



# The Crisis of Authority in Catholic Modernity

*Michael J. Lacey, Francis Oakley*

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One deep problem facing the Catholic church is the question of how its teaching authority is understood today. It is fairly clear that, while Rome continues to teach *as if* its authority were unchanged from the days before Vatican II (1962-65), the majority of Catholics - within the first-world church, at least - take a far more independent line, and increasingly understand themselves (rather than the church) as the final arbiters of decision-making, especially on ethical questions. This collection of essays explores the historical background and present ecclesial situation, explaining the dramatic shift in attitude on the part of contemporary Catholics in the U.S. and Europe. The overall purpose is neither to justify nor to repudiate the authority of the church's hierarchy, but to cast some light on: the context within which it operates, the complexities and ambiguities of the historical tradition of belief and behavior it speaks for, and the kinds of limits it confronts - consciously or otherwise. The authors do not hope to fix problems, although some of the essays make suggestions, but to contribute to a badly needed intra-Catholic dialogue without which, they believe, problems will continue to fester and solutions will remain elusive.

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