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Canossa reversed: The Church and the secular state in the abuse crisis

Massimo Faggioli

February 4, 2020

According to contemporary sources, in January 1077 Henry IV, head of the Holy Roman Empire, was forced to humiliate himself on his knees, barefoot in the snow, before the entrance gate of the Castle of Canossa, in northern Italy.

After three days and three nights, Pope Gregory VII, who was a guest of Matilda of Tuscany, accepted his humiliation.

It was the most dramatic moment in the struggle between the Church and the Empire. Imperial power bowed before the papacy of the so-called “Gregorian revolution.”

It was also the beginning of a new history in the Church’s relationship to empire, states and nations in terms of mutual respecting the sovereignty of the other, as two different and inassimilable jurisdictions: the Church for political power, and political power for the Church and the papacy.

The Castle of Canossa became the symbol of that relationship in the Middle Ages, in a way similar to how the Berlin Wall was during the Cold War in the 20th century: the symbol of an epochal clash between two powers fighting for supremacy.

Cardinals are judged by the State

Sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, it is now quite clear, is a global phenomenon.

The abuse crisis has even touched those once thought to be untouchable – bishops, including the Roman Pontiff. There have even been allegations and trials against the pope’s electors.

The former Archbishop of Washington, Theodore McCarrick, was removed from the College of Cardinals and, after a canonical trial at the Vatican for sexual abuse, was dismissed from the clerical state in February 2019.

French Cardinal Philippe Barbarin was acquitted of allegations of abuse cover-up just last week in a state court. And Australian Cardinal George Pell, who was convicted last year for sexual abuse, is waiting in prison for his appeal to be heard by the High Court.

These three cases set three different precedents – and all are still unfolding. We continue to wait for the Vatican to release a detailed report on how McCarrick, now 89, was able to rise, undetected (and protected), up the career ladder.

It is not clear what the future holds for Cardinal Barbarin in terms of Church leadership. He retains his title as Archbishop of Lyon and is only 69 years old (six from the retirement age), but he has said he intends to step down. A Vatican-appointed administrator has been running his diocese since last June.

And George Pell – who, at age 78, is still eligible to participate in a conclave – could be the first cardinal in modern times to spend the rest of his life in a prison of a country that is not an authoritarian or totalitarian regime, but a liberal-democratic system governed by the rule of law.

Canossa in Reverse

The humiliation, in the last two years, of three once very powerful “princes of the Church” can be seen as a kind of Canossa in reversal: the the humiliation of the Church before national, secular jurisdictions, following its humiliation in the eyes of public opinion.

The Church in the West was considered for centuries to be a separate and independent jurisdiction, which dealt internally with its criminal clergy, not under the same law like everybody else. But that system is now in crisis.

In different nations the rebalancing act between Church and State will take different shapes, but there is no going back to the second millennium.

Certainly, there is no going back to the idea that the ordained members of the Catholic Church are above civil law.

On the other hand, the humiliation of Canossa did not mean the total subjugation of imperial power to papal power.

The clash between Gregory VII and Henry IV set in motion, between the 11th and the 12th centuries, a long process of redefining relations between Church and empire.

It created the distinction between religion and politics, between Church and state (something that is very different, if not absent, in other Christian traditions and in other religions).

Not a question of either/or

This is a distinction that is often missing from the interpretation of the sexual abuse crisis as expressed on either side of the ideological aisle of Catholicism.

The conservative and traditionalist side has resurfaced theories of integralist, anti-modern and illiberal Catholicism.

It continues to view the Church as the highest source of moral and political authority, which must be defended from the assault of liberal, relativistic democracy (but only in defense of churchmen identified as “cultural warriors” like Cardinal Pell).

The radical-progressive side, on the other hand, is tempted to automatically apply decisions made by secular and political authorities to the Church’s internal laws and constitutions or to rubber-stamp sentences and laws issued by the state.

This ongoing “Canossa in reverse” should not be seen as a symbol of disaster, but as an instructive moment for today’s Church.

In medieval Christendom the contraposition between Church and empire was at the origin of the idea of distinction between church and state.

In the long run it helped create the very Catholic idea of *laïcité*: a particular kind of relationship between religion and politics that is about *distinction* of authorities.

Distinction between Church and State

That is different from the more recent concept of constitutional *separation* between Church and state or, on the contrary, of the supremacy of the state over the Church or the Church over the state.

This is something the most persistent voices in the intra-Catholic debate tend to forget – both the neo-integralists or traditionalists and the radical-progressives.

Getting rid of the healthy, Catholic idea of the distinction between Church and state during the storm of the sex abuse crisis would put the members of Church at the mercy of populist agendas that offer a simplistic diagnosis that can be seen in some voices in the media both Catholic and secular.

It would also enslave the Church to ideological opposites and populist interpretations of the crisis. This would be even more dangerous for Christian communities that are sociologically small minorities living under a system of oppression or persecution.

On the one hand, there is no possible reform of the Church through claims of total purity, transparency, innocence and sinlessness that are typical of authoritarian regimes.

This is the strongman solution to the Church crisis based on some illusory idea of ecclesial self-sufficiency.

There is no solution to the abuse crisis in the Church without the intervention of secular authorities in prosecuting and punishing those crimes.

On the other hand, there is no possible reform of the Church that surrenders completely to the outside (secular courts, parliaments and legislatures, administrative branch of the state, the media, etc.) *all* aspects of the need of reform in the life of the Church.

The purely criminal side of the crisis is the easiest aspect.

A Catholic way forward

Canossa in reverse means the Church is clearly subject to the law like everyone else. It cannot shield criminals and must cooperate fully with secular authorities. But this is not all.

There are more complex sides to the relationship between the institutional Church and what was once called the *ad extra* (secular politics, culture, the media, etc.).

The danger of completely obliterating the wall of distinction between Church and state can be seen in the polarization regarding the diagnosis of the causes of the sexual abuse crisis.

Those who promote a stereotypically conservative and neo-traditionalist religious ideology say the cause of abuse is homosexuality. Their solution is to scapegoat LGBT Catholics.

Those who promote a stereotypically liberal religious ideology blame abuse on priestly celibacy.

The way the Church deals with, for example, the issue of homosexuality in the Church and celibacy depends enormously on the kind of relationship the Church will be able to establish with the *ad extra*. And there is no way to escape the impression that these reforms are also a response to the abuse crisis.

The sexual abuse crisis needs a comprehensive effort for specific *Catholic*- spiritual, ecclesial and theological - inputs to Church reform.

As it deals with the secular state and the media in the sex abuse crisis, the Church needs voices that provide contributions for the 21st century as Robert Bellarmine did for the Tridentine age and of John Courtney Murray for the age of Vatican II.

The Catholic Church needs to recover what was, until a few years ago, a credible voice in a good deal of public discussion. It cannot do that with ahistorical, fantasy accounts of the Catholic tradition like the ones that now seem to be in fashion.

Follow me on Twitter @MassimoFaggioli

The shadow pontificate is drawing to a close

Robert Mickens

February 6, 2020

It was only a matter of time.

Pope Francis has finally lost his patience and gotten rid of **Archbishop Georg Gänswein** as prefect of the Papal Household.

According to the German weekly, *Die Tagespost*, the pope put the 63-year-old on “indefinite administrative leave.”

He did so, the paper said, because of the German prefect’s involvement in a controversial book that Benedict XVI co-authored with Cardinal Robert Sarah. It was a slim volume that most people saw as a warning to Francis, that he dare not even consider allowing the ordination of married priests.

Gänswein, who lives with Benedict and is his longtime personal secretary, was seen – rightly or wrongly – as the man ultimately responsible for dragging the retired pope into the book project.

Of course, Pope Francis did not *officially* sack the German archbishop. He could hardly do so, given Gänswein’s close relationship to Benedict. That would shatter the myth that the former pope and **current pope** are in perfect sync and harmony.

They are not. The truer reality is that these two men in white have been living respectfully towards each other under an unwritten (and unspoken) non-aggression treaty. Firing the man some call “Gorgeous George” would fuel speculation that this pact has been annulled.

A Kremlin-style purge

The Vatican's spokespersons have been embarrassed by the media's reaction to the sidelining of Gänswein. The Holy See Press Office explained that there had simply been "an ordinary redistribution" of the prefect's "various commitments and duties."

It actually looked suspiciously more like a purge, according to Italian colleague Francesco Peloso, who described the press office's explanation as reminiscent of the "golden years of the Kremlin."

So what is really going on here?

The *Tagespost* article, which first broke the news of Gänswein's administrative leave, seems extremely credible for no other reason than the fact that the politically conservative paper is close to Benedict XVI and his inner circle (i.e. his private secretary). Last December the former pope launched something called, "The Tagespost School for Catholic Journalism."

In its recent article, the paper said Gänswein would now be able to devote all his energies to helping the 92-year-old Benedict who is in declining health. This has led to further speculation that the former pope is now in the last stage of his earthly life.

We do not know for sure, but it is possible. One Italian newspaper gave further credence to that by reporting that the German archbishop has just been assigned a new apartment inside the Vatican.

Obviously, he will need another place to live once Benedict has died.

What's next for "Don Giorgio"?

There have been rumors over the past several months that, once the new constitution for the reformed Roman Curia is published (likely within the next few months), Gänswein would be transferred to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

He would replace the current secretary, Archbishop Marcello Bartolucci, who is already past the retirement age of 75.

That was before the kerfuffle over the Sarah-Benedict book.

But where else could Francis assign him? It is inconceivable that he would send Gänswein back to Germany to head a diocese, since there has been vocal resistance from the priests and people there every time the possibility has been raised.

Parking “Don Giorgio” at a desk job in Rome looks to be about the best alternative. It’s hard to imagine that he’d voluntarily seek to return to parish ministry, of which he has only limited experience, or volunteer to serve in the missions.

This was not supposed to happen

Ironically, it was Benedict XVI who caused this predicament.

He did so quite unintentionally. In fact, he believed he had done everything possible to ensure his personal secretary would hold important posts the rest of his priestly life, perhaps even rising to the rank of cardinal.

Of course, that is still possible. But only if there is a backlash to Francis’ pontificate at the next conclave (or the one after that) and a loyalist to Benedict is elected.

And that’s where Gänswein future has always rested.

The fact of the matter is that neither he nor Benedict believed Jorge Mario Bergoglio would be pope today. It wasn’t supposed to happen.

When the conclave got underway in March 2013 there was every indication that a Benedict loyalist would be elected.

The top candidates were believed to be Angelo Scola of Italy, Marc Ouellet of Quebec, Odilo Scherer of Brazil, Peter Erdöf Hungary or, possibly, Christoph Schönborn of Austria.

Carefully planning a seamless papal transition

But leaving nothing to chance, Benedict took several precautionary steps before he resigned the papacy to guarantee that his successor, whomever that was, would continue to lead the Church in seamless continuity with his own pontificate.

In the months before announcing in February 2013 his decision to step down from the papacy, which he had already

decided privately the previous spring, he carefully made several moves to protect his legacy and reward those close to him.

One of them was the June 2012 appointment of Gerhard Ludwig Müller, curator of the theological writings of Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, as head of the Vatican's doctrinal congregation.

Another was to hold a final consistory on the following Nov. 24 to create new cardinals, principally for the purpose of giving then-Archbishop James Harvey the red hat.

The American, just 63 at the time, was prefect of the Papal Household, a job he had held since 1998. Benedict re-assigned him as archpriest of the Papal Basilica of St. Paul's Outside the Walls.

Harvey, like all the men who served as prefect before him, had become a cardinal. But now his post was vacant. It would be filled two weeks later.

Putting all the final pieces in place

On Dec. 7, just 75 days before stunning the world with the announcement of his resignation, Benedict appointed his personal secretary, Monsignor George Gänswein, then 56, as prefect of the Papal Household.

The pope consecrated him titular Archbishop of Urbisaglia a month later on the Feast of the Epiphany.

All the pieces were now in place.

Benedict had already begun refurbishing a building in the Vatican Gardens that had been used the previous two decades as a nunnery.

John Paul II had established the Mater Ecclesiae Monastery in the 1990s to be occupied by a different community of contemplative nuns every five years.

When the last group completed its term in 2012, Benedict decided he'd make the monastery his retirement home. He would live there with his private secretary and a small group of consecrated women who would serve as his staff.

Their plans that day came to nothing

There was nothing terribly unusual about the arrangement except for one thing – Gänswein would be living with the retired pope while running the household (being the gatekeeper) of the current pope. Seamless transition and continuity from one pontificate to another was guaranteed.

But then Francis got elected. It would have been difficult for him to replace Gänswein, given that the German had been in the post only a few months. Instead, the new pope decided to live at the Santa Marta Residence where the cardinals lodged during the conclave.

The old guard from Benedict's pontificate was dumbfounded. And the now-retired pope's well-laid plans came to nothing.

Meanwhile, Archbishop Gänswein looked out of place and sullen in the early days and weeks of the papal transition. He was, in effect, the prefect of an *empty* household.

Initially, he scheduled meetings and engagements for Francis without coordinating them first with the new pope. On at least two or three occasions the Jesuit pope refused to go by claiming to be sick or ill disposed.

It only took the prefect a couple of months to get the message. And Francis kept him on the job.

Francis is not everybody's darling

But just around the first anniversary of the pontificate in March 2014 the archbishop gave an interview to a German television network in which he said that Pope Francis was “not everybody's darling.”

He also revealed that neither he nor Benedict had expected Bergoglio to be elected pope. And, furthermore, he gave the impression that the former pope was proof-checking the orthodoxy of at least some of Francis' talks.

The reaction was predictable.

“Pope Francis has kept Gänswein at arm's length by choosing to live in the Domus Sanctae Marthae rather than Apostolic Palace where the prefect of the Papal Household holds sway. Looked at with hindsight that was a wise decision,” said [Elena Curti](#), deputy editor of the *Tablet*.

“It would be even better if Archbishop Gänswein were now to devote himself exclusively to serving the pope emeritus – or leave Rome altogether,” she said.

It has taken almost six years, but it looks like that is finally happening.

The Amazon Synod, indigenous rights and a problematic papal bull

David E. DeCosse and Anthony Mejia

February 21, 2020

Pope Francis has the opportunity to take a bold step and build on the success of the Synod of Bishops' assembly on the Amazon and his post-synodal exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*.

He could revoke the 15th century papal bull that opened the door to the genocide of indigenous peoples in what are now called the Americas.

Of course, the issues of married priests and women's ordination in the Amazon and beyond will not go away, despite the fact that *Querida Amazonia* is silent about the former and rejects the latter.

But of greater significance than those issues is the document's prophetic reflection on the indigenous peoples and lands of the Amazon in light of the Gospel.

A step to undo a catastrophic historic injustice

And that's where formal revocation of Pope Alexander VI's bull of 1493, known as *Inter Caetera*, comes in.

Such a revocation would extend *Querida Amazonia's* prophetic engagement with the indigenous of the Amazon to native peoples around the world.

It would be a step to undo a catastrophic historical injustice. It would also bolster contemporary indigenous rights claims in land disputes. And it would affirm a powerful new vision for the people of God in the face of climate change.

In fact, for the last years indigenous peoples around the world have called for the bull to be revoked. In 2016, in an initiative called the Long March to Rome, tribal leaders met briefly with Pope Francis and for hours with Vatican diplomat Archbishop Silvano Tomasi to discuss the bull.

More recently, at a press conference last October during the Synod assembly, Rosebud Sioux Tribal Chair, Rodney M. Bordeaux, renewed the call for revocation.

“What is happening to (the indigenous of the Amazon) now, happened to us in Dakota 120 years ago, when without consultation, they took our land away, based on economic gain,” he said.

Getting bullish over a problematic papal bull

In general, problematic papal bulls don't get revoked. Like old soldiers, they just fade away.

A “bull” (from the Latin *bullā*, the authenticating seal at the end of a papal document) is a decree pertaining to policy. As a practical statement, a bull is neither dogmatic nor infallible.

In the last years, the Vatican's United Nations office has said that *Inter Caetera* is a “historic remnant with no juridical or spiritual value.”

In 2015, Pope Francis apologized in Bolivia for “many grave sins” against native peoples committed by members of the Church in the course of the colonial occupation of the Americas. But he did not specifically apologize for or revoke *Inter Caetera*.

The Borgia pope and a Spanish land-grab in the Americas

In an act that strikes us now as smacking of wild historical hubris, Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo de Borja) in 1493 took a break from tending to his children (he had four) and inserted his Spanish origins into growing nationalist and colonial clashes between Spain and Portugal.

He accepted the stated purpose of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain to bring the Catholic faith to the indigenous peoples whom Columbus had encountered, and accordingly declared:

“We...give, grant, and assign to you and your heirs and successors, kings of Castile and Leon, forever, together with all their dominions, cities, camps, places, and villages, and all rights, jurisdictions, and appurtenances, all islands and mainlands found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered towards the west and south, by drawing... the said line to be distant one hundred leagues towards the west and south from any of the islands commonly known as the Azores and Cape Verde.”

It's important to understand several key principles that informed what Alexander promulgated.

The pope rules the world

One was the assumption at the time of a universal papal jurisdiction derived directly from Christ for the purpose of the salvation of souls.

In effect, Alexander assumed a pope had sovereignty over the lands Columbus found and that such lands – and lands to be found in the future – could be given to the Spanish crown for the sake of the spread of the Gospel.

At the time of *Inter Caetera*, this ultimate appeal to universal papal jurisdiction co-existed uneasily with competing principles.

For instance, the Council of Constance in 1414 affirmed the natural law rights of non-Christian peoples to self-government and property. This affirmation prompted 16th century Jesuit philosopher Francesco Vitoria to argue that in principle the pope had had no right to give away native lands.

Moreover, Catholic theology held that no human being could be compelled to accept Christian faith (although heretics, having first accepted and then rejected faith, could be compelled to recant their heresy).

But, of course, whatever force belonged to these limiting principles was washed away in an orgy of conquest, enslavement and theft.

Depicting indigenous people as no people at all

Native peoples were made fit for plunder and death by a host of de-humanizing justifications: their tribal practices violated natural law; they were sub-human; they weren't in a state of grace...

The prophetic 16th century Dominican Bartolome de las Casas denounced the practice of the colonial *requerimiento*. On pain of enslavement or war, indigenous peoples were required to accept Spanish rule and Catholic religious practices. But, in the face of this requirement, such peoples were also absurdly considered free to accept or reject Christian faith.

In the navy a captain is responsible for his ship and so it should be for the papacy itself. For beginning a process that was blinkered from the start and ran catastrophically out of control, the papacy should formally revoke *Inter Caetera*.

Tragic effects of the 'doctrine of discovery'

But the Catholic Church must respond to more than historical cries of injustice. One of the Long March to Rome's key claims is that the basic logic of the bull – that indigenous rights may be overridden for the sake of so-called higher purposes – supports contemporary ideologies that take indigenous lands.

To be sure, the Borgia pope's "giving" indigenous lands to the Spanish for the sake of the Gospel was amply complemented in subsequent centuries by what came to be known as the "doctrine of discovery."

This is the legal doctrine that emerged in the United States and spread throughout the world claiming that "discovery" of indigenous lands entitled European "discoverers" to ownership and sovereignty.

A landmark in this regard is the 1823 United States Supreme Court case called *Johnson v. McIntosh* in which the court held that it was “the exclusive right of the discoverer to appropriate the lands occupied by the Indians” and that these rights “which had previously been in Great Britain, passed definitively to these States.”

From conquering nations to greedy businesses: the lust for land

Of course, beneath the veneer of legalese suggested by the word “doctrine” was a dressed-down, raw lust. Europeans and Americans wanted indigenous land.

And to the claim of ownership based on discovery, other justifications were added. For instance, indigenous lands were “empty” or “unused” and, thus, fit to be taken over in the name of “progress” and “civilization.”

These same justifications are deployed today in land battles around the world between indigenous tribes and aggressive business interests often allied with governments.

Often these battles emerge out of a deliberate ambiguity over ownership.

In Brazil, for instance, there are 688 indigenous territories. But only 60.4% of this land has been officially designated by the government in a process known as demarcation. Without demarcation, the rights of ownership and use of indigenous lands are left in a murky, exploitable haze.

The Latin American pope raises his voice

Pope Francis has raised his voice in protest against the ongoing efforts to take native land.

“The native Amazonian peoples have probably never been so threatened on their own lands as they are at present,” he said in 2018 while visiting Puerto Maldonado in the Peruvian Amazon.

And in *Querida Amazonia* he calls for the protection of indigenous land rights and praises indigenous land practices (to counter charges of indigenous lands being “unused”).

A formal revocation of *Inter Caetera* would clear away any ambiguity from this prophetic push.

The institution in a world-historical moment that overrode the claims of indigenous peoples to their lands now rejects any title to native land inconsistent with the clear, prior consent of indigenous people themselves.

The argument for revocation also rests on recognition of the witness of the indigenous in the time of climate change.

Inter Caetera helped launch a process of profound exploitation – a process that can now be said to be culminating in a capitalism that is indifferent to its catastrophic effects.

Revocation of this 15th century papal bull would reject the letter and spirit of exploitation and confirm that the Church now sees in the life of indigenous peoples around the world what Pope Francis has said of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon:

They stand in equal dignity and reverent care for the earth as a prophetic challenge to “a style of life that is oblivious to its own cost.”

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Catholics still don't get it: sexual abuse is not about sex

Robert Mickens

February 27, 2020

We continue to hear of incidents that more than suggest that Catholics – and, in particular, their bishops – have learned very little from the clergy sex abuse crisis.

This is quite alarming and depressing, because the Church in North America has been dealing with issues regarding priests who abuse children and teenagers for at least thirty, if not forty years.

Catholics in Great Britain, Ireland and Australia have been facing this “plague” for almost as long. And those in the countries of northern Europe began reckoning more openly with abuse among the clerical ranks shortly after the turn of the millennium.

In the last several years, Catholics in the rest of the world have also been forced to admit that there are recurrences of priest sex abuse in their countries, too.

This includes places in the former Catholic bastions of Latin America and southern Europe, the largely homophobic continent of Africa and the mostly non-Christian expanse of Asia.

It seems like wherever 2 or 3 (hundred thousand) people are gathered in the name of Catholicism, there is clergy sexual abuse in their midst.

Sex makes Catholics go blind

As Catholics, we don't like to hear that. And we don't want to admit it, either. But what is worse is that many of us do not want to see – or maybe we're too blinded by culture and history to see – what sexual abuse is really all about.

It is not about sex.

I repeat, and ask you to pause and think about it for a moment. It is not about sex.

For most Catholics, this is probably even harder to hear, because we don't deal with sexual things very well. Our confused Church teachings on the subject tend to either make human sexuality an idol or (and, thankfully, this is less common today) something that's dirty.

Reactions to recent revelations that Jean Vanier sexually abused several women prove the point.

The French-Canadian layman, who was seen as something of a living saint for his extraordinary work with mentally disabled people, was not guilty of committing sins against the Sixth Commandment.

At least not principally, so it seems clear to me.

'Encroaching intimacy' and the false spiritualization of sex

The women say Vanier abused them sexually. But they also say he did this under the pretext of some sort of mystical spirituality.

As much as this was sexual abuse in the physical sense, it was even more a spiritual abuse of these women, in the way he used the things of God to manipulate or control them.

Jean Vanier used spirituality – what I have learned to call from my own painful experience “encroaching intimacy” – as a way to obtain what the other person would not or could not offer freely.

I've never heard any theologian or preacher speak of it this way, but I am convinced that this is what it means to violate the Second Commandment, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.”

There are people in the Church, especially among the ordained ministers (deacons, priests and bishops) or even lay leaders with a certain charism (like Vanier), who do this in a variety of ways.

Using one's religious status

They use their position in the Church or their spiritual authority to satisfy their own self-centered needs or desires.

They do so – and often with little self awareness, it seems to me – by convincing people in the name of God to give them money, sex, honors, private information about others and all sorts of things.

Tele-evangelists who get rich peddling the so-called “prosperity Gospel” are the most obnoxious and blatant example of this. Certain scandal-stained Catholic religious orders that bilk widows and other wealthy people are no better.

We tend to look disapprovingly on them and rightly so.

Yet we fail to see how our own good priests and bishops – and other charismatic spiritual leaders – can fall prey to the same temptation to use their religious status (and, often unconsciously!) to feed their own personal needs.

And when I say “we”, I mean all of us Catholics. We tend to be blinded to this reality. We don't want to see it.

In the name of the father

It is probably no coincidence that in a Church (and a society) that is male-dominated, the vast majority of those who sexually or spiritually take advantage of others are men.

The desire of men to manipulate or even abuse those who are weaker or under their authority – women, other men, teens or children – is probably also reinforced, even unwittingly, by the simple fact that men have always been able to do so in a patriarchal system like that of the Church.

Patriarchy and its first-born son, clericalism, have allowed men of God to violate the true meaning of the Second Commandment, probably from the days when the giants of our faith walked the earth.

They will continue to do so until women truly become equal members of the Church, equal to men at every level of decision-making authority and at every level of ministerial service.

We will not get to the root of the Church's crisis of abuse until that happens.

Coronavirus is depriving us of touch, the nourishment of our humanity

Timothy Radcliffe OP

March 25, 2020

Queuing up to go through security in Tel Aviv airport last week, I was fascinated by the balletic movements of the man in front of me.

He almost danced as he maneuvered his suitcases so that no one could be nearer to him than two meters.

He was probably wise, but for me he vividly evoked two aspects of the new world in which we live as best we can.

First of all, insecurity. The menace of death hangs in the air, literally. We are vulnerable.

Living well now and being grateful

When I had cancer three years ago, I was confronted with my own mortality. This is different since it touches all whom we love.

The two people to whom I am closest in my community in Blackfriars are both at high risk. One of them is only fifty. But he already has an illness, which means he has no immunity at all.

Both of them are the brothers with whom I have been on holidays every year for many years. Maybe I never will again.

The only way that I can respond is to enjoy them now. Their lives are a gift for which I can give thanks every day.

I went and bought a bottle of wine so that I can have a drink with the one who can still share space with me.

Gratitude floods my being. We shall have a wonderful evening. But he has just phoned to say we must delay since he is not well.

We need proximity and touch, hugs and kisses

The young man with the suitcases also was an image of isolation.

Every stranger, and even friend, is seen as a possible threat to one's life, and I to him or her. Safety is found only in keeping apart.

But how can we live in isolation? We need proximity and touch, hugs and kisses, to be really alive.

In the Sistine Chapel, Michelangelo shows God's finger touching Adam into life. We are all the hands of the life-giving God when we touch others with kindness and respect.

Touch is the nourishment of our humanity. Grandparents and grandchildren who cannot hug each other are living a deep deprivation!

Cyberspace is not the same, but...

I am deeply grateful, as never before, for living in a community, so that even in this terrible time, I can leave my room and find brethren.

And I live in a beautiful city filled with parks in which I can walk and see the signs of spring. I have no reason to complain.

But millions of people are deprived of the physical closeness that we need to flourish.

On the other hand, cyberspace is filled with messages expressing love and care. 'Are you alright?' 'Have you got back from Israel?'

I have received three since I began to write this short piece.

Suddenly, when I must not touch, I am in touch with people whom I have not seen for years. Yes, there is isolation, but also a new and wide communion of those who care.

Of course it is not the same. I miss the faces of those whom I love.

Confessions of a first-time 'Skyper'

Yesterday for the first time in my life – what a confession! – I used Skype. I contacted a friend who lives abroad to find out how he was.

In the evening I skyped the other brother who is isolated from us all. It was better than nothing, but it is not the same as seeing a face three dimensionally.

Usually we do not sit in front of screens staring each other. Faces are best seen in side-glances, unexpected glimpses, caught unawares when one enters a room.

We do not stare at the faces of those whom we love, as we focus relentlessly at the screen when we Skype or Zoom. When we are physically together, we look at each other gently, discreetly, from every angle.

The brother whom I first skyped told me that in Hebrew, faces give light. It is as if the light shines forth from our eyes, illuminating those whom we love.

We bask in their radiance, like sunbathers on a beach; we rest in their gaze. I miss so many faces at the moment.

Fasting from the shared intimacy of the Body of Christ

And touch! Yesterday we celebrated the last of our public Eucharists for a while. As we processed out a friend waved. We will be fasting from the shared intimacy of the Body of Christ.

The early Christians shocked the pagans by the intimacy of our touch in the kiss of peace. It was really a kiss on the mouth! All that stops for the moment.

How can we deprive people of the Eucharist?

Interiorly, I rebelled against the Church's decision to close all public liturgies, even though rationally I know it is unavoidable.

Of course, pastoral work and the hearing of confessions still continue, often discreetly on benches in gardens, letting the fresh air keep us from mutual contagion.

The joy of preaching comes from faces

As members of the Order of Preachers we must find every way we can to proclaim the gospel. Our Dominican students are exploring new ways of reaching out on the web; our university classes will be on-line.

Never has there been such a vast effort to reach out with the gospel on the digital continent. Wonderful!

And yet most of the joy of preaching comes from the faces, the smiles and the laughter, of the people one is addressing.

St Augustine says that we should teach with *Hilaritas*, exuberance and even ecstasy.

It is intensely mutual. When the occasion is blessed, the preacher and the people inspire each other.

A fifteenth century Sufi imam, Mullah Nasrudin, said: "I talk all day, but when I see someone's eyes blaze, then I write it down."

So for me this is both a time of intense communion but also of deprivation, of rediscovered friends and of absence, of reaching out but not touching.

All that we lose in this time of plague will, we hope and trust, be recovered before too long. The coronavirus will pass.

Something good from this contagion

But something is in the air that may be contagious for the good. I pray that we in Britain may look back to this time as when we recovered some sense of being a single national community.

The Conservative government made an extraordinary announcement: If a company lays off an employee from work, rather than dismissing them, the government will pay 80% of their wages.

This is an intervention of the State that is unparalleled in the history of Britain and the cost of which is hard to imagine.

But slowly our politicians are coming to realize that unless such drastic action is taken in favor of the poorest, the people on zero hours contracts, those who earn least, the result might be a social unrest that Europe has not seen since the French Revolution.

A single human community from which we cannot exit

We can only survive as a society by radical change. The vast inequalities of wealth have so weakened our common bonds that extreme financial suffering could provoke social dissolution.

The cry of conservative politicians ever since the financial crisis of 2008 has been 'We are all in this together'. But it was not true.

Maybe at least some of the political elite needs to see that if we are not really all in this together, the consequences will be almost unthinkable.

Of course, as unshakeable European, I hope that we may eventually come to see that we cannot flourish without our European friends as well!

Brexit could not have happened at a more unfortunate moment.

Let us hope that we shall discover that just as the virus reaches beyond national boundaries and does not need visas, so we shall renew our sense that we belong to a single human community from which no exit is possible.

Post scriptum: What I have learnt

I was at the Tel Aviv airport, returning home from a month with my brethren at the *Ecole Biblique* of Jerusalem.

The virus had disrupted life of the Ecole; most of the professors had been stranded abroad, unable to return, but I still had a wonderful time reading the latest research on the New Testament.

After almost 50 years of priesthood, and incessant preaching, teaching and writing, I was having a break. It was time for a Sabbath.

But after a month, I was becoming hungry to work again. I had lectures to prepare for the summer in America, France and England.

Now they are all cancelled. There are just a few articles to write about the crisis. Thank you *La Croix* for asking me!

I have discovered that I am more driven by tasks and goals than I had realized. Now I must learn to live differently, which most people have to at my age of almost 75!

An Australian friend had sent me CDs of his favorite composers. Can I learn just to sit back and listen, even in the middle of the morning?

Will I read a Shakespearean play just because it is wonderful and for the pure pleasure of it?

Can I live in this moment, attending to the people who need me now, and be content even if no one calls?

Can I learn that I do not have to justify my existence and prove to others that my life is worthwhile?

I can just live, day by day.

This Sabbatical time invites me to prepare for the coming Sabbath of the Lord, when we shall rest in his peace.

The twelfth century theologian Peter Abelard evoked this glimpse of the end of the journey:

There Sabbath unto Sabbath

Succeeds eternally,

The joy that has no ending

Of souls in holiday

***Timothy Radcliffe OP** is a Dominican friar and priest from England. He was Master of the Order of Preachers from 1992-2001 and is a best-selling author.*

If God is love, why is there evil and suffering?

Jean-Paul Sagadou

March 26, 2020

The Bible opens with a song of jubilation, a hymn to the creation that is born from God's hand and Word: "And God saw that it was good."

This astonishing and luminous affirmation punctuates the first seven days of the story of Genesis. At the same time, it leaves us with questions.

If creation is good, then why is there evil in our world? Why does God allow suffering, disease, pandemics like COVID-19 and the death of the innocent?

In the Bible, the prophet Isaiah foresees the trial of evil. "Then down to earth: there will be only anguish, gloom, the confusion of night, swirling darkness" (Is 8: 22-23).

At the heart of this trial of evil lies the question: "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42: 4).

Evil truly hurts. It hurts our intelligence as we try to understand. We do not understand.

Evil hurts our faith. Sometimes we end up doubting God.

Based on the theory of evolution, scientists say nature is gradually evolving. And if there is so much evil, it is because the world is not yet complete.

For them the world is imperfect and nature is like a craftsman that, by trial and error, is gradually creating a masterpiece.

Living by struggle and hope

Christian theologians, on the other hand, see the question of evil in relation to human freedom.

They say 'God is love' necessarily implies that God respects our freedom. Because if God did not, it would not be love, but rape.

They also say that God is the first to suffer from evil and that if we, who are so self-centered, can be saddened by the suffering of another, what pain it must cause to the Father's loving heart!

They say it is absolutely false to imagine that God is indifferent or, worse, a cruel spectator of all the evil committed on earth.

Throughout history philosophers and theologians have offered many other explanations about evil, but we are always brought back to the same conclusion:

The presence of evil in the world is a mystery that we do not fully understand. No religion provides a fully satisfactory answer.

That said, Christians do not live in resignation and despair, but in struggle and hope.

While they struggle to make sense of the existence of evil in the world, they do not cease to combat it. Because it is more important to try to expel evil than to explain it.

Faith brings Christians a hope that is at the heart of their struggle against evil and suffering.

The biblical story of Job is well known. Encouraged by his friends to curse God, Job resists and is astonished at God's greatness in a creation that surpasses him.

God has broken evil

One day, in the presence of a man who was born blind, the disciples asked Jesus: "Who sinned, this man or his parents?"

"Neither he nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered, "he was born blind that the works of God might be revealed in him" (Jn 9:1-3).

These words are beyond us, but they dissociate evil from the idea of punishment, while also designating, in Jesus, the place of God's response.

Jesus, in fact, will face total darkness on a cross, thus revealing God's presence with all people and all those confronted with the nonsense of history and with radical, absurd evil.

In Jesus' victory over death, Christians see that something else has begun, and when they, in their struggle against evil, are tempted to give up, they remember that on Easter morning a tomb was found empty.

Whatever has to be said about the origin and nature of evil, however serious its meaning for us, one thing is certain: in Jesus Christ, God destroyed evil and its empire.

So Christians must continue the struggle of the Gospel by following Jesus, who healed the sick and forgave sins.

The life of Jesus motivates Christians, nourishes their hope and gives meaning to their lives, even as they must continually confront the absurdity of evil.

Jean-Paul Sagadou is an Assumptionist priest from Burkina Faso in western Sub-Saharan Africa.

The People of God in the post-coronavirus Church

Justin Stanwix

April 22, 2020

In the solitude of lockdown or quiet hours in social distance it is obligatory to ponder what Catholics will do once they are free to return to church and to celebrate Mass.

Will they resume the former practice of their faith, renew their financial contributions and continue participating in parish groups?

Possibly they will carry on with traditional ways with renewed vigor, having prayerfully encountered Christ in his suffering over Holy Week and embraced his message of new life and love.

Or is it likely, as some have suggested, that coronavirus separation will provide Catholics with the opportunity (or excuse) to free themselves from a broken and failed Church they no longer see as community of believers that Jesus established.

Perhaps the physical distancing will have given new light to the wisdom of withdrawing from a failed institution. Is it possible that we will forget the promise that Jesus made us to be with his Church until the end of time?

When the church doors open, will clergy and lay leaders expect an instant return of a committed faithful anxious to resume sacramental life of their Church? Or is a different expectation appropriate?

A wake up call

Clearly this is time to recognize and be thankful for a huge wake up call, an enormous God-given opportunity for the Church to reach out to the People of God.

Paul Collins wrote in *La Croix International* nearly a year ago that the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) had “sketched out a remarkable New Testament vision of the Church in the first two chapters of the document *Lumen gentium*” (the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church).

But he went on to say, “We failed to follow-up and fully incorporate that vision in the Church’s pastoral practice, governance, ecclesiastical structures and revised 1983 Code of Canon Law.”

Most parishioners are not familiar with these multiple missed opportunities. Why would they?

There has been abundant theological commentary on the vision of Vatican II, but very little direct application of it. At least until Pope Francis began, in his own way, to reflect some of the dreams of Pope John XXIII.

Baptized Catholics have even less reason to appreciate that Paul VI’s proposal for a *Lex Ecclesiae Fundamentalis* (a Fundamental Law of the Church) was effectively skittled.

Vatican II’s vision for the Church

The dynamic images of the Church that *Lumen gentium* paints in its first two chapters remain vital.

“The mystery of the holy Church is manifested in its very foundation,” the document says. “The Lord set it on its course by preaching the Good News.”

Lumen gentium adopts St Augustine’s image that “the Church like a stranger in a foreign land, presses forward amid the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God”.

The Council Fathers could never have known how much consolation the Church would need for the anguish it has brought upon itself nor of the type of pandemic that presently persecutes the world.

“The Church is represented as a community, the People of God on pilgrimage, drawn together by God’s Spirit and gifted to serve and act as representatives of Christ,” says Collins.

The Church is a sign that God is active in the world, symbolized by those who hunger for justice, work for integrity and seek the meaning of human existence.

The focus in both these chapters of *Lumen gentium* is on the local Church, which is envisaged as being built-up from below, from the community.

We can’t change the monarchical origins of the Church or renew canon law in the manner John XXIII intended overnight, not least because the last inadequate revision took 20 years to complete.

“Synodality” has commenced but has such a long way to go. Pope Francis’ calls to reject clericalism are paid lip service.

But we could take some practical steps along the way to reach out to the People of God and genuinely recognize the community and its pilgrimage, empowered as it is by the Holy Spirit.

Some options for moving forward

We could start by not automatically assuming that parishioners will return. We may think deep faith exists, but there are parishioners who are lost or who have strayed, wounded by carrying long standing hurt or temporary social isolation. They need to be embraced as Jesus would gather them.

By virtue of baptism all Christians are anointed “priest, prophet and king (pastor)”. The Church is their Church. It is not a place over there, in Rome or elsewhere. No. They are the Church.

And if that is so, why do they need to be welcomed? Why is it not self-evident?

Because *Lumen gentium* was never properly adopted.

The baptized faithful were never really treated as the People of God as the Constitution on the Church contemplated and that vision is not truly part of our basic idiom.

Deepening the concept of communion with God and one another

We need a much more enhanced concept of Church as communion.

At the vertical level that is communion between God and us. At the horizontal level it is communion among ourselves, with one another, bound together in the risen Christ, infused by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We need to reach out to the People of God and embrace them, bring them out of their tombs as Easter people to meet the risen Lord, to walk the Road to Emmaus with amazement and to respond to the Word.

We must commit to ongoing adult formation in the faith and to social/eco justice. In other words, we need to re-engage in new and creative ways, not simply re-adopt the status quo.

We must also look for ways to re-imagine communion post lockdown and permit those for whom the experience has been transformative to address their hunger for formalized religion.

Individual parishes will no doubt have different preferences for expressing their outreach. For instance, they may have a “late Easter” celebration with blessing of the Paschal candle or a Mass for the dead for those who were buried hastily or without the presence of family.

Some parishes may opt to have a major community-wide thanksgiving celebration for workers and all those who have supported us through this pandemic.

For others it may be a Reconciliation liturgy, a prolonged Eucharistic exposition to honor the Body and Blood of Christ given to us at the first Easter, with joyous music and song to pray twice as St Augustine encourages us.

Perhaps, there are parishes that will make a new place for the Liturgy of the Hours (for all members of the Church).

A new Easter People

These are all possibilities. And we must respond to the thirst that many parishioners have for a better understanding of sacred scripture.

Members of the community, including those in communion with us, are increasingly choosing to have outdoor marriage ceremonies – often on the beach or in a park.

As God is present wherever two or more are gathered, it is past time we were more flexible about outdoor weddings. The alternative often is no sacramental marriage.

While the House of Prayer is the ideal place for the sacred Liturgy it is undeniable that people are enlivened by a properly organized Mass at the seaside, especially at sunrise or sunset.

Home Mass for those who are infirm, not especially mobile or who just wish to gather as a smaller worshipping community occasionally should be the norm. We seem to forget that the Last Supper took place in an upper room.

In all cases the invitation must be extended to the People of God to come and join as a communion, with God and with one another, as the new Easter People intimately part of the Body of Christ and the Church as sacrament.

Justin Stanwix is chair of the liturgy team at St Mary Star of the Sea Parish in the Diocese of Wollongong (Australia).

Why are bishops still "consecrating" their countries to Mary

Hendro Munsterman

April 30, 2020

The Catholic bishops' conferences of Italy, the United States and Canada will "consecrate" their countries to the Blessed Virgin Mary on the first day of May, the month traditionally dedicated to honoring the mother of Jesus.

The Italian Church leaders say their people have asked them to do this "so that she may protect and save (the country) from the current pandemic". The "consecration" will take place Friday evening at a 15th century Marian shrine near Bergamo, capital of one of the provinces worst hit by COVID-19.

Los Angeles Archbishop Jose Gomez, president of the US Bishops' Conference (USCCB), says the consecration of the United States to Mary is "the occasion to pray for Our Lady's continued protection of the vulnerable, healing of the unwell, and wisdom for those who work to cure this terrible virus".

In recent weeks, dozens of individual bishops and other episcopal conferences have done the same, including prelates in Latin America, Portugal, Spain, Estonia and Ireland.

But "consecrating" a country or region to Mary (or the "Immaculate Heart of Mary") is theologically problematic and controversial.

Worshipping God, venerating the saints

The Congregation for Divine Worship at the Vatican published a "[Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy](#)" in 2001, in which it laid down principles and guidelines for devotions.

It states that the Latin term *consecratio* is better reserved "for those self-offerings which have God as their object, and which are characterized by totality and perpetuity, which are guaranteed by the Church's intervention and have as their basis the sacraments of baptism and confirmation".

In other words, we cannot consecrate ourselves to Mary, and certainly not outside the sacraments of initiation. This is a Vatican change in vision, based on advances in "liturgical theology and the consequent rigorous use of terminology".

And indeed, at least since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the Roman Catholic Church has made an explicit distinction between "worship", the object of which is God alone, and "veneration", which can be shown to Mary and other recognized saints.

The Council said veneration of Mary "differs essentially from the cult of adoration which is offered equally" to the three Persons of the Trinity "and is most favorable to this adoration" (*Lumen gentium*, 66).

Within Catholic theology and devotional practices this is nothing more, but also nothing less, than giving "praise" to the mother of Christ "for the great things" God has done to her, as Mary exclaims in her Gospel canticle (Lk 1: 46-55).

Thus, whenever a Marian devotion uses terms that threaten to water down the essential distinction between Mary as a creature and God as Creator, these traditions must be adjusted and reoriented.

That's why Pope John Paul II increasingly replaced the term consecration with "entrustment", which he did, for example, after the attempt on his life on May 13, 1981 – Feast of Our Lady of Fatima. And the Pontifical International Marian Academy pointed out this important shift in 2005.

Medieval origins of Marian devotion and present culture

Devotion to Mary originated in the Middle Ages in a feudal culture and a hierarchically structured society, in which the knightly tradition resonated with her surrender to God.

Consecrating oneself to Mary is so culturally defined that when it is detached from that culture and repeated – unchanged – in a more democratic, modern culture, it is no longer understood in the same way or means the same thing.

This also applies, for example, to the idea of a patron saint. The way the medieval feudal system understood this is incomprehensible today.

Believers have devoted themselves to the Virgin Mary since the Middle Ages. Saint Louis-Marie de Montfort (1673-1716) “proposed to the faithful consecration to Jesus through Mary, as an effective way of living out their baptismal commitment”.

Unfortunately, the Christocentric character of this consecration was often ignored. This happens all the more in our modern context when Mary is still presented as queen to whom we surrender as slavish soldiers. The risk is that she becomes more like a pagan mother goddess who can exist outside the bond with the Triune God.

In the course of history, however, others were also “dedicated” to Mary, beginning with the newly baptized. And in the 20th century, countries, dioceses and individuals were dedicated to Mary or her “Immaculate Heart”.

Pope Pius XII, for example, consecrated the entire world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1942.

A shift in emphasis

From being a personal, medieval cult of piety, consecration to Mary has grown into a devotion that often has apocalyptic overtones, not least inspired by a maximalist interpretation of the Fatima apparitions.

But under John Paul II this practice shifted. And **Pope Francis**, during his visit to Fatima in 2017, also confirmed this shift during his prayer before the statue of the Virgin Mary when he said: "I entrust myself to you. In union with my brothers and sisters, through you, I consecrate myself to God."

From a sound Catholic theology, believers can entrust themselves or others to the prayer of Mary.

"The prayer of a righteous believer is powerful and effective," says the Epistle of St. James, and the Catholic tradition sees Mary as the righteous, redeemed human being par excellence.

But Mary does not possess her own "power of action" on a supernatural level. This, of course, belongs explicitly to God alone.

Thus, it is possible to consecrate oneself (not other individuals or countries) to God; but to God alone and not to Mary or any other saint.

Come, Holy Spirit!

But besides this theological truth, there is another important point that deserves attention.

At a time in Church history when Western theology is rediscovering the role of the Holy Spirit, it would be good to emphasize more clearly the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity's "power to act" – also in the form of popular belief.

After all, the ancient litany, *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, implores the Holy Spirit to "heal that which is wounded" and "correct what goes astray".

Why must all popular devotion revolve around Mary and other saints? Many Catholic theologians have rightly pointed out in recent decades that Mary often takes the place of the Holy Spirit, for example as "Advocate" and "Comforter".

Where has our creativity gone? Why do Catholics of our day and age so often, and too eagerly, cling to devotional practices that have been surpassed by their own Catholic

theology? The question is whether these kinds of old practices keep the faith alive or, on the contrary, stultify it and turn it into a museum piece.

Why shouldn't we go new – but, actually, completely traditional – ways by asking our bishops to invoke the Holy Spirit in this coronavirus crisis? Individually or collectively.

Sometimes I even dream of a gigantic zoom-meeting in coronation times in which a bishop, as the main pastor of the faith communities entrusted to him, prays to the Holy Spirit.

Believers could pray the good old **Novena to the Holy Spirit** – together or individually. And they could burn a candle each day in every Christian home.

Please, let us try something new!

***Hendro Munsterman** works as a Roman Catholic theologian in France and writes on faith and religion for the Dutch newspaper Nederlands Dagblad.*

Historians offer first impressions of Pius XII archives

Nicolas Senèze

May 22, 2020

The Vatican Apostolic Archive finally opened its files on the pontificate of Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) on March 2, but just five days later it was forced to close because of the COVID-19 crisis.

“The global pandemic has allowed time for more meticulous daily research,” says historian Nina Valbousquet, in a fascinating article in the online magazine *Entre-Temps*.

A researcher from the “École française de Rome”, she specializes in relations between Judaism and the Church. During the lockdown she’s had time to learn a little more about how the Vatican functioned during the Second World War.

Valbousquet discovered that, at the time, the Vatican was anything but a monolithic bloc dominated by the pope.

“Dilemmas” and “silence”

“The Church was already complex and international,” says Andrea Riccardi.

The Italian historian and founder of the Sant’Egidio Community assessed his own early research into the Pius XII era archives in an article in the May 13 issue of the Milan-based daily, *Corriere della Sera*.

Valbousquet says a good example of the Church’s diversity is seen, for example, in the archives of the Vatican nunciature in Paris, which had been moved to Vichy.

We see that the nuncio at the time, Archbishop Valerio Valeri, noted the “brutality” of the Vel d’Hiv Roundup of Jews in Paris in 1942, while also deploring the very “platonic” protest of the French bishops.

And there’s a report on public opinion in the free zone in which the Jesuit Roger Braun said it was “astonishing and almost a scandal to see the hierarchy - and even Rome - remaining silent”.

On the other hand, there’s a letter that a priest from Marseilles sent to Pierre Laval (head of the Vichy government), with copy to the nuncio, in which he expressed indignation in violent anti-Semitic terms that his bishop had been publicly criticized.

The diversity of this information coming from all over Europe undoubtedly explains what Italian historian Giovanni Miccoli had called, as early as 2000, the “dilemmas” of Pius XII, as much as his “silences”.

Riccardi insists that such a plurality of information is crucial to understanding what really happened. He points out that from the beginning of the war, Pius XII was worried about how his silence about Poland would be perceived.

A “center for information”

“During the Second World War, the Church was won over by the divisions caused by war propaganda in Poland. The Nazis put forward a pope aligned with Germany, generating an impression of abandonment by Polish Catholics,” Riccardi says, stressing that the Vatican was not in a strong position at the time.

“The power of the Church was, therefore, a myth. The Holy See in the 1940s was a handful of men surrounded by Nazis,” he insists.

“You can really wonder how much room the Holy See had for maneuvering,” Valbousquet says in agreement.

Nevertheless, she says the Vatican was able to offset its weakness by becoming a “center for information”.

The archives of the apostolic delegation in Jerusalem show how the Vatican representation became a letterbox between the Jews of Palestine and those who remained under the boot of the Reich.

“I was impressed by this role of intermediary which began very early, from 1940-1941,” she told *La Croix*.

The historian also looked at the series of files, “aid and assistance to refugees on grounds of race or religion”, which was begun under Pius XI and “grew considerably under the pontificate of Pius XII”.

This is a sign of real humanitarian action even if the Vatican did not seem to want to give up its neutrality.

“A slow awakening”

The archives underscore how well informed the Vatican was about the situation in Europe, even though not all the information was necessarily sent to Rome.

For example, Riccardi’s article in *Corriere della Sera* was published alongside photos found in the apostolic nunciature in Switzerland. They show naked Jews just before being executed, with a terrified look in their eyes. They also show German soldiers burying corpses.

“News was pouring into the Vatican, although it was not always easy to verify. It cannot be said that the pope was not aware of the massacres of the Jews, as his defenders sometimes have claimed,” Riccardi says.

“At the beginning of the war, the Holy See considered that each side had its faults -- both the Nazis and the Communists,” Valbousquet says.

“Pius XII did not want to condemn the Nazis without mentioning the Bolsheviks,” Riccardi adds.

“But he was also aware that, once the war was over, Hitler would put an end to the Church. So the pope, for instance, forced

American Catholics to support Roosevelt's aid to the Soviets," the Italian historian says.

"Looking at the archives one can see an evolution: we feel that, as the information was coming in, there was a growing awareness, even if it was slow," insists Valbousquet.

She hopes to resume her research on June 1. That's when the Vatican Apostolic Archive reopens its doors -- but for only 15 researchers.

Racism, the Church and the suffering of people of African descent

Stan Chu Ilo

June 18, 2020

Among the most important contributions of the Catholic Church in the modern era to healing the legacy of **racism** and anti-blackness were Pope John Paul II's public apologies to people of African descent.

During a visit to Cameroon in 1985 he **apologized** to blacks throughout the world for the involvement of white Christians in the slave trade.

He apologized again in 1992 at the *Door of No Return* on the Island of Goree in Senegal, from where more than 60,000 enslaved Africans were transported by sea from Africa to the Americas during the slavery period.

The Polish pope not only asked Africans for forgiveness for the crimes committed against her sons and daughters by Christians and their nations, he also emphasized that the world should never forget the "enormous suffering", the abuse of human rights and "the black pain" of what he calls the horrors and drama of slavery "by a civilization that called itself Christian".

This singular penitential act preceded John Paul's invitation to Christians and the institutional Church, for an examination of conscience and purification of memory by all Christians at the dawn of the New Millennium in his 1994 apostolic letter *Tertio millennio adveniente*.

He spoke strongly on the need for the Church to embrace the path of repentance by first becoming, "more fully conscious of the sinfulness of her children, recalling all those times in history when they departed from the spirit of Christ and his Gospel and, instead of offering to the world the witness of a life inspired by

the values of faith, indulged in ways of thinking and acting which were truly forms of counter-witness and scandal”.

Many black people throughout the world prayed then that the pope’s example would encourage all Western governments who were involved in the shameful enslavement and dehumanization of blacks, indigenous peoples and all God’s people to publicly apologize for these grave evils against God and humanity, and undertake a comprehensive step towards repairing the harm caused and its continuing consequences.

Many blacks and peoples of color in the Global South have continued to bear this burden brought upon them as a result of slavery, colonialism and racism. It is built on the neo-liberal capitalism that sustains the present iniquitous global order and the “economy that kills”, as Pope Francis consistently calls it.

Many Africans and oppressed people the world over had hoped that the global movement for justice, democracy and human rights – which led to the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dawn of a New Millennium – would lead to restorative justice for blacks.

Sadly, it did not. And it did not even usher in a new wave of apologies, following John Paul II’s example. Particularly in the United States, there has been no concerted and honest effort to confront this demon of the past.

This is why African Americans and subsequently black immigrants continue to suffer today because the United States has not embarked on a serious national process of healing and restorative justice for blacks.

Instead, blacks continue to bear the brunt of individual, institutionalized and systemic racism and discrimination, which many **US Church leaders** and theologians constantly refer to as America’s “original sin”.

Racism: a daily reality for most blacks in America and throughout the world

The current anti-racism movement – which began as a response to the painful public asphyxiation of an unarmed African American man, George Floyd – has also elicited strong condemnations and *mea culpas* from activists, as well as Church and political leaders.

Pope Francis reacted to Floyd’s killing by reminding the world “we cannot tolerate or turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life”.

But asking for forgiveness as John Paul II did or condemning the brutal killing of an African American as Francis did are not enough.

The Church can and should do more, because racism and anti-blackness is a global pandemic. It is worse than COVID-19 and has tainted human history since time immemorial.

Racism is not only a crime against humanity. It is also a crime against God.

First, the Catholic Church needs to denounce racism as a heresy. She must unhook herself from any form of political ideology or political figures, corporations and entities who through their words and actions continue to promote racist thinking, policies and rhetoric.

Those who advance the false ideology of the superiority of one race or nation over others in any shape or form should be condemned as enemies of God and enemies of life. Being pro-life for the Church should also include an anti-racism stance.

Second, the time has come for the Church to revise the Code of Canon Law and its penitential rites to integrate the penal precepts against her racist members.

There needs to be put in place some rites and rituals for purging and healing both the racist members, Church leaders and ministers who espouse racist teaching and actions in order to purge the lifeblood of the Church of this filth.

This is one concrete and sacramental way of trying to repair the harm any racist actions bring upon people and the wound it brings on the heart of our loving God, whose heart is open to all creation in its diversity and beauty.

Third, George Floyd's death has shown only one facet of the persistence of racism against black people in the United States and in the world. The public display of his brutal killing pulled the heartstrings of many women and men of goodwill.

However, the greatest and most insidious aspect of racism today, is that it is hidden from the public eye in many ways. Implicit bias is an "invisible" form of racism that many "good" people display in their attitudes towards blacks.

It masks hidden hatred with empty platitudes or sermons about the good intention of "good" people; it deploys all kinds of pretty language and social policies and educational programs that all reinforce existing structures of oppression, social hierarchies and white privilege.

And it foists a cycle of dependency upon blacks in America.

Hidden bias and ideologies of power

Hidden bias is so virulent for three reasons.

Firstly, it *pathologizes black people* – by claiming that there is something wrong with African Americans.

Secondly, it *victimizes the black victims of violence* a second time – by claiming that their crimes or behaviors contribute to the unjust treatment they receive at the hand of society, for their incarceration or the capital punishment which continues to decimate a large section of black men.

Thirdly, it *minimizes the extent and devastating impact of racism* – by pointing to successful black people and social policies put in place to help blacks.

The response in the United States to George Floyd's death has also revealed the ideologically driven nature of racialized thinking, action and hatred in the country.

One immediately sees in the face of the national and international outrage, how bias, stereotype, and internalized racism function.

The topic of racism has always been polarizing in America, the Church and elsewhere because it is tied up with power and privilege. The kinds of institutional reform, as well as personal and group conversion, required to heal America and the world of racism will demand surrendering power and privilege to the poor.

This will unsettle the balance of power and require giving those on the lower rungs of the economic and social ladder access to upward mobility.

In the United States racism, the prison-industrial complex, rising gun violence and drug use in the black neighborhoods all continue to persist because there are many white people who are benefiting from this state of affairs.

A Church where we black people can lament and be heard

The good news in all these is that George Floyd's death seems to have shaken the world from its slumber. There is a feeling of change in the air.

The Catholic Church in United States and around the world must seize this moment of grace.

The global Church and the American Church must take a stand with the poor and the downtrodden marginalized blacks in America and many other Western societies, as well as in Latin America and on the African continent.

The Church must be on the side of this movement of the Spirit in present history by being on the side of truth, justice, healing and restoration of those whose ancestry has been one long history of blood, death, destruction and tears.

In the past, the Catholic Church has often been a latecomer in some of the most important social progress made in the world for liberating Africans. The Church has often been cautious, afraid and reactionary.

For instance, the reason the Catholic Church in the United States failed African-Americans during the slave trade was because it stayed mostly neutral during the anti-slavery movement. Some Catholic religious orders even continued to hold on to the enslaved peoples it owned.

The Catholic Church failed to correctly read the signs of the times. The Roman Church was more concerned with protecting her institutional standing in a country where she was still struggling to win acceptance as a minority religious group in a society dominated by Protestantism.

However, the universal Church also had another internal problem. The slave trade was not simply an American problem, even if the United States had the highest number of African slaves in the world, which was connected to the political, social and economic convulsion that later led to the Civil War.

The heart of the internal ecclesial problem was how the Church understood social movements and calls for human rights at a time when Europe was also convulsing with nationalistic sentiments that were upending the powers of the papacy.

The internal problem of the Catholic Church during the abolitionist movement has to be seen within a larger political balancing game.

The Church sought to remain relevant in world history by not ruffling any feathers, particularly in countries like France, the United Kingdom, Spain and Portugal, while retaining its own influence in Europe and the rest of the world.

All these countries had different imperialistic and economic stakes in the slave trade, colonialism and the missionary enterprise of the Churches from the West to the rest.

The lives and future of blacks became a mere bargaining chip in the balancing of the interests that have often been referred to as the battle for “God, Glory and Gold”.

Even after Gregory XVI published *In Supremo Apostolatus* in 1839 the US bishops did not publicly and clearly fight for the abolition and emancipation of blacks.

The American Church leaders could not come to terms with whether the evils of slavery should be interpreted as a moral issue or a political problem.

Many of them saw slavery and the slave trade as a political issue and sought the path of compromise and silence, while moralizing with a view to changing the minds of the South and all pro-slavery diehards.

The Catholic Church concentrated its efforts on providing spiritual and social support to enslaved and formerly enslaved people.

But it did little to fight for the dismantling of the structures of racism that grew out of slavery. It was not the leading voice in calling for an end to lynching, promoting the Civil Rights movement or fighting for desegregation.

What is obvious in the light of recent events in the world following the death of George Floyd is that that the Church can no longer work within this status quo characterized by systemic racism, institutionalized violence, internalized racism, implicit bias, health inequity, environmental racism and the flagrant abuse of the dignity and rights of African-Americans and blacks in many parts of the world.

It is against the Gospel to make compromises with political systems, institutions or global structures that promote racism or that tolerate unjust systems and all forms of intolerance and bias against people because of who they are.

Everywhere many blacks are embracing Catholicism

However, African-Americans are embracing Catholicism today. Their numerical presence in the Church has grown from about 300,000 in 1940 to 3 million today, outnumbering one of the oldest historical black churches, the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The same exponential growth in black Catholicism is happening around the world in Africa, Latin America and among indigenous peoples in places like Brazil, Peru and Canada.

What is evident is that blacks throughout the world have embraced Christianity in large numbers, and a significant number of them have embraced Catholicism.

But one needs to ask some important and troubling questions.

What does it mean to be a black Catholic? Has belonging to the Catholic Church significantly altered the fate and fortune of blacks throughout the world?

Has the Church offered them a sacred canopy and a healthy space where they can lament their past, bemoan and show anger at their present condition and be heard? Has our Church become a champion for the emergence of a new agency to reverse the course of history?

As Matthew Cressler points out in *Authentically Black and Truly Catholic*, "Black Catholics bore the brunt of racism in their own churches."

What this means is that the Church did not protect Catholics in America or elsewhere from racism, racial profiling bias and discrimination.

This is why Pope John Paul II's calls to white people to acknowledge their collective responsibility for racism, and Pope Francis' renewed call for a rejection of this mindset of racism, are not enough.

The sad truth is that most blacks carry the wounds of racism wherever they go. In the ideological battles that characterize racial discourse in America and the rest of the world, black Catholics look to their Church.

The expect it to be a sign of contradiction and a site for hope, which can reverse the trajectory of the unacceptable history that has been the lot of blacks in world history.

The question is: Is the Catholic Church prepared to lead humanity in reimagining a better world for blacks, and all peoples, in our longing for a new heaven and a new earth?

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