Tension Between "Roman" And "Catholic" In Catholic Missiology

And Why It Matters

William R. Burrows

About the Author

William R. ("Bill") Burrows, Ph.D., is Research Professor of Missiology in The Center for World Christianity at the New York Theological Seminary. Bill's lifelong scholarly interest has centered on the adaptation of Christianity in non-Western environments and on Christian relations with persons in other faith traditions, particularly on how Christian mission should be understood and carried on in an ecumenical age. He is also Managing Editor Emeritus of Orbis Books.

Introduction

The news in these very days about Pope Francis's encyclical about humanity and the environmental crisis offers a good occasion to illustrate what is at stake in the topic I chose to talk on several months ago. Praise and criticisms have been abundant, but few on either side of the argument show a very deep understanding of *why* a pope would write such a document, nor for the way in which Francis documents his thought in a large-scale hermeneutic of Scripture and in things said by his predecessors. The directness and the marshalling of scientific evidence for the case he makes is new. But he feels compelled to root the seeming novelty in Roman Catholic Tradition. In doing so, he shows that he is not a freelancer nor benevolent dictator. Indeed his way of proceeding is vintage "Roman" in its innate conservatism, and the way he proceeds shows the way in which he feels compelled to be "Catholic" – which is to say, speaks to the whole world, on the one hand, and is anchoring himself in the spirit of the whole Christ, not just in a sectarian enthusiasm for an aspect of Jesus' life, work, and teaching.

Francis stands in a long line of popes who have been critical of the modern project. In particular, since the Enlightenment popes have been exercising their teaching office in two fundamental ways. First, to articulate the Roman Catholic vision of the human community as organic, a living body that is interdependent and must not forget the least. Second, to counteract what they viewed as the negative effects of the Enlightenment. At the risk of glossing over negative elements in the popes' statements and actions, what is enduring in their agenda can be summarized in two points:

1. They viewed modernity's move to democratization as carrying with it the risk that laws and traditions would be treated as solely up to majorities to define – without reference (a) to the law of nature and (b) divine revelation.

2. They sought to counteract the diminishment of revelation – both as contained in Scripture and clarified in Tradition.

Pope Benedict XVI crystallized this position in his well-known phrase, "dictatorship of relativism." He tried to emphasize his belief that the Enlightenment had produced many wonderful things, but those whom

we label liberals or progressives seemed never to hear them, just as he had a tin ear for their fear that he and John Paul II wanted to bring humanity back to the bad old days of Pope Pius IX's *Syllabus of Errors* and Vatican Council I's teaching on the infallibility of the pope.[1] Perhaps most of all neither John Paul II nor Benedict seem to have grasped what the Jesuit historian John W. O'Malley called the most important element of the Second Vatican Council:

> … a new way of speaking and behaving [that] … entails a shift in value-system.
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>   New way of speaking? The implications are profound. To learn a new language so as genuinely to live within it entails an inner transformation. Much more is at stake than learning new words for old concepts. To properly learn a new language means to enter fully into the values and sensibilities of a culture different from one's own and to appropriate them. One gestures, shrugs, bears oneself differently, and responds differently to situations to the point of, to some extent, becoming another person.[2]

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1   For the full text of the *Syllabus*, see Henricus Denzinger and Adolphus Schönmetzer, eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum* (Rome: Herder, 36th ed., 1976), pp. 576-84, §§ 2901-80; for an abridged English version, see Jacques Dupuis, ed., *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church* (Staten Island, NY: Alba House, 7th ed., 2001), pp. 37-42; see also Dupuis, pp. 42-51 for Vatican Council I's articulation of the doctrine of revelation, faith, and faith and reason; see also pp. 316-22 on the papacy and papal infallibility; see also *Dei Verbum* (Vatican II "Decree on Revelation," 1965), §§ 7-10 for a balanced view on the interrelationship of Scripture and Tradition. This section, arguably one of the most important in the documents of the Council, concludes with the words, "It is clear, therefore, that in the supremely wise arrangement of God, sacred Tradition, sacred Scripture, and the Magisterium of the Church are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the other. Working together, each in its own way under the action of the one Holy Spirit, they all contribute effectively to the salvation of souls."

2   John W O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), p. 50.

Anyone who has struggled with learning a new language and culture knows that what O'Malley says is true. The reality is dramatically portrayed in the words of Andrew Walls: "The fundamental missionary experience is to live on terms set by others."[3]

The question I address does not presume that I think Catholic conservatives, who insist on close readings of Vatican II, are malevolent; indeed, I want to state clearly that I appreciate the indispensable role of conservatives in "conserving" at the same time as I bring into relief the tension between aspirations to be both "Roman" and "Catholic" in ecclesiology and missiology. The positive side of the way Roman Catholicism works is expressed well by Lamin Sanneh when he says:

> Catholicism's doctrinal core is arguably more stable than that of many other variants of Christianity. Even if its directives are contested, the church's magisterium is recognized for what it is. The catechism and the instrument of papal encyclicals together have defined Catholic faith just as that faith is enshrined in the church's liturgical life, with Jesus Christ at its core. Against the cultural fragmentation of modern life, that is a considerable advantage. Catholics may crack wise at this heritage and from the flanks even nibble away at it, but it's hard to dismiss it as of no value.[4]

On a more personal note, he adds,

> For me Catholicism became an exit strategy from the confinement of upscale liberal agnosticism that has long commanded the world of academia. I felt a lively sense of emancipation surrounded by the signs and symbols of the mystery of God in the ungrudging, faithful witness of the church. That fact was the connection to the worldwide community of faith spread within and across national boundaries. It relieved me of the double burden of having to face wearying interrogation by other Christians, and of

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3   Andrew F Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 41.

4   Lamin Sanneh, *Summoned from the Margin: Homecoming of an African* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 259.

the defensiveness it begs. I could identify myself with other Catholics without having to work the levers of citizenship, race, language, education, taste, class, sex, or education. My privileged position in an elite university accustomed to thinking of itself as entitled to due deference ceased to determine my religious standing.[5]

The positive side of "Roman" Catholicism is, I would argue, expressed concisely here. Rome proceeds slowly and is often behind the times, but it does so in a world quickly moving from fad to fad and vogue to vogue. With a nod to Alexander Pope, being not the first by whom the new are tried nor the last to lay the old aside is not all bad, as long as one is merely keeping antiquarians happy.

In what follows, I will be referring to the work of other scholars, but much of what follows will be, in the words of the scholastic theology on which I was weaned, "speculative." The rules of scholarship require careful documentation of what one says or writes, but at the age of 72 and after spending half my adult life preparing for or taking part in the missionary apostolates of the Society of the Divine Word and the other half in the employ of the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America (better known as "Maryknoll") as part of the team that publishes Orbis Books, there are things I have picked up that I can't document carefully. I will not apologize for that.

In that vein, it was with a sigh of relief that I started reading recently a book sent to me by my friend Paul Gifford, a noted sociologist, historian, and analyst of Sub-Saharan Africa, like me a former priest who has both a clerical insider's and a lay outsider's view of things Catholic. Paul has a quality that is rare in scholars. He ruminates over the meaning of inconvenient facts that call into question the sort of consensus that explains too much with too little backing.

What I like about Paul's writing is something I hope you will find in what follows. Quoting Keith Thomas, Gifford notes that in certain areas of knowledge one will not find "knock-down evidence of statistics, but the wholly justified implication … that these matters are best understood with the aid of what German social scientists and theorists call the faculty of

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5   Sanneh, *Homecoming*, p. 267.

Verstehung."[6] *Verstehen* ("to understand") and *Verstehung* ("understanding") in their deepest sense are often the products of Eureka moments that lead to paradigm shifts à la Thomas Kuhn[7] -- if one has waded through the evidence and reaches insights that (1) answer the relevant questions on the matters being studied and (2) better explain what is happening than regnant constructs. Achieving insight is rather a lot more than producing mere bright ideas.

Alfred North Whitehead once observed that speculation on a grand scale "is superficially sceptical … but it obtains its urge from a deep ultimate faith that the nature of things is penetrable by reason." Scholarship, on the other hand, as Whitehead observes, "is superficially conservative of belief. But its tone of mind leans towards a fundamental negation."[8] In our discussion of the tension between "Roman" and Catholic" in mission study and practice, I will be speculating on things that go beyond what scholarship can "prove" or "document." Much of what follows will not be " 'conclusive' in any hard sense," but, because like Paul Gifford, "I think they are revealing of the reality I am describing, and my reason for thinking so is my 30 years of exposure and experience."[9]

To be clear, I think it is important for Roman Catholics to be both Roman and Catholic, and that the tendency to scorn the Roman is dangerous. At least as dangerous as the tendency to be slavishly subservient to it. Clearly Pope Benedict XVI had this in view in his insistence that "faith itself is cultural" and does not exist in some "naked state, as sheer religion."[10] And he goes on to note,

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6   Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa* (London: Hurst & Company, 2015), p. 7.

7   Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 2nd ed.) Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

8   Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventure of Ideas* (New York: Macmillan, 1933), p. 137.

9   Gifford, *Christianity in Africa*, p.7

10   Joseph Ratzinger *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and the World Religions* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), p. 67.

> Anyone entering the Church has to be aware that he is entering a separate, active cultural entity with her own many-layered intercultural character that has grown up in the course of history. Without a certain exodus, a breaking off with one's life in all its aspects, one cannot become a Christian . . . We cannot repeat the Incarnation at will, in the sense of repeatedly taking Christ's flesh away from him, so to speak, and offering him some other flesh instead … Christ remains the same, even according to his body. But he is drawing us to him."[11]

For Ratzinger, this is why Christianity is at war with relativism. Christ is the same now as he was at the Resurrection, and being a Christian means entering into fellowship with a people journeying through history in union with this Christ.

The Central Issue

I have said that I want to explore the topic of the tension in Roman Catholic attitudes toward mission between being "Catholic," on the one hand, and "Roman," on the other. Both adjectives throw light on and cast shadows over our conception of the mission of the church. Note that both "Roman" and "Catholic" are important as adjectives modifying the noun "church." And because to say "church" is to speak of "mission," it is important to see the vital importance of understanding the tension between them in the light of Roman Catholic history and the historical situation of globalized Christianity. This globalized situation, I wish to suggest, challenges us – Catholics, Orthodox, Ecumenical Protestants, Evangelical denominational and non-denominational Protestants, Anabaptists, Pentecostals, and Charismatics – to seek a form of Christian unity and self-understanding in which both the universal and the "local" – the latter in analogy to the way "Roman" functions in Roman Catholicism – are vitally integrated in respectful love and, yes, requisite tension.

Why? Briefly said, because the balance has shifted so far in the direction "local" and "contextual" Christianity over against biblical claims of the "universality" and "finality" of Jesus the Christ, that the task of Christians

11   Ratzinger, *Truth and Tolerance,* p. 71.

becoming ever more deeply the body of Christ is imperative. Because I believe that the proclamation of the decisive role and person of Jesus as Christ in the revelation of God's nature and purposes for the cosmos and humanity is, as Pope St John Paul II calls it, the "permanent priority of mission"[12]; and therefore we badly need to understand the centrality of "the church" in ensuring that Jesus, the Christ/Messiah is not occluded and that Jacques Dupuis's "Christocentric Trinitarianism" is maintained.[13]

Genuine Christianity is not "Christomonistic," for the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each and together essential in the mystery of salvation. That said, to follow Jesus entails a way of life that is *Christomorphic,* which is to say the paschal mystery shapes (*morphôô*) Christian identity, practice and belief.[14] It is also a vision in which the challenge of First Corinthians 3:9 as "God's servants, working together" must be taken very seriously.

And lest you think the words "the centrality of the church" above were mere filler, the subtext of everything that follows is a question asked by Graymoor Friar James Puglisi when he or his editors at Eerdmans put the following title on a recent book: *How can the Petrine Ministry Be a Service to the Unity of the Universal Church?*[15] If one is to follow the Acts of the Apostles, Peter's ministry moved from Jerusalem to Antioch to Rome.

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12 Pope St John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Missio,* ("On the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate" [Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990]), § 44.

13 Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), pp. 87-95, where Dupuis makes the case for Christian theocentrism being a Christocentric Trinitarianism, not a form of low Christology that, in effect, makes Christ a teacher in the way John Hick's and Paul Knitter's theocentrism and soteriocentrism do.

14 See Galatians 4:19, " ... until Christ is formed (*morphôthē*) in you." I find Richard R Niebuhr magisterial on the subject of Christomorphism; see his *Schleiermacher on Christ and Religion: A New Introduction* (New York: Scribners, 1964), pp. 210-59.

15 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010). Fr Puglisi is a former superior general of the Graymoor Friars, a Catholic order in the Franciscan tradition with roots in Anglicanism, one of whose principle apostolates is the promotion of Christian unity.

As both John O'Malley[16] and Eamon Duffy[17] note in their histories of the papacy, however, the development of the papal office is not a simple, straightforward matter, nor is the office of bishop as attributed to Peter exercised in the same way as it would be in later years. But the consensus of historians is that Peter did reside in and lead a community in Rome and by the second century, that tradition was the basis for a recognition of Roman primacy in much of the then-infant *ecclesia* scattered throughout the world.

An Etymological and Historical Detour

The etymology of the name "Roman Catholic Church" is anomalous in that the two adjectives are in contradiction with one another. *Roman* refers to a particular place. *Catholic* denotes something universal. Grasping the dialectic tension between the two words is important if one is to understand how the church that claims half the world's Christians as members understands itself.

"Catholic," we are usually told, comes from the Greek word *katholikos* (universal) and has an "extensive" or "geographic" meaning. At a deeper level, however, lie the words *kata* ("according to") and *holon* ("whole"). *Kata* is most familiar to readers of the New Testament as the preposition used to name a version of the story of Jesus, a "gospel" (*euaggelion*), as in the phrase "the Gospel 'according to' Luke" (*kata loukon*).

The elided version of the two words *kat'olon* also has a theological or intensive meaning that needs more emphasis than it usually gets. By *intensive* I indicate that what is connoted is "according to the whole [i.e., gospel or Christ]." That gospel is "catholic," not sectarian. It connotes in other words, the Christ revealed in the full dimensions of New Testament and Apostolic age teaching. We are more familiar with the extensive sense of the words where "the catholic church" is the term favored for speaking of the universal church spread from Lyons to Bagdad, from Jerusalem

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16   John W O'Malley, *A History of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), pp. 13-21 (Chapter 2, "After Peter and Paul").

17   Eamon Duffy, *Saints and Sinners: A History of the Popes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp 1-36.

and Alexandria to Rome and down into Ethiopia. The second – what I am calling "the intensive sense" of the word – denotes a local church recognized by other churches in the nascent communion of churches as one that preserved the whole gospel as the message *of* Jesus about God's Promise and Kingdom, but also *about* Jesus as the Christ, the universal savior.

The overseers (*episkopoi,* bishops) of the principal churches did this by judging that catholicity and three other key characteristics of a genuine church were present ("unity" [with the universal church], "holiness," and "apostolicity") in a local church (primarily understood a local community or nexus of communities led by a bishop). In acting this way, they were considered to be exercising authority as legitimate successors of the Twelve (apostles), declaring congregations to be genuine assemblies (Greek, *ekklesiē,* plural of *ekklesia,* whence the Latin word for "church," *ecclesia*) of God's new people in Christ. A local community was recognized as part of the universal church only insofar as it was *intensively* catholic, which is to say that *a church was judged to be one wherein the whole Christ was present, his paschal mystery was liturgically celebrated, and the whole gospel was taught and lived.*

The Riddle and Ambiguity of Roman Primacy

In this context, as its self-understanding developed, the "Roman" catholic church, although it was but one of the five major patriarchal churches, from very early on claimed: (1) to have been founded by the apostles Peter and Paul; (2) that Peter was its first bishop; (3) that Peter had been given primacy over the other members of the Twelve by Christ; and (4) that his successors continued to enjoy that primacy. Over time, this primacy came to be understood as entailing the Bishop of Rome's divinely conferred ministry to symbolize and effect the unity of the universal church (*ecclesia catholica*).

In making this claim in ongoing centuries, the church of Rome invoked words such as the following from Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–200), in his work *Against Heresies* (Book III, Chapter 3). Irenaeus argues that anyone can see the evidence for the lineage from Peter to the present Bishop of Rome. Moreover, he says, the tradition that the church of Rome is "universally known" to have been "founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul"; and he maintains that "it is a matter of necessity that every church should agree with this church

on account of its pre-eminent authority." In addition, the memory of early bishops such as Polycarp (c. 69–155, whose testimony on the centrality of Rome is recounted by Irenaeus) were invoked as proofs of Rome's preeminence from earliest times.

The point here is not that the case for what the Roman Catholic church *now claims* was clinched in a way convincing to all *today*, but that belief in its primacy was important both to other churches and to the Roman church's self-understanding. That Roman primacy entails "jurisdiction" – the power to command obedience to its dictates – over all other churches is hotly disputed, both by Catholics and others. And here we are talking about the ambiguity of these claims.[18]

Imagining that fourth century Catholicism represents some sort of falling away from an a-political, religiously pristine status that existed before Constantine is an oversimplification. Equally simplistic are claims that late medieval, early modern reform movements started beyond the Alps leap-frogged over twelve centuries of Roman decadence to re-create the true church. I don't mean that there was no decadence. Anyone who reads the history of the Medici family knows better. But the reality is much more complex than mere corruption. The barbarians had pressured the Romans even before Constantine, and the sack of Rome in 410 was less a uniquely cataclysmic event, than the natural outcome of a centuries-long march of "barbarian" nations coming off the Russian Steppes.[19] As the Western Roman Empire declined and fell in the fifth and sixth centuries and as pressure from the Germanic nations brought about an entirely new

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18   In these matters Brian Tierney's *The Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350: A Study on the Concepts of Infallibility, Sovereignty, and Tradition in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 22-31, remains magisterial. Tierney shows how the Decretists of the reform movements of the 12th and 13th centuries never saw papal power as having the capacity of a pope to alter "permanent truths of Scriptural revelation." For them (the Decretists) "the pope was a supreme ruler within the framework of divine revelation established by Scripture, not an absolute monarch set above it" (p. 30). To complete the picture, see Brian Tierney, *The Crisis of Church and State 1050-1300* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964).

19   See Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 151-206, Chapter 4, "Migration and Frontier Collapse." Equally interesting is Allesandro Barbert, tr. Allan Cameron, *Charlemagne: Father of a Continent* (London: The Folio Society, 2006). What both books show is the immense complexity of the organization

social-political reality, bishops of Rome assumed the mantle of guarantors of both civil and ecclesial order. While *Roman* evoked a specific locality in the semantic world of the age, it also recalled a crumbling world's memory of universal order, the *pax Romana*. The key to what Roman "Catholicism" *meant* in the medieval period stems, then, from that local (Roman) church's role in articulating what was thought to be the proper apostolic order of the universal (catholic) church in vastly new circumstances. In the West, the crumbling structures of the Roman Empire were taken over by the church. Peoples hungering for order were, for the most part, glad to accept it. Viewed from the perspective of an Anglican and Edwardian gentleman, the brother of a missionary bishop in India, however, the post-Reformation world was less impressed with the medieval synthesis. Listen again to Alfred North Whitehead:

> When the Western world accepted Christianity, Caesar conquered; and the received text of Western theology was edited by his lawyers. The code of Justinian and the theology of Justinian are two volumes expressing one movement of the human spirit. The brief Galilean vision of humility flickered throughout the ages certainly … But the deeper idolatry of fashioning God in the image of the Egyptian, Persian, and Roman imperial rulers was retained. The Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar.[20]

Rise of Islam, Divorce of Eastern and Western Christianity

As the Empire split between the Latin West and the Greek East, the division of European and West Asian Catholic Christianity into complimentary and mutually recognizing forms of Catholicism was solidified. What is often forgotten is that after the rise of Islam in 622, the Catholic, Orthodox churches of the East — the Oriental Orthodox, Coptic, Syrian, Armenian, Ethiopian, and Indian — declined and were forgotten by the Western Church. The Greek and Latin Catholic churches

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of Catholic Europe in the aftermath of Rome's collapse. Rather than a disaster of turning from "genuine" or "primitive" Christianity, the post-Constantinian world was a remarkable achievement.

20   Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, Gifford Lectures, Edinburgh, 1927-28 (New York: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 519-20.

went their distinct but cousinly ways until 1054, when they split at just about the time Slavic Catholic Orthodoxy was growing in significance as a result of the missionary labors of Cyril, Methodius, and their successors. And Roman Catholics must admit that the split was to a great extent caused by the arrogant Roman exercise and inflation of its primacy.

For our purposes, what is important is twofold. There was a time when a variety of churches — Greek and Latin churches, as well as Oriental Orthodox churches of the East — recognized each other as "catholic" in every essential way. They argued about the adequacy of doctrines propagated at councils such as Chalcedon (454), but they were led by bishops in communion with the major patriarchal sees, bishops believed to have authority conferred on them by apostolic succession and the will of God. In addition, with varying emphases and differing liturgical languages and traditions, they were united in a form of worship begun in baptism, centered on the Eucharist, and dedicated to expounding orthodox teaching based in scripture and tradition.

"Roman" Catholicism Develops in the West

It is hard to know whether it is more accurate to see the growth of Christianity in the West as the result of a missionary movement or as a form of religio-cultural diffusion aided by Merovingian and Carolingian kings and emperors. It suffices here to recognize that the growth of Celtic Christianity in Brittany, Wales, and Ireland and its expansion into northern Britain and eventually into northern Europe through the work of such legendary figures as Patrick (mid to late fifth century), Columba (c. 521–597), and monks sent by Pope Gregory I ("the Great," c. 540–604) began a process wherein Roman liturgy, canons, and usages eventually became ascendant. Owing in large part to the rise of monasteries following the rule of the Italian Saint Benedict of Nursia (c. 480–550), the Catholicism of the church north of the Alps would be Roman in flavor and look to Rome for guidance when theological and ecclesial matters were in dispute or kings and princes were trampling on church prerogatives. In addition to spurring the diffusion of Christianity northward, Gregory took a strong hand in ruling the church of Italy, upholding and broadening the recognition and power of the See of Rome. Unfortunately, he did so in ways that often alienated churches that took their signals from the Patriarch of Constantinople, whose claim to be the "Ecumenical Patriarch" Gregory

refused to recognize. In the East, accordingly, recognition of Roman primacy was understood to grant Rome a primacy of honor, not authority to decide matters in dispute in other churches. When Rome insisted that primacy entailed the authority of jurisdiction, a split that had been long in the making occurred.

The development of what becomes the Roman Catholic Church that is still recognizable today came in a centuries-long process too seldom identified. In it, migrating Teutonic and other tribes effectively "Germanized" Latin Catholicism. (In using the word *German*, I am speaking of not only the Goths, Franks, Saxons, and Vandals, but also, although loosely, of the Vikings and original Britons.) Between the beginnings of the migration of the Germanic nations until relative stability was attained in about 678, the Germans were coming to terms with Roman culture. They admired its laws, architecture, methods of building roads, fortresses, and houses, while they resisted other elements. In terms of faith, some Germanic peoples became acquainted with Arian constructions of Christian identity, others with the Catholic and Celtic emissaries. No matter what kind of contacts, all had to work through the ways in which traditional Germanic warrior honor cultures would adapt to new conditions and whether and how they would take on the new religion.

The societies into which Latin Christianity was grafted were ones in which religion and politics were closely aligned. Religion was predominantly magical, in contradistinction, as Russell says, "to being a pre-dominantly doctrinal and ethical" reality. In addition, the German view of politics was marked by a form of "sacral kingship," a worldview that will loom large in coming battles over the relative powers of princes and bishops.[21]

In the end, the Roman form of Catholicism symbolized by St. Wilfrid, bishop of York (634–709) triumphed over Celtic usages in Britain at the Synod of Whitby (664) and was brought to the continent by St. Boniface (c. 675–754), who was a Benedictine and loyal to the papacy. That allegiance, while not without strains, would become normative north of the Alps, but the process was not straightforward, and the ratio of Germanic to

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21   See James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Catholicism: A Socio-Historical Approach to Religious Transformation* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), part 2, pp. 107-214. For a fascinating example of the ways in which Christian doctrine developed under the umbrella of the history analyzed by Russell, see Peter Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul: Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), chapter 4, "Penance and the Other World in Gaul," pp. 115-47.

Mediterranean-Roman elements was negotiated over several centuries. As the Holy Roman Empire took shape in the north with the coronation of Otto I in 962 and conquered the northern two-thirds of Italy by 1100, one can fairly speak of the "Germanization" of Roman Catholicism. This takes place precisely in the age when canon lawyers are systematizing church law and bringing forth theories that the Pope has, by divine will, universal jurisdiction (the power to emanate laws that must be obeyed by all a ruler's subjects). This sets the scene for the medieval struggle among bishops, princes, kings, emperors, and popes over where the jurisdiction of bishops and popes begins and ends.

What is central to this Germanized Roman Catholicism? First, devotions to saints and a sense of the closeness of the dead took an important place; the Germanic world was the dwelling place of various kinds of "presences" and non-human agencies; and any religion worth adopting, had to adapt to that reality. Shrines associated with saints, where miracles were performed, grew up, at least partly to provide heroes to replace those of ancient Norse and German sagas. Pilgrimages to holy places dedicated to the saints and God's mother were important; these saints were said to be more powerful than the old nature, place, and ancestral spirits. Rituals associated with the saints, in addition, took the place of pagan rites.

Significantly, the liturgy of the Mass and the monastic liturgy of the hours were developed and became central to the official cult of the church. Amidst all the varieties of devotion that replaced the old magic, the rhythm of the liturgical year celebrated according to proscribed liturgical texts was designed to keep the various devotions and pilgrimages subservient to the Christ of the creeds. The Mass was where God's grace and power were met; though to be sure that sins were *really* forgiven, indulgences and sacramentals were sold and blessed so the faithful could be assured that the fruits of Christ's sacrifice would reach them.

Germanized-Roman Catholicism, in other words, had been born. And onto the root of cultural conversion of Christianity from Hebrew to Hellenistic outlooks begun by Paul and carried forward by Greek-speaking Apostolic and post-Apostolic Fathers, which were adapted to the Latin mindset by Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine, was grafted the Germanic vine.

Reality was messy, of course, and in areas like paying for indulgences, popular piety and greedy clerics' need for money for their projects overwhelmed orthodoxy, so much so that by the 13th century many of the themes of 16th century reformers had been foreshadowed. The Franciscan and Dominican orders were founded and became the agents of reform.

The Splintering of Western Christendom And the Crisis of Our Age

We all know the basics of the history of the Reformation, and I do not intend to recite that history. My basic point is that Catholic reforms under St Francis and St Dominic antedated the Reformation and proceeded under the inspiration of Catholic impulses. The conversion of St Ignatius of Loyola and the creation both of his *Spiritual Exercises* and the order he founded were not intended primarily to combat Protestants.[22] Yet many of the goals of these saints were shared with the great Reformers: Hus, Zwingli, Calvin, Luther, and Simons. I speak, of course, of the debt Protestantism owes to the early modern impulses that we call collectively the Renaissance. The Jesuit historian John O'Malley is magisterial on that point. I commend his work to you, especially his little book *Trent and All That*.[23]

It is clear, nevertheless, that the renewal of Catholicism would not have occurred without the upheaval caused by the Lutheran and the Reformed movements of the sixteenth century. An Erasmus may have been more learned and enjoy a much more pleasant temperament than his contemporaries in Wittenberg and Geneva, but he would never have sparked the movement needed to cleanse Catholic Christendom. Luther and Calvin returned to the Scriptures and found in them little to no basis for the Roman Catholicism of their day. By luck or through providence, their revolution coincided with revolutions in scholarship, the growth of national self-awareness, and resentment of clerical domination.

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22   See John W O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 284-328.

23   John W O'Malley, *Trent and All That: Renaming Catholicism in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

If one takes a look at some of the greatest missionaries of the early modern era, and especially if one reads their letters, it becomes clear that Catholic reforms were producing results, too. Jesuits such as Francis Xavier, Alessandro Valignano, Ippolito Desideri, Roberto De Nobili, Matteo Ricci, Alexandre de Rhodes, and José de Acosta; the Dominican Bartholomé de las Casas; and the Franciscans Junípero Serra and his friend and biographer Francisco Palóu did not come from a decadent church. To Jesuits active in Asia in the 16th through the 18th centuries goes the *palme d'oro* for grasping the depths of the interreligious and intercultural problems Christianity faced in civilizations whose elites at least had undergone what the German philosopher of history Karl Jaspers would call the axial period. By that term he meant undergoing a process in which "Human existence becomes the object of meditation, *as history*" when human beings "feel and know something extraordinary is beginning in their own present."[24]

Catholic missionaries of the 16th through the 18th centuries, when Protestant missions from the West begin in earnest, struggled with the question of cultural adaptation, and not always successfully. Spanish and Portuguese missionaries in South America, Mexico, and "New" Mexico (today's Texas, Arizona, California, and New Mexico) in particular were seen by the crown and saw themselves as agents of Iberian imperialism. That many of the missionaries judged the behavior of colonial administrators, the military, and colonizers to violate the rights of the Indians does not change the fact that they also saw themselves as an integral part of a work in which they were preparing Indians to be useful citizens in an imperial-colonial project. The salaries of the missionaries were paid by the colonial government under the aegis of the *patronato real*. And to read the life of Junípero Serra in a recent book that has taken advantage of deep research into archives in California, Mexico, and Spain is to be shocked at the Franciscans' self-identification as missionaries sponsored by the king and dedicated to extending his kingdom.

> As a Catholic missionary and loyal Spaniard, Serra never doubted for an instant that his worldview was objectively superior to the indigenous worldviews. But this trip helped him begin to grasp that an effective missionary strategy would have to acknowledge the existence of the

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24   Karl Jaspers, *The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 5.

spaces between the various cultures. A successful strategy would have to be tentative and provisional, and its results would be gradual.[25]

And in another place:

> The colonial government that established the missions intended for them to be temporary institutions. The Indians were to learn the Spanish religion, language, and way of life, and then after a period of ten years or so, the church was to be turned into a regular parish (a process known as "secularization"). The mission lands were to be divided among the Indians, who would then take their places in society as Spanish and Catholic farmers and ranchers.[26]

Drawing Conclusions

It seems to me that our missionary moment today requires a Christian movement that is both extensively and intensively catholic, one that is marked also by holiness, unity, and apostolicity. The four belong together, for they are intrinsically related to the dynamic of following Christ in our globalizing world as when the Christian movement center moved from Jerusalem to Asia Minor and finally to Rome in a series of events recounted in Acts 10-16, one of the key parts of which consists in the words of Peter:

> And God who knows the human heart testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us. Now therefore why are you putting God to the test by placing on the neck of the disciples a yoke that neither our ancestors nor we have been able to

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25   Rose Marie Beebe and Robert M Senkewicz, *Junípero Serra: California, Indians, and the Transformation of a Missionary* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), Kindle Edition, loc. 3039.

26   Beebe, *Serra*, Kindle loc. 3844.

bear? On the contrary, we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will (Acts 15:8-11).

Catholics enjoy such texts, for in them they see Peter rising above the church of Jerusalem led by James and making the decision that confers legitimacy on Paul's and Barnabas's mission to the gentiles. Ah, would that history were kind to those who rely on proof-texting when reality is so much more complicated! Catholics certainly have much to repent of in their long history. Indeed, Pope St John Paul II recognized that the institution he embodied, the Roman Papacy, was to many an obstacle to attaining that unity:

> [A]s I acknowledged on the important occasion of a visit to the World Council of Churches in Geneva on 12 June 1984, the Catholic Church's conviction that in the ministry of the Bishop of Rome she has preserved, in fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition and the faith of the Fathers, the visible sign and guarantor of unity, constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians, whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections. To the extent that we are responsible for these, I join my Predecessor Paul VI in asking forgiveness.[27]

Careful study reveals that the legitimacy of the present shape of papal office cannot be called the only legitimate way Roman primacy can be exercised over the Roman Catholic half of the world's Christians. Even more, a notion of primacy that includes the right directly to exercise authority over all churches is a non-starter for the non-Roman half of the world's Christians. It is increasingly under fire even within Roman Catholicism; and much of the enthusiasm for Pope Francis comes from hope that he might seek a new way forward.

Still, the perpetual splintering of the Protestant third of the world's Christians is itself a cautionary tale. And as to the claim that Scripture alone can govern the church, it is self-evident the Scriptures are not self-interpreting. Take the anguish that they are going through today over how to interpret the Bible in both testaments on homosexuality, gender identity, the position of women, and related issues. I read both *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* on a regular basis. It is hard to

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27   Pope St John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (Encyclical Letter on Christian Unity, "That All May Be One" [Rome: Libreria Vaticana, 1995]) § 88.

imagine that they are both respected Protestant "Christian" journals, so little does either segment of Protestantism respect the other. I also read *The National Catholic Reporter*, *America*, and *Commonweal*. The same is true there. The cultural divide among Catholics is deep and the rivers between them are both deep and bitter.

My friend Ed Schroeder introduced me to Luther's sixteenth century recovery of the Pauline doctrine on gospel and law. Indeed, he converted me believing that Luther's retrieval of the Pauline Gospel is a far better interpretation of what Christianity is about than the standard Roman Catholic envisionment of grace perfecting nature. But equally important was Ed's introducing me to the Book of Concord on the *Adiaphora*. Here one finds in paragraph 9 the Lutheran formula for dealing with external matters that do not touch the heart of faith.

> Therefore we believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has, according to its circumstances, the good right, power, and authority [in matters truly adiaphora] to change, to diminish, and to increase them, without thoughtlessness and offense, in an orderly and becoming way, as at any time it may be regarded most profitable, most beneficial, and best for [preserving] good order, [maintaining] Christian discipline … and the edification of the Church.[28]

What is essential is the teaching on Christ, the Gospel as Promise, the forgiveness of sin, and justification through faith. It would be nice if we could put our sexual morality disagreements in the category of *adiaphora* and concentrate solely on preaching the Gospel. Experience, though, shows we cannot manage it.

Why bring this up? Because I think that the traditional Roman way of dealing with such matters has a great deal to commend it. For something on the order of 1,500 years, a nascent and later robust, perhaps too robust, concept of Roman primacy guided Western Christianity toward proclaiming the centrality of Christ and celebrating his mysteries liturgically while allowing exercises in popular piety that served as a bridge to the essentials of faith.

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28   *Solid Declaration of the Book of Concord,* Article X, para. 9 (accessed at http://bookofconcord.org/sd-adiaphora.php on 25 June 2015)

Is something more evangelical possible in a reformed papacy? In his study of Pope John Paul II's *Ut Unum Sint*, retired Archbishop John Quinn singles out seven elements that the pope himself identifies as key to primatial vigilance and the service of unity. I quote Quinn:

- Vigilance over handing down of the word

- Vigilance over the celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments

- Vigilance over the Church's mission, discipline and the Christian life

- Vigilance over the requirements of the common good of the Church should anyone be tempted to overlook it in the pursuit of personal interests

- The primatial duty to admonish, to caution, and to declare at times that this or that opinion . . . is irreconcilable with the unity of faith

- The primatial duty to speak in the name of all the Pastors in communion with him when circumstances require it

- The primatial duty – under very specific (and limited) conditions to declare *ex cathedra* that a certain doctrine belongs the deposit of faith[29]

My suspicion is that a pope with the personality of Jorge Mario Bergoglio may have a better chance of making such things seem attractive than John Paul. But where John Paul could bring only conservatives, Francis appears to be battling with them in his attempt to simplify the papacy and reduce its elaborate habits. Thus it is well to remember the question that Robert Mickens asked in the 26 May 2015 issue of *The National Catholic Reporter*: "Can Pope Francis succeed in reforming the Curia?"

None of us knows yet the answer to that question, but when I dream of the future, I imagine the zeal and freedom of Protestant associational methods of operating in ad hoc manners combined with both the dynamism and stability of Catholic religious orders. Each order is self-

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29   John R Quinn, *The Reform of the Papacy: The Costly Call to Christian Unity* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), p. 29.

governing under the umbrella of canon law and the pope as vicar of Peter who – at his best – discerns both how to encourage the auspicious new and to subject mere novelties and self-aggrandizing grand-standing to sober testing … with the love, patience, and wisdom that heals and increases, taking care not to wound.