

## ***Introduction***

This evening I would like to accomplish two things: to consider the manner in which the Church is governed, and to apply the government of the Church to Blessed Sacrament Parish.

The topic is important to us for two principal reasons: first, the Holy Father, following in the footsteps of the Vatican Council, has insisted that our lay men and women take their proper place in the life of the Church. Our laity have an office which, though essentially different, is equal in dignity to that of the ordained. He has insisted that our parishes are to be centers of a conversation between the Catholic laity and the members of the hierarchy, so that we may discern together the manner of the Church's presence in the world, and so that we may collaborate in the apostolates of the Church. To collaborate implies an equality in ministry: one delegates to one's subordinates; one collaborates with one's equals. How can the parish be governed in such a way that a real equality in dignity and a real collaboration in ministry can be achieved?

The second reason to discuss the government of our Church and parish is for the sake of the stability and consistency of our programs and ministries. While there is ongoing legislation in the Archdiocese and in the Dominican Province, there is no parallel legislation at the level of the parish. As a result, the programs and initiatives of the parish can change radically with the appointment of each new pastor. How can the parish be governed in such a way that there is a stability in programs and apostolic initiatives from one administration to the next?

## ***There is no civil model for government in the Church***

How is the Catholic Church governed? The first problem that we confront is that none of the governmental systems that we are used to in civil society can be applied directly to the Church. Instead, the Church has a mode of government which is unique among the institutions of the world.

### **1. Authority, power and jurisdiction**

When we contrast modes of government there are three elements which are essential: power, authority and jurisdiction. By "power" is meant the ability to order a given society. Thus the president of a republic has, by virtue of his office, the ability - or power - to order the society. He can propose and veto legislation, or mobilize the army.

By "authority" is first meant the rightful or legitimate exercise of power. But authority is also a broader notion than power: "authority" connotes a service rendered to others, for the sake of the common good, whereby the one who is in authority speaks for the whole. In this light, one in authority legitimately exercises power because he or she appeals to the common good, and speaks on behalf of all who are governed. For this reason,

"authority" also implies some consent on the part of the governed, at least to the degree that appeal is made to the relationship of those who are governed to the common good.

By "jurisdiction" is meant the scope of the exercise of power and authority. Thus, for example, the jurisdiction of the President of the United States extends, in some measure, to the whole of the nation; the jurisdiction of a governor to the whole of a state.

## **2. Two Examples of Authority, Power and Jurisdiction exercised by the Laity**

For an example of the exercise of power and authority within a specific jurisdiction, consider the recent experience of a Blessed Sacrament parishioner. She raised a moral objection with her child's school about the teaching offered in a sex education class, and told officials that she wanted to withdraw her child from the class. They gave her permission to withdraw the child provided that she come in to review the course materials so that she could teach the child at home. This was a violation of her authority; as a parent, it is her place by right to educate her child. A parent delegates her teaching authority to the school, not the school to the parent, a child being clearly within his parent's jurisdiction.

Our parishioner informed the school officials that they were acting out of order. She insisted on her unconditional right to withdraw her child from class. The school conceded the point, the parishioner withdrew her child, and, having secured her right, went in to review the materials anyway, out of prudence. That school officials listened to the parishioner's objection and honored her wishes is evidence of the power of the truth: when a person speaks in communion with the Church, she is speaking for God, and her words carry a weight greater than if she spoke them on her own. Whether officials realized it or not, in confronting our parishioner they were really confronting God and the whole Catholic Church. If this sounds like an excessive claim, consider the alternative, which sounds even more far-fetched: that God might truly leave us alone to confront the injustices of our world, and that God might abandon the world without his representation. In truth we, the people of God, are his representatives, and so it makes perfect sense that he will back us up with his power.

Consider your relationships to your non-Catholic friends. If you have ever shared your Catholic faith with a friend, you have exercised authority on behalf of the Church, authority that you hold in your own right as a baptized and confirmed member of the People of God. God has granted you authority to speak for the Church. He has also given you the power to speak on behalf of Christ and his church: when you teach in communion with the Church, Christ will move the heart of your friend to hear you and to receive your words. Your jurisdiction is governed by your day-to-day relationships: your coworkers, friends and family all fall within your jurisdiction.

A parishioner who works at an animal shelter was asked recently by a coworker whether animals have souls. The parishioner replied that yes, they do indeed, though in a somewhat different sense than humans. Animals are wholly embodied in a way that we

are not: they belong completely to the earth, while there is a part of us that remains forever with God in heaven. Animals have sense knowledge and emotions, they can be loyal and courageous; we can love animals, and they are very much like little brothers and sisters to us (St. Francis called them such). The coworker was clearly intrigued, for he had never heard such an explanation before, yet the explanation was perfectly Catholic. Such a sharing of the Catholic faith, in a way that is tailored to real-life situations and which attempts to meet the nonbeliever in whatever physical - or spiritual - situation he finds himself, can only be accomplished by lay people acting under their own authority.

Pope John Paul II has insisted that our laity have a real authority in the Church, a real power and a real jurisdiction. This being the case, how are we to think of government in the Church? To examine this question, let us consider two modes of governance with which we are familiar: absolute monarchy and representative democracy.

### **3. The Church is not an absolute monarchy**

Most Catholics - and, likely, everyone else - think of the Church as a monarchy, even an absolute monarchy (see figure 2). According to this model, the Pope, as Vicar of Christ, has supreme power and authority, and jurisdiction over the whole Church. He alone can legislate for the whole Church, and speak for the whole Church. He is accountable to Christ, whose vicar he is, and, when he speaks for the whole Church, his office is guaranteed by the Holy Spirit. His jurisdiction is exercised through the Bishops, who participate in the papal office, but who are subordinate to the papal power and authority. The bishops, through ordination, participate in the papal power and authority, but exercise jurisdiction only in their dioceses. By ordination, the bishops delegate a participation in their power and authority to priests, who can exercise jurisdiction in the name of the bishops (and, ultimately, in the name of the pope) in parishes or other local settings. In this model, lay men and women can be delegated power, authority and jurisdiction, but only for particular tasks of a specified duration, and never in their own right.

What is wrong with such a model? First, the Pope has insisted that lay men and women do exercise authority and power in the mission of the Church in their own right. This has always been the case. Thus, for example, there are lay women - St. Catherine of Siena and St. Theresa of Avila - who are Doctors of the Church; the authority of the saints is a real authority and one which is apart from the papal jurisdiction. The Pope did not designate St. Catherine to instruct the Church of her day; he submitted to the authority with which she spoke. Moreover, Pope John Paul II has insisted that, in the mission of the Church to the world, he has no more dignity than has any baptized Christian.

The bishops of the Church are successors of the apostles in their own right; they are not merely participants in the papal authority and power. Their jurisdiction is a real jurisdiction. Thus, the Vatican Council teaches that supreme authority in the Church resides in the Pope and in the Apostolic College (the communion of bishops), of which the Pope is a member.

The universal Church is actually a communion of local churches, each governed by a bishop, who, in his own right, is a successor to the apostles. If the Church were an absolute monarchy, it would not be a communion of local churches, and there would be no real jurisdiction apart from the Pope. The Church is not an absolute monarchy.

#### **4. The Church is not a representative Democracy**

Neither is the Church a representative democracy (see figure 3). According to this model, the Holy Spirit is first present to the whole community in such a way that the authority to act for the whole community depends upon the delegation of the laity. What is wrong with this understanding?

First, Our Lord himself committed the care of the Church to Peter and to the Apostles, and conferred the Holy Spirit upon the Church through the apostolic office. Christ is our head, and we are members of his body, the Church. We do not constitute the Church in the manner that we constitute civil society. Rather, the good that we hold in common is a supernatural good, communicated to us by the Holy Spirit acting through the apostolic succession. The Holy Spirit does inform the Church, and we all truly partake of the Spirit, but we are dependent upon the apostolic succession in order to be a community at all.

Thus, second, the laity depend upon the hierarchy, in succession from the apostles, for the very revelation and grace by which they are constituted as members of the People of God. The model of representative democracy would effectively remove the apostolic office from the Church.

Third, there have been moments in the Church's history in which many Christians, possibly even a majority, departed from the faith. So, for example, during the time of Athanasius there were likely more Arians in the Church than orthodox Christians. Had the faith of the Church been left to popular vote, the Catholic faith would likely have disappeared from the world. The Catholic faith has always been guaranteed by the apostolic college, united under their head, the Pope. The Church cannot be a representative democracy.

The reason for this is all the more clear when we consider closely the way in which Christ is revealed to us. The manner of the revelation is personal in two respects: the revelation is about a person, Jesus of Nazareth, God's only-begotten son, and the revelation of Jesus is made to persons, to us and to others. The revelation of a person always depends upon personal authority. So, if someone who has never met you desires to know about you, he or she will seek to speak to you. If they cannot speak to you, they will speak to someone who knows you well - a close friend of yours. They will seek someone who can speak from authority about you. What they will never do is gather everyone who has met you and conduct a survey or take a vote concerning who you are, careful that everyone's opinion is represented. Why not? Because the opinions of those who know you best would then be placed on the same level as those who have little contact with you.

All of us have a real knowledge of Jesus, conferred by the Holy Spirit. But it is a knowledge which is mediated in a human way. We have come to know Jesus through the apostles - that is, through those who knew him best, and whose knowledge of him was guaranteed by the Holy Spirit - and we remain dependent upon their witness about him, a witness that is preserved in the apostolic succession. The Holy Spirit does not introduce us to Jesus independently of the Apostolic testimony about Jesus; rather, the Holy Spirit enables us to *understand* the Apostolic testimony, as we receive it. The bishops, who are the successors to the Apostles, are those through whom the testimony about Jesus is presented to the Church.

The revelation, which must be newly given in every age, depends upon the episcopal authority. Insofar as the Church has the task of revealing Jesus to the world, the Church cannot be a representative democracy; it must rest upon the apostolic testimony, and the authority of the apostles must be exercised independent from the particular issues or concerns of the day.

### ***The Holy Spirit governs the Church:***

#### **5. Through Holy Orders**

If the Church is not governed as a monarchy or as a democracy, then how is it governed? (See figure 4). To answer this question, we must ask what the Church is.

The Church is not a "community of believers" if, by this, we mean that those who believe choose to constitute themselves into a visible society. The Church is not made up by its members; rather, the Church is a reality which is prior to any of its members. Christ calls us into the Church, which is his Mystical Body, and, through the Holy Spirit, governs his Church. For this reason, all authority in the Church is vicarious; no one governs in the Church by his own right, but only as a vicar - that is, as one who takes the place of someone else. For this reason, the Pope has the title, "the Vicar of Christ;" his office is to speak to the whole Church, in communion with his brother bishops who make up the apostolic college. In another sense, every member of the Church is a "vicar of Christ:" we are all called to stand in Christ's place for the sake of others - whether for our friends, for our families, or for co-workers whom we can encourage in Christ's place.

The Holy Spirit teaches, sanctifies and governs the Church. Thus, the office of the apostles is to teach, sanctify and govern in the name of Christ. Here the order of the presentation - to teach, to sanctify and to govern - is significant: the office of governing the Church first depends upon the office of teaching and sanctifying. The Holy Spirit first teaches the Church through the apostolic preaching. The result of this teaching is the *sensus fidei*, the "sense of the faith" by which Christ is recognized in the community of the Church. Nourished by the Word, the faithful are sanctified through the sacraments, by which they are - actually and physically - conformed to Christ. Then, the faithful are governed by the Holy Spirit: they are ordered to the presence of Christ in the Church and in the world.

How does this "sense of the faith" function? By way of example, we might consider one of the Gnostic gospels, the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. It was a document of the early Church which claimed the authorship of St. Thomas, the Apostle. In it were stories of Jesus' childhood. In one incident, Jesus is alleged to have willed the death of the father of a young friend of his, because of the man's impertinence. The sense that we have of who Jesus is, because of our encounters with him in word and sacrament, is revolted by such a story. Jesus, we know, is never self-serving; neither is there a trace of arbitrariness in the manner in which he relates to others. The *sensus fidei* - the "sense of the faith" - which we possess forbids us to believe such an account. It was for this reason that the early Church refused to accept the authority of such a gospel.

We can draw an analogy to the "sense of the faith" in our own relationships. When we have truly encountered another person, and loved that person, we come to have an inner sense concerning what belongs to our friend to speak and act, and what does not. If it were reported to me that a certain friend had embezzled a large sum of money, I could know that the report was untrue - simply on the grounds that I know the integrity of my friend. I would not require any further evidence, and even if the apparent evidence against my friend should be overwhelming, still I could know that it was not so. My sense of my friend, which I have achieved through faithfulness - through a constant attentiveness to my friend - would forbid me to believe such an account.

Again, we have experienced the "sense of the faith" if we have ever listened skeptically to a TV evangelist asserting that salvation is a black-and-white matter of "accepting Jesus," believing in the Bible, and perhaps sending in a generous donation - and, furthermore, accepting the proposition that if you haven't "been saved" according to this narrow formulation, you are likely destined for the fires of Hell. Is God's work in the soul not more quiet, more gentle, and more forgiving? How could God condemn all nonbelievers to Hell, when many labor under the suffering of this world? We have all encountered God's love, mercy, and forgiveness in the Sacrament of Reconciliation: How could God fail to be loving to those who have died, even those who have died outside the faith? Yet we also recognize that God is perfectly just, and that our actions have consequences; we expect that God will mete out justice to those who deserve it, so that "many who are last, will be first, and many who are first, will be last." Salvation is, in fact, a profound mystery, a mystery which we recognize intrinsically if we stop to reflect upon it. This recognition comes through the *sensus fidei*.

In their office of teaching, sanctifying and governing, the bishops, as successors to the apostles, are dependent upon the sense of the faith - the *sensus fidei* - which they invoke. The means of governing the Church is, therefore, by way of *discernment*: first, of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the community of the Church, which are to be called forth and commissioned; second, of the order which the Holy Spirit imposes upon the community, requiring that the community of the Church should be one in Christ. Thus St. Paul: there are many gifts, but one faith, one baptism, one Lord (Ephesians 4:4,5).

What does it mean to govern by way of *discernment*? First, it is to govern by way of prayer: the Holy Spirit must be invoked, so that the Holy Spirit will guide the Church,

and illumine what is to be done. Second, it will require that the particular issues, concerns and biases of those who govern be submitted for God's judgment. This means that one's own agenda must be acknowledged, and then referred for judgment. The judgment proceeds according to consensus; that consensus, in turn, depends upon the sense of the faith which the whole Church possesses. To govern by discernment means that the whole Church must be involved in the decision: the Church in the past as well as the Church in the present. The principles of the discernment will be found: first, in scripture and in the apostolic tradition; second, in the insights of the saints; third, in the understanding and concerns of the present membership of the Church.

The governance of the Church is therefore directed to the *unity* of the whole Church, the Church past and present, and the unity of the local churches which comprise the universal Church, as well as the unity within the local churches. The apostolic preaching inculcates a sense of the faith, which demands that we be one in our witness to Christ. Through the hierarchy - through the successors to the Apostles - the Holy Spirit invokes the *sensus fidei* and fashions the People of God into the visible manifestation of the Mystical Body of Christ, so that Christ may be presented whole to the world. The way in which this government proceeds is through prayerful discernment of the will of God.

Were the Church a representative democracy, the discernment of God's will would not extend to the whole Church, but only to the Church presently constituted. Were the Church an absolute monarchy, the discernment would rest only upon the person of the Holy Father; the insights of the saints and of present believers would be overlooked. Neither model is adequate to understand the manner of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church, or the way in which the will of God is discerned in the Church.

## **6. Through personal charisms**

Not only is there a hierarchy - a "holy order" - in the Church through which the Holy Spirit orders and governs the Church by means of apostolic succession, but there are also personal charisms or gifts of the Holy Spirit, conferred upon individual Christians for the sake of the mission of the Church to the world, and for building up the Church.

A charism is a free gift of grace, imparted by the Holy spirit, for the sake of others. The charisms are not for the sake of sanctifying the one who possesses the charism, but are for the sake of sanctifying those who receive his or her ministry. Thus, if one has the charism of teaching, others will be powerfully brought to God through his or her teaching ministry; if one has the charism of healing, others will be supernaturally healed through his or her healing ministry. The one who possesses the charism will not thereby be able to teach or to heal himself.

The charisms are, therefore, given for the sake of the whole Church, not of the individual, and ordered to the mission of the whole Church. An individual will not be aware of possessing a charism, until he or she undertakes a particular work of the Church. Until one who has the charism of healing actually prays for the sake of another, he or she will

be unaware of possessing that charism. The charisms are not talents; they must be discerned through life and work in the Christian community.

By means of the charisms, the Holy Spirit inspires particular initiatives in the community of the Church. It pertains to the pastoral office to recognize the gifts, but not to confer them; the charisms are directly conferred by the Holy Spirit. In this way, *the hierarchy submits to the charisms of the Spirit present in the community, even as they are called to govern the Church, just as the hierarchy submits to the sensus fidei, which the apostolic preaching invokes*. The members of the hierarchy therefore must serve the Church through a double obedience: to the Holy Spirit teaching through the apostolic tradition, which they must preserve and teach, and to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian community, conferring gifts of grace (charisms) upon the faithful.

## **7. Government of the Church**

Because the government of the Church is, in the first place, the work of the Holy Spirit, given for the sake of both the sanctification of the Christian and the sanctification of the world, government in the Church is a unique phenomenon. There is indeed a hierarchy, but it is a hierarchy who are obedient, and whose lives must be ordered both to the very tradition which they preserve and represent and to those whom they govern. There are those who are governed, but they have equal dignity with those who govern, and are gifted by the Holy Spirit in their own right. How is such a government modeled?

## **8. Authority in the Church**

All authority in the Church is vicarious. No one can speak for the Holy Spirit, unless by office - such as pope or bishop or layman or laywoman - or by charism. Each Christian has authority to speak for the whole Church in presenting Christ to the world, and each Christian must be prepared for this office. Thus, authority in the Church is conferred by the Holy Spirit upon each Christian by virtue of Baptism and Confirmation; each Christian is called to exercise authority for the sake of the mission of the Church. Practically speaking, you yourself are the presence of the Church to your families, your friends, your co-workers. You have the responsibility to represent the Church to them, and you are therefore given the authority to do so. In the mission of the Church to the world, the Catholic laity are possessed of the same authority as are the apostolic college.

When we consider the mission of the Church to the world, there is complete equality of authority in the Church. What happens when we consider the internal organization of the Church? By virtue of the conferral of the Holy Spirit, the Pope, united with bishops of the Church, possesses universal authority within the Church. The Pope, united with the apostolic college, of which he is a member, can speak with authority to the whole Church. His authority is not personal, nor is it arbitrary. The Pope and the apostolic college govern the Church through discerning the will of God expressed in the *sensus fidei* the "sense of the faith"; because they appeal to the *sensus fidei*, their exercise of authority is a true speaking for the Church.

We therefore distinguish between the mission of the Church to the world, in which each baptized and confirmed Catholic has the same authority to speak for the Church - whether pope, bishop or lay man or woman - and the work of the Holy Spirit within the Church, according to which there is a hierarchy - a "holy order" - by which the Pope and the bishops have authority to speak for the whole Church. This authority is for the sake of the revelation. It is a real authority, but a vicarious authority. The Pope and bishops teach in the name of Christ. Their teaching invokes a "sense of the faith" which is the reason that the laity will submit to the apostolic teaching. In this way the authority of the bishops is not arbitrary, but ordered to the work of the Holy Spirit, revealing Christ to his Church. In a similar way, the authority of the laity is not arbitrary, but ordered to the work of the Holy Spirit, revealing Christ to the world.

Each bishop possesses full authority in his own diocese, or local Church. Each bishop teaches infallibly when he teaches in communion with the Pope and the whole apostolic college. The Catholic Church is, indeed, a communion of local Churches; the whole mystery of the Church is found complete in each of the local churches, or dioceses.

## **9. Power in the Church**

Along with authority, there is also "power" in the Church. Power, again, means the ability to exercise authority. So, for example, the priest has the authority to forgive sins in Christ's name, conferred by Christ himself, through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. But not only does the priest possess the authority to speak in Christ's name; he also possesses, by virtue of Holy Orders, the power to do so. Authority is most directly related to the teaching office of the Church; power is most directly related to the work of the Holy Spirit sanctifying the community - making it holy. When the priest pronounces absolution, the person is actually absolved by Christ, who acts through the priest.

To offer another example, Christ has conferred upon you - through your baptism and anointing - the authority to teach the world about him. You have the authority to speak in his name. But you have also been given the power to do so. In other words, when you speak to others about Christ, the Holy Spirit will move the hearts of others to hear you - exactly, that is, to the degree that you really do speak with and for the Church. The result is that the person will respond, not simply to you, but to Christ speaking through you. Power adds to authority the capability of acting for Christ.

By power, the authority of Christ is made actually present, sanctifying the world. Like authority, the exercise of power in the Church is distinguished: there is the power to represent Christ to the world, and the power to represent Christ in the Church. While the power to represent Christ in the world is given to all of the members of the Church, it belongs most particularly to the laity of our Church. The power to represent Christ within the Church belongs to the Pope and to the bishops of the Church, who are particularly entrusted with the apostolic tradition. In the exercise of their office, they stand in the place of the apostles. But, like the apostles, they teach and govern the Church through obedience to the Holy Spirit, and dependent upon the *sensus fidei*, which their teaching invokes.

We have already remarked that lay men and women also exercise power within the Church, because of charisms - or supernatural gifts - which they receive from the Holy Spirit. Thus, St. Catherine of Sienna was frequently called upon during her lifetime to make peace both in civil society and within the Church. She spoke not only with authority, but with power: her interventions were effective. It was largely due to Catherine that the papacy returned to Rome from Avignon. St. Catherine was not heeded because of her office - she was a laywoman, and not a member of the hierarchy - but because of the authority and power with which she spoke.

By office, our lay men and women are first entrusted with presenting Christ to the world. By office, the pope and bishops are first entrusted with the revelation of Christ to the Church. Yet by charism, particular lay men and women are entrusted with the revelation of Christ to the Church, even as, by charism, certain bishops and priests have been effective in presenting Christ to the world. (In this regard, the grey heads in our community will possibly remember Bishop Fulton Sheen, whose television show drew ratings which were equal to those of the comedian, Milton Berle, whose show ran opposite the bishop's.)

### **10. Jurisdiction - the principle of subsidiarity**

Each baptized and confirmed Catholic possesses an arena in which he or she exercises jurisdiction. By jurisdiction, again, is meant the sphere in which power and authority are exercised. Thus, parents exercise a real jurisdiction in their families. There is in the Church the *principle of subsidiarity* according to which no authority which is more general can ever usurp the place of an authority which is more particular. While the Bishop has jurisdiction over the whole diocese, he cannot usurp the proper authority of a parent in the family. Again, whereas the pope has jurisdiction over the whole Church, he cannot usurp the proper authority of a bishop in his own diocese.

When a Catholic encourages or instructs a friend, he or she exercises a real jurisdiction. (This fact is instantiated in the Rite of Confirmation, at the moment that the sponsor presents the candidate to the bishop to be confirmed. The bishop confirms the candidate, relying upon the testimony of the sponsor that the candidate has been properly prepared.) Even the pope would not interfere with the real authority, power and jurisdiction which parents exercise in their families, or which friends can extend to each other.

Within the Church, the pope alone has jurisdiction over the whole Church. The papal authority and power extend to every diocese, inasmuch as the pope can speak for the whole Church. At the same time, the bishop exercises a real jurisdiction in his diocese. The pope will not overrule the pastoral policies of a particular bishop, unless the bishop is acting out of communion with his brother bishops. Within his diocese, the bishop possesses full authority and power to speak for the apostles.

### **11. Government in the Church: Summary**

The Church has the mission of presenting Christ to the world. For this purpose, there are offices in the Church. Lay men and women have an office in the Church: they possess the authority to speak for the Church, an authority which Christ renders effective, so that they speak with power, within a jurisdiction which is particular to the exercise of their power and authority - as parents in a family, or Catholics with their friends or co-workers. The pope and bishops of the Church also have an office, whereby they are to preserve the revelation of Christ within the Church. In the exercise of their office, pope and bishops are bound to the apostolic tradition and to the sense of the faith, to which they appeal. Their authority is vicarious; they stand in the place of the apostles. Moreover, even within their proper jurisdiction - the whole Church (the papal jurisdiction), or the diocese (the episcopal jurisdiction) - bishops are obliged to respect the proper competence of those whose jurisdiction is more particular.

Government proceeds by way of discernment: the pope and bishops invoke the Holy Spirit to guarantee that they will not defect from the Truth, who is Christ. Similarly, in his own diocese, the Bishop consults his priests and with the lay men and women of his diocese in the task of governing the Church, just as the Pope consults with his brother bishops in governing the whole Church. The bishop's office is to identify the charisms which the Holy Spirit has bestowed upon the Church, and to call them forth.

It should be clear that governance in the Church is a servant governance: it is the particular ministry of one who serves. The governance of the Church is for the sake of the people of God, not for the sake those who govern. Government in a family is for the sake of the children, not of the parents. You are called to serve others by ordering your families, your friendships, your work in the light of the Gospel. We are, accordingly, speaking of a ministry of service. Our Lord instructed us that he came, not to be served, but to serve: to offer his life for the many. Similarly, we are called, not to be served, but to serve: to offer our lives for the sake of our families, our friends, our children, our world. It is in this way that, when we govern, we are both servants of Christ, in whose place we stand (our ministry is vicarious), and servants of those whom we govern, so that they may come to know Christ.

## **12. Practical Considerations in the governance of the Church**

When we consider all of the components which make up the governance of the Church, it is clear that there are real practical considerations which must be met:

- Each of our lay men and women possesses a real competence to speak for the Church in the mission of the Church to the world. For this reason, each of our lay men and women also possesses a real competence to speak to the community of the Church, concerning their mission to the world. Yet the authority, power and jurisdiction of the laity are specific to their particular circumstances. In one sense, we cannot speak of "the laity" as if there could be only one voice; there are as many voices as there are lay men and women. On the other hand, the bishops of the Church do speak with one voice, insofar as they remain in communion with

- their brother bishops, and with the pope. We must, therefore, speak of "the hierarchy" in a different way than we would speak of "the laity." How, then, can we ensure that each of the voices of the laity is heard when we attempt to discern what our programs should be, and how Christ is best presented to a particular time or place? How can we ensure that each of the lay jurisdictions is honored in committing the resources of the parish or diocese?
- Whereas the apostolic college must legislate for the whole people of God, it remains true that the faith must be lived by particular persons in particular times, places and circumstances. How can we guarantee that the principle of subsidiarity is observed - that we do not usurp the proper authority of each member of the community?
  - Whereas the Holy Spirit guarantees that the whole Church will never fall into error concerning the revelation of Christ and the manner of our life in Christ, there is no such guarantee for a particular community (the family or parish). How can we guarantee that the policies of our own parish really conform to the will of God for us?

## ***Government of the Dominican Order***

One example of governance in the Church is that of the Dominican Order. I will propose that this method of governance may well provide a suitable model for the governance of our parish, especially with respect to the practical issues of governance which must be met. The Dominican Order is divided into more than fifty provinces, world wide. In the United States there are four such provinces; each province is governed by a provincial, and a provincial council. Each province is divided, in turn, into houses, with a prior or superior, and a house council.

### **13. The role of the Provincial**

The provincial, as the major superior of the province, represents the whole Order to the province. It is his duty to see to it that the constitution of the Order, and the acts of the provincial chapters (see below) are observed in the province. The provincial is responsible for the initial and ongoing formation of the Dominicans in his province, and has the responsibility for assigning the priests and brothers to the particular houses and apostolates of the province. He has the responsibility to plan for the province - both in fiscal matters and in apostolic initiatives - and is responsible for the spiritual and physical well-being of each of the men in his province. The provincial is elected for a term, not to exceed five years. He can be reelected once.

### **14. The role of the Provincial Council**

The provincial council is elected by the chapter of the province, for a term which is coterminous with that of the provincial. The role of the council is to advise the provincial in the exercise of his office in the province, in any matter which he introduces. On certain issues the provincial is obliged to consult with his council; in some matters the council is not only advisory, but also deliberative. So, for example, major expenditures must be

approved by the council of the province. With the provincial, the council is charged with implementing the acts of the provincial chapters.

## **15.The Provincial Chapters and Assemblies**

Every four years there is a provincial chapter. The chapter is an assembly of Dominicans from the province who are elected by their peers. While the chapter is meeting, the chapter has the responsibility to govern the province. The chapter elects the provincial and the provincial council, and reviews the ongoing legislation of the province (the *Acta* or "acts" of the province) which applies the Constitution of the whole Order to the particular situation of the province. The chapter enacts legislation governing the life and ministry of the brethren, and appoints the men who will be responsible for the formation of our students and for taking leadership in the various apostolates of the province. It is the responsibility of those who are elected or appointed to office to implement the provincial *Acta*.

In addition to the chapters of the Province, every four years (at least) there are general assemblies of the province. These are not for the sake of legislation, but are a forum for planning for the province, and for discerning the initiatives which the next chapter should take. All of the membership of the province attend the assemblies, unless individuals are precluded from attending due to ill health or some other equally grave reason.

## **16.What the government of the Order achieves**

By means of the assemblies and chapters, an ongoing legislation is possible, so that there is both continual and consistent application of the general constitution in each of the provinces of the Order. In this way, common initiatives can be pursued over many years. The model affords common discernment and deliberation, so that each of the members is fully consulted concerning the common life and the apostolic work of the Order. Those who hold office in the Order can enjoy a real mandate from the membership, who are consulted in their election and in the legislation for the province. This method of government therefore fosters a genuine collaboration in life and ministry, for each of the members of the province is treated as an equal. (The provincial is, for this reason, called the "prior provincial" from the Latin *prior* or "first"; he is "first among equals.") The legislation for the province proceeds from within the mandate of the Church, which is articulated in the constitution of the Order; through the assemblies and chapters the mandate of the Order can be expressed in a way which respects the particular culture and society in which the province functions. The structure of government is "democratic" in that each of the members has a function in the government of the province; at the same time, the universal Church is represented in the Province through the office of the Provincial and his Council, and through the Constitution of the Order, which he is bound to uphold.

The same structure is applied in each of the local communities of the province. Thus, in each local community there is a prior or superior, a house council, and assemblies of the whole house. The local community has the responsibility of maintaining and applying the

Constitution of the Order and the Acta of the Provincial chapters. The local community can, therefore, instantiate the presence of the whole Order in each local house.

In this way, each member of the province can speak for the whole Order in the exercise of his apostolate. A Dominican has *authority* to speak for the whole Order to the degree that he is obedient to the Constitution and the Acta, and is pursuing the mandate of the Order, which is to preach. Moreover, each Dominican has the *power* to speak for the whole Order. When he is speaking, it is not simply the assertion of an individual, but he is upheld and sustained by the whole Province and Order. Each Dominican is also assigned by the provincial to a particular *jurisdiction* in the province, where he is competent to speak for the whole Order and province. At the same time, the provincial has jurisdiction over the whole province, just as each local superior has jurisdiction in the local community. In this sense, there is a strict parallel between the governance of the Order and the governance of the whole Church. The provincial has a similar role in the province to that of the bishop in his diocese. The Dominicans are obliged to receive the office of the provincial, just as we are obliged - priests and lay men and women - to receive the office of the bishop. At the same time, the structure of governance in the Order permits each Dominican an active role in the governing of the Order, the province, and the local community.

### ***Governance of the Parish***

I would like to propose that the parish be governed in a similar way to the government of the Dominican Order. Let me briefly outline how this might be implemented.

#### **17. Office of the Pastor**

The pastor is obliged to represent the local bishop, for the priest is the co-worker of the bishop. Thus, the pastor in a parish has a parallel office to the bishop of the diocese. It is the pastor's office to guarantee that the whole Church - and the whole diocese - is represented in the parish. For this reason, the pastor has the final responsibility for decisions which are made in the parish, much as the provincial has the final responsibility for decisions which are made in the province.

The law of the Church requires that pastors - bishops, and their priests - consult with the laity in the administration and the governance of the parish. The means of that consultation is according to the norms which the bishop sets. So, for example, Archbishop Murphy has promulgated the law that each parish in his Archdiocese must have both a financial council and a pastoral council. He has obliged himself and his priests to consult with the laity, not only in financial and administrative affairs, but also in pastoral planning.

What is the pastoral responsibility of the pastor? Just as the bishop is to be an instructor in the faith, and is to teach, sanctify and govern in his diocese, so the pastor in the parish is to teach, sanctify and govern in the parish. Christ must be presented to his people in word, in sacrament and in the order of the community. At the same time, the primary

work of the parish community, which is to present the gospel to everyone within the boundaries of the parish, is a work which is shared with lay men and women. The parish is to be a place of genuine collaboration between the hierarchy and the laity for the sake of presenting Christ to the whole community in which the parish is located. This requires that the laity must have real voice in the governance of the parish, for they hold an office which is equal in dignity to the hierarchy, although essentially different. In governing the parish, the pastor must ensure that the laity are represented and heard, and that they are received according to the full dignity of their office. Each lay member of the parish must realize that he or she has the authority to speak to others for the parish, is empowered to speak for the parish, and has a jurisdiction which the parish honors.

Just as the provincial has the responsibility for the spiritual and physical well being of each of the Dominicans of the province, the pastor has the responsibility for the physical and spiritual well being of the members of his parish. He must coordinate the efforts of the parish to ensure that each member is cared for. Again, just as the provincial has the responsibility to oversee planning for the whole province, so the pastor has the responsibility to oversee planning for the whole parish.

In sum, it is the pastor's role to safeguard the Catholic tradition, to ensure the union of the parish with the local Church and with the universal Church, to coordinate planning in the parish, and to call forth and recognize the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are present in the parish community. It also belongs to his office to ensure that each lay member of the community is capable of carrying on his or her apostolate to the community.

All that has been said of the office of the Pastor applies equally to the office of the Parochial Vicar.

## **18. The role of the parish pastoral council**

Just as the provincial council advises the provincial in all matters pertaining to his office, the parish pastoral council might advise the pastor in all matters pertaining to his office. Because the pastor has a six year term of office, some consistency in pastoral planning is required from administration to administration. Just as the provincial council advises the provincial in planning for the province, so the pastoral council might advise the pastor concerning planning for the parish.

It is the responsibility of the provincial council to implement the *Acta* of the province; so too, it can be the responsibility of the parish pastoral council to assist the pastor to implement the deliberations of the parish assemblies (see below).

Because the parish has a much larger membership than does the Dominican Province, it is not possible for the pastor to know every member of the parish to the degree that the provincial knows every member of the province. If the pastor is truly to see to the physical and spiritual well being of each of the parishioners, then the members of the pastoral council must undertake to become familiar - to the degree that it is possible - with the members of the parish: with their talents and gifts, their interests and abilities,

and also their personal needs. Again, if we are truly to seek the assistance of the Holy Spirit to discern the pastoral objectives of our parish, and if our parish is to be a place of true collaboration between the hierarchy and the laity, then the members of the pastoral council must commit themselves to discernment as their ordinary mode of decision making.

## **19. The role of the parish assembly**

Just as the Dominican province seeks the common discernment of Dominicans in the government of the province, so we might best achieve a common discernment of our parishioners by means of parish assemblies. We have already held three assemblies in the parish; what we now propose is to include the assemblies in the ordinary governance of the parish.

What we first hope to achieve by this means is an ongoing legislation in the parish, which subsequent pastors and parochial administrations will respect. Second, we hope to ensure by this means that each of the lay voices in our parish is respected; we hope, in other words, to recognize the proper authority, power and jurisdiction of each of our members.

The purpose of the assembly can be to apply the tradition of the Church to the local situation of our parish. It is the pastor's responsibility to ensure that the whole Church is represented in the parish, just as it is the responsibility of the provincial to ensure that the whole Order is represented in the province. At the same time, the initiatives which will be particular to our community at Blessed Sacrament must involve applying the Gospel and the law of the Church to our unique situation, and to the lay men and women for whom Blessed Sacrament is their parish.

Just as the Dominicans who gather in assembly undertake a common discernment of what the province should undertake in order to support them in their apostolates, so at the assemblies we can undertake a common discernment of what the parish should undertake in order to support each member in his or her apostolate. The Church teaches that each Catholic who is baptized and anointed has the authority and the power to speak for the whole Church within his or her particular competence and jurisdiction. This also means that each Catholic is to be actually supported in his or her apostolic initiatives. Thus, our parishioner who confronted her school and school board was actually representing the whole Church to those officials. Due to a conversation with the pastor, she was aware of that fact. But many in our parish regularly confront situations in which they appear to be alone; the parish is to be a place of real conversation and discernment so that no Catholic is alone or isolated in the exercise of the lay office.

The priorities at Blessed Sacrament will not be exactly the same as priorities in other parishes in the province or in the archdiocese. Were our priorities as a parish indistinguishable from any other, it would simply mean either that we were not truly living our Catholic vocation in our local situation, or that the parish did not truly support the actual faith and initiatives of our membership. The assembly is the means to apply the tradition and legislation of the whole Church to our parish and its members.

Again, the means of our decision making must be an appeal, in prayer and in thoughtful discernment, to the Holy Spirit. The assembly is not a "political" entity; there is little parallel between a Church assembly and a parliament or congress or town meeting. (It is true, parenthetically, that the whole idea of parliament and of constitutional government as it is applied in civil society was borrowed from the Church, but it was changed in the borrowing.) Instead, the parallel for the parish assembly is to be sought in the councils of the Church, in synods of bishops, in the assemblies and chapters of the Dominican Order.

The disposition to enter into the assembly must be one of prayer and one of faithfulness to Christ and his Church. We need not leave the institution of the parish as we found it; were we to do so we would not be taking our parish seriously. At the same time, our fidelity to the Catholic tradition is what provides the basis for our discernment. We are seeking to express the *sensus fidei* - the sense of the faith - and to apply it in our local situation. The assembly is not a place for posturing or for politicking; rather, each participant must acknowledge his or her agenda, and then submit it for the common discernment of the whole assembly. At the assembly the pastor and pastoral staff of the parish will sit as members of the assembly, to discern along with all who attend. They are to represent the whole Church to the assembly, and to ensure that nothing is endorsed which is contrary to the Catholic tradition or to the norms established by the Archbishop. At the same time, in discerning the particular initiatives and priorities of our parish, their agenda must also be submitted for the common discernment of all who are present.

## **Conclusion**

I would like to conclude with an appeal: it is important that every member of our parish be included in our planning and in our discernment. It will likely never be the case that every member of the parish is able to attend a particular assembly. Some will not have the time to be involved in any of the assemblies. At the same time, each member of the parish exercises authority, power and jurisdiction in the name of the Church, and each member of the parish therefore is significant to our common discernment, our common planning, and our common initiatives as a parish.

We have often heard it said that "the Church" is out of touch with its membership, as if "the Church" were some institution which stands apart from us. It is truer to say that if "the Church" really is out of touch with me or with you, then you and I are suffering from schizophrenia, for both of us are authorized to speak and act for the Church. If our local institutions have not adequately represented or supported us, it can only be that we have lacked either the inclination or the opportunity to enter more fully into the exercise of our own office in the Church. We hope, by means of the governance of our parish, to extend the opportunity to all of our parishioners to enter into the actual governance of the parish; I appeal to each of our parishioners to enter into common discernment with your parish community and, therefore, with the whole Church.

Michael Sweeney, O.P.  
December, 1996

*(from an address to the  
Parish Assembly, June, 1996)*