices organize the *diakonia* of the saints, that is, of the Christians (Eph. 4:12). . . . The relationship between superiors and subordinates, *secundum sub et supra*, is found *within* the relationship which constitutes the Christian life and, by one and the same process, makes us welcome God's grace in faith, and then live

and express it in loving service for mankind and in thanksgiving to God. Hence the hierarchy must not only *live* its life in the spirit of service, it *is* service intrinsically because it is established *within* a life which *is* service.³

Much has been written of late on this whole matter, and some of the most eloquent speeches given in Vatican II have dwelt on this theme. The book's foreword cites these moving lines from Pope John XXIII:

It is the spirit that counts more than the gesture; and this lesson does not apply to the leaders of the Church alone: every position of power, every exercise of authority, is a service. The Pope gladly calls himself *Servus servorum Dei*; he is conscious of being, and strives to be, the servant of all. God grant that those who bear the burden of responsibility for the human community may take to heart this last great lesson of Maundy Thursday, and recognize that their authority will be all the more acceptable to their people for being exercised in a spirit of humble service and complete devotion to the welfare of all men. (p. 11)

And Pope Paul VI, in an address given at a general audience on 4 November 1964 (cf. *The Tablet*, London, 21 November 1964) said:

Authority in the Church is a vehicle of divine gifts, is a service of charity for charity; it was in fact instituted to put into practice—for a salvific purpose—the great commandment of love; it is not an expression of pride, it is not an organization working for its own advantage; it is not even a copy of civil authority armed with the sword and clothed with glory. It is a pastoral function . . . (Loc. cit., 1327)

Other citations could be multiplied. Congar, in fact, gives us a small collection of texts under the heading, "our pastors speak of the Church of poverty and service: passages from the Council, the Pope and the Bishops," where the theme is taken up and some of its applications indicated (pp. 145-157).

A reading of the papal statements just cited and of the pages just referred to may strike the ordinary Catholic as hearing a relatively new tune, or at least a tune played with

³ Quoted from "The Historical Development of Authority" in its original form, the paper read at the Notre-Dame du Bec symposium (April 1961) and first published in *Problems of Authority* (Baltimore: Helicon, 1962), pp. 121-123.

relative infrequency in ecclesiastical circles . . . It would be worthwhile, in a matter of such basic importance, to discuss Congar's book at length; and the book deserves such discussion. (One persistent question which it raises is, "What then? What does all this mean, in practice?"—A good question, and potentially a very fruitful one.) This might prove to be the main value of this slight volume of collected pieces: it might force us to reflect on how we Christians are to understand authority and how we are to live out the share of its burden which falls on us (for parents, teachers, pastors—all have their share of authority). But even in a longish review we have space only to indicate one point for emphasis.

Are we really faced with a radically new view of authority within the Church? Is this view, somewhat fully formulated in the present work, something really different from what we have been taught all along? — The answer is both *No* and *Yes*.

No, if we mean that the *reality* of authority within the Church is denied. We might recall that Pope Paul VI, towards the end of the third session of the Council, strongly reaffirmed the reality of the papal primacy and of authority in the Church in the allocution from which we have excerpted the lines given above. (Cf. *The Tablet*, London 21 November 1964 for a fuller report.) And Congar's thought is clear on this point. To cite two brief statements:

It is certain that authority is included, *as a reality*, in Christ's institution of the apostolate and in the apostles' institution of certain ministries, and similarly in the fact of mission We are not at the moment concerned with the reality of authority, which seems to me undeniable (p. 38).

An authority most certainly does exist in the Church. The New Testament not only supposes or expressly affirms the existence of offices of authority, but often does so (and this is a fact to be carefully noted) actually in the context of its pronouncements on the hierarchy as service: Mt. 18: 1 ff., Lk. 22: 25-27, John 13: 1 (p. 96).

Yes, if we mean that we have not kept steadily before our eyes (and section 2: on the "Historical development of

authority" should serve as an excellent astringent to help clear our vision) the very real distinction which obtains between authority and power as understood and exercised by those "who lord it over the Gentiles" and the Christian idea of authority as *diakonia*, service within the current of divine Love-Giving and Grace (cf. pp. 28-31). What is being stressed by contemporary theologians, then, amounts to a rediscovery of the genuine evangelical understanding of this element in the life of the Church.

It would be just as mistaken to think that the ideal of loving service eliminated all "power" as it would be dangerous to believe that authority in Christianity had reality or was defined *in the same way* as a juridical authority or a temporal power, with, as a kind of appendix, a moral obligation to exercise it in a spirit of service. (p. 96).

The words just cited already forestall the evasion which offers itself to a certain type of mentality which will immediately take refuge in a sleight-of-hand distinction between the substance (*id quod*) of authority and the manner (*modus quo*) of its exercise. But to resort to this evasion is to miss the whole point of the matter. Congar is insistent that the whole character of authority has been transformed in the thought of Jesus. Insistent, because time and time again in the history of the Church the facile escape from the true meaning of Christian authority has been used to rationalize away even "the most flagrant examples of constraint". (Even the scriptural text, "Pasce oves meas"—Congar points out, after Henri de Lubac—was used to justify the use of torture! Vid. p. 97)

The Christian understanding of authority does not mean only that authority in the Christian community "must be exercised *in a spirit of personal unselfishness and service*"; it means more than this. It means to realize that Jesus "radically transformed the whole character and even the nature of authority", just as He transposed priesthood and sacrifice to another plane of reality altogether (pp. 81-83). We are to understand what Our Lord understood by authority in the Church on earth by seeing it in the total context of what the common Christian grace and discipleship are within the Chris-

tian life, against the background of what pure reality is in the Christian scheme of things (for in Christianity *pure* reality is eschatological).

We must get back to the true vision of the Gospel: posts of authority in the Church do indeed exist; a real jurisdictional power does exist, which the shepherds of God's people receive from Christ in conformity with the order which Christ willed and instituted (at least in its essential lines). But this power exists only within the structure of the fundamental religious relationship of the Gospel, as an organizational element within the life given to men by Christ, the one Lord and the one Head of his Body, for which each is accountable to all the rest according to the place and measure granted to him. So there is never simply a relationship of subordination or superiority, as in secular society, but always a loving obedience to Christ, shaping the life of each with all and for all, according to the position which the Lord has given him in the Body. In this service, fundamentally identical and coextensive with the fact of being a Christian, some command and others obey: whether as leaders or as simple members of the brotherhood, they are wholly engaged in the service of Christ and their brethren (Eph. 4:15-16). (pp. 98-88)

One point for reflection would be underlined, we said above, and there is not the space to develop even that. And we have not touched on the other theme of the book (some will say, of greater importance), poverty in the Church; and have said nothing on Congar's reflections on ecclesiastical titles and honors whose importance he himself points out (p. 111). The section "Titles and honors . . ." makes really interesting reading, and the temptation is to cite whole pages. But one more quote will have to suffice:

It is by the outward signs of the Church, by what she is seen to be, that men know her and through her are, or should be, brought to the Gospel, led to God; or else they are estranged from her, repelled or even turned towards some sort of religion of material things, a system where sociological conduct predominates, rather than towards a personal religion with its inherent spiritual demands. From this point of view, then, the greatest importance attaches to everything that makes the Church visible, everything by which it comes into contact with men's lives, as their faces, looks, shape, and outward trappings give us contact with our fellows; it may be the wording of a poster, a notice, a parish magazine, or more likely form of ornamentation or celebration . . . the look of the priest, his manner or turn of speech, the way he lives—

and the same applies to a nun, or any cleric. These are minor everyday elements in the Church's form, in her role as the parable of the kingdom of God or the sacrament of the Gospel, but they have their significance none the less and it may be decisive (pp. 111-112)⁴

Perhaps enough has been said to at least give readers some idea of what things they will find waiting for them in the pages of *Power and Poverty*. The large number of citations we reproduced were set down in the hope that they would lead readers to the book itself. And this, of course, (as another reviewer who used the same tactic said) is the whole idea.

Power and Poverty in the Church is a small book, and some parts of it give indications of having been hurriedly written. But it is eminently worth reading, and its pages are remarkably evocative,—although perhaps only those already acquainted with Congar's previous work will see how many of the themes dear to him keep recurring here, and that these themes, as they appear briefly in *Power and Poverty*, sketch out the larger background against which the reflections in this book should be projected: the need of an ecclesiology which has its due place for an anthropology of Christian man; the realization of the living God truly active among us through his grace; the community of the faithful on earth and its relation to the *pure* eschatological reality; concern with the domain of men vs. concern with the domain of *things*; the Church less of the world and more *in* the world; the *koinonia-diakonia-marturia* which must characterize the presence of the Church in the world of today . . .

⁴ We may be allowed to append the last part of this passage: ". . . our outward circumstances, the setting in which we live our lives, the way we are customarily treated, the image of ourselves and our office which we see reflected in all these, are powerful factors in moulding our ideas and attitude. Can we as a rule enjoy privileges without coming to feel they are rights, or live in some degree of luxury without forming certain habits, be honoured, flattered, treated with solemn and brilliant ceremonial, without setting ourselves morally on a pedestal? Can we always command and judge, receive men as petitioners, eager with their compliments, without getting into the habit of not really listening? In short, if we are always attended bythurifers, can we avoid acquiring a liking for incense?" (p. 112)

No doubt P. Congar wrote these essays to fill here-and-now needs, and they were then gathered together in book form largely with this in mind: that these studies should illuminate a few questions with which the Fathers of the Council are concerned, and on which research into the Christian sources could fruitfully play its light for at least a few moments. But for all this, it seems to me a precious little book, with a mission of its own to fulfill. Its real "bite" on each one of us—only our own further reflection (and above all our own honest and patient effort to realize its message in terms of life) will make us feel. We can perhaps apply what the author says regarding the man of today to the book itself: "it compels us now to show forth in our lives the truth of what we profess to believe and love with all our heart."

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