

The new 'Two Orders of Christians'

Massimo Faggioli, United States

October 8, 2018

The line dividing clergy from laity has been blurred — having become a canonical distinction says little about what the two have in common and what separates them

La ligne séparant le clergé du reste est devenue floue ; même une distinction canonique dit peu de ce que les deux groupes ont en commun et ce qui les sépare.

In 1979, undercover FBI agents videotaped a U.S. congressman accepting a bribe, in which the crooked politician notoriously said, “Money talks in this business, and bullshit walks.”

En 1979 des agents du FBI ont filmé un membre du congrès acceptant un pot de vin ; il disait en particulier : « L’argent est là et les conneries vont avec ».

This prosaic image could be used to describe what is presently happening in the Catholic Church in the United States.

Cette prosaïque image décrit bien ce qui se passe dans l’Eglise américaine.

It is here that we find the epicenter of Catholicism’s current crisis, but not because clergy sex abuse has not taken place in other countries.

Rather, it is because the crisis has created a vacuum of authority in the U.S. Church. It is not a vacuum of *power*, which is still in the usual hands (at least for now), but of *authority*, which is about trust and credibility.

La crise a créé un vide d’autorité dans l’Eglise américaine, d’autorité, pas de pouvoir, c’est à dire de confiance et de crédibilité.

Nature abhors a vacuum, and this vacuum is being filled by those with an open checkbook and a very clear ideological agenda. Money is talking loud and clear.

Catholics with abundant financial resources and strong connections to the leaders of the U.S. episcopate are trying to fill the vacuum with an agenda that is officially about reform. But, in fact, it is actually corrupting the Church even more, though in a different way.

Des catholiques fortunés en lien étroit avec les chefs de l’Eglise tentent de remplir ce vide en prétextant la réforme. En réalité ils corrompent encore plus l’Eglise, bien que d’une différente manière.

Recently a self-appointed Catholic watchdog group emerged under the name “Better Church Governance.”

At a meeting on Oct. 3 at the Catholic University of America in Washington D.C., the group announced “plans to enlist the help of former F.B.I. agents to investigate the cardinals who will vote for the next pope and assess how they handled allegations of sexual abuse and whether they have remained faithful to their own vows.”

Dans une réunion tenue le 3 octobre à l'université catholique d'Amérique à Washington, un groupe qui se nomme « Pour une meilleure gouvernance de l'Eglise » a dévoilé ses plans pour obtenir l'aide d'anciens agents du FBI pour évaluer quant aux allégations d'abus sexuels et quant à leurs souhaits les cardinaux qui voteront pour le prochain pape.

In the very same week, another event — called “Authentic Reform” — also took place in Washington.

It was organized by the Napa Institute, a group of wealthy Catholics “known for its annual conferences in California wine country” and which “blends conservative theology and libertarian economics, with an emphasis on apologetics, sexual ethics and countercultural anti-secularization.”

Un autre groupe appelé “authentique réforme” mixe théologie conservatrice et économie libertaire.

There is much to say about how the leadership of the Catholic Church has become desensitized to the threat that money represents for the Christian character of the communion of the faithful.

Il y a beaucoup à dire sur l'insensibilité des leaders de l'Eglise à la menace que fait peser l'argent sur la communion de foi.

This desensitization is one of the consequences of the abandonment of a theology that takes seriously what Karl Marx called “relations of production” and has instead embraced “culture” and “identity” as an opposition to materialism.

Cette insensibilité est une des conséquences de l'abandon d'une théologie qui regardait avec sérieux ce que Marx appelait les « rapports de production ».

This post-materialistic theology of culture, focused on “values,” turned out to serve the interests of those who are in control of the “relations of production” — the influential network of wealthy Catholic philanthropists from the right, which recently has built strong ties with conservative bishops in the United States.

This is certainly not the first time that someone has tried to buy influence in the Church at a time when corruption in the hierarchy has created a vacuum of authority. In the Middle Ages, it was the aristocracy of Roman families and the royal families of the new European nations that sought to subjugate the Church by controlling the papacy. This is why the conclave was invented.

Ce n'est certainement pas la première fois que quelqu'un cherche à acheter l'influence de l'Eglise quand il y a un vide d'autorité (Cf. le Moyen-âge) ; c'est pour cela que le conclave a été inventé.

In the early modern period, it was nepotism – church officials giving positions of authority to their own relatives. Pope Innocent XII officially condemned nepotism in 1692, just a year after being elected to the papacy thanks to the Austrian Emperor's veto of Cardinal Barbarigo, who was considered an ally of France.

Innocent XII put an end to the long century (1566-1692) of the official position of cardinal nephew (“cardinal nepote”), the predecessor of what later became the position of Cardinal Secretary of State – the most important role in the central government of the Catholic Church after the pope.

In the late modern and contemporary period, attempts to control the Church and the papacy came from Catholic nations and empires in Europe.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, these nations and empires had and sometimes exercised a right of veto against a candidate in the conclave.

Jusqu'au début du XXème siècle des nations européennes sont allées parfois jusqu'à exercer un droit de véto sur tel ou tel candidat.

It was used in 1903 when Franz Joseph I of Austria blocked the candidacy of Cardinal Mariano Rampolla. A year later Pius X forbade the right of veto "under threat of the Divine judgment, and pain of excommunication *latae sententiae*."

What about today? The recent agreement between the Vatican and China certainly raises questions about the freedom of the Church in China and globally.

One has to imagine how the Chinese government would react, for example, if a cardinal from China or an Asian country that has difficult relations with Beijing were to be elected pope.

The geopolitical order of concerns for the freedom of the Church is still there, and in some sense, it is more dangerous today compared to the previous 50 years, when the threat seemed to come only from Soviet Russia and its satellites.

L'ordre géopolitique est toujours un problème pour la liberté de l'Eglise et en un sens il est plus dangereux aujourd'hui qu'il y a 50 ans...

But the much more imminent danger today comes from the influence of money. By creating a series of dossiers on the cardinals taking part in the conclave, a group like "Better Church Governance" is creating a situation – perhaps unconsciously and unknowingly – that is comparable to the "right of veto" (which carries the penalty of excommunication).

Mais la menace imminente est celle de l'argent.

Tim Busch, the Napa Institute founder and the "Authentic Reform" conference organizer, has openly endorsed the agenda of the former nuncio who tried to push Pope Francis to resign, saying: "Viganò has given us an agenda. We need to follow those leads and push that forward."

Tim Bush, le fondateur « d'authentique réforme » a clairement soutenu l'ancien nonce Viganò qui essaie de pousser le pape à la démission.

By doing so, Busch has put his institute in a similar position of the late Austrian Emperor who in 1903 also wanted to "reform" the Catholic Church.

Now, no one expects Pope Francis to excommunicate the people involved in "Better Church Governance," the Napa Institute or other self-appointed American Catholic watchdogs, especially since some U.S. bishops are very close to these groups.

But it is clear that the threat to publish privately funded investigations of cardinals who will be in the next conclave is an outside attempt to influence the election of the Bishop of Rome.

Il est clair que la menace de subventionner des investigations sur les cardinaux du prochain conclave est une tentative d'influencer la prochaine élection.

If the 2013 conclave took place under unprecedented circumstances (following the resignation of Benedict XVI), the next one could take place in a much more dangerous and uncertain situation for the freedom of the Church.

The influx of agenda-driven money has long term consequences on the trajectory of a religious community and of a faith.

Just look at the effects of money coming from Saudi Arabia and Turkey on the schools for the formation of the new generations of leaders of Islam – not just in Saudi Arabia and Turkey, but globally.

Regardez l'effet de l'argent de l'Arabie saoudite et de la Turquie sur la formation des futurs leaders de l'Islam.

This could happen also to the Church, with certain groups of American Catholics using their resources and outreach to create an ecclesial culture that is not exactly in sync with the one embodied by the current pope.

Cela peut arriver à l'Eglise.

Without ignoring the obvious differences, there are certain similarities between the new right-wing Roman Catholic institute in Italy, created under the auspices of Steve Bannon and Cardinal Raymond Burke, and the Saudi-financed madrassas that teach Wahhabism around the world.

This poses a challenge to Catholicism that is no less dangerous for the freedom of the Church than the one coming from the Chinese government or from aggressive secularist agendas.

C'est un défi pour le catholicisme qui n'est pas moins dangereux pour la liberté de l'Eglise que ceux qui pourraient venir de la Chine.

But it is more subtle than foreign State interference, presenting itself as offering theologically orthodox assistance to the Church. However, it is actually a new version of the old juridical-political principle “protection draws to it subjection” (*protectio trahit subjectionem*).

Et c'est plus subtil qu'une impression venant d'un état.

In the 12th century, the initiator of “modern” canon law, Gratian, said that there are two kinds of Christians (“duo genera Christianorum”) – the ordained and the laity. He was not referring to the ability to marry or celebrate Mass as that which separates the ordained from the laity.

Au XIIIème siècle Gratian, l'initiateur du canon modern disait qu'il y a deux sortes de chrétiens : les clercs et les autres et il ne se référait pas à la possibilité ou non de se marier ou de célébrer la messe.

Rather, he was referring to the distinction between those who can manage Church finances and resources (the ordained) and those who cannot (the laity).

Il faisait référence à ceux qui sont ou pas capables de diriger l'Eglise.

We are now in a Church that is trying to get rid, for theological reasons, of this dualistic understanding of authority and power in the Church – what Francis refers to often as “clericalism.”

Nous sommes dans une Eglise que tente de se débarrasser du conflit autorité / pouvoir que François nomme « cléricalisme ».

And in reality the line dividing the clergy from the laity has been blurred for a long time now — having become a canonical distinction says little about what the clergy and the laity have in common and what separates them.

But we are now witnessing a new type of “duo genera Christianorum” — those who have money (and can thereby influence in the Church) and those who do not.

Nous voyons maintenant deux sortes de chrétiens : ceux qui ont de l'argent et ceux qui n'en ont pas.

This is creating a new clericalism of money and even dividing the Church in one same nation (today, the United States). But it also threatens to create an even deeper division between the rich churches and the poor ones.

Un nouveau cléricalisme se crée : celui de l'argent, et il divise notre nation. Il pourrait diviser l'Eglise en deux : la riche et la pauvre.

This Catholic plutocracy is already one of the major factors in the rift between Pope Francis and some sectors of U.S. Catholicism.

Money is indeed talking in the business of Catholicism today. It is not at all clear if there is another kind of currency that can influence the Church and in a different direction.

Given all this, the canonization of Oscar Romero next Sunday could not come at a more crucial time.

Ceci étant dit la canonization d'Oscar Romero ne peut pas venir à un moment plus crucial.