

*A truth is not divine if it is without charity,  
so charity is without essence if it sacrifices truth.*  
Gregory Baum, OSA

## **Heresy and Heretics: An Evolving Understanding**

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The term *heresy* and *heretic* pull a great deal of emotional flotsam and jetsam in their wake. One immediately envisions not only ecclesiastical condemnations and formal, public excommunications but racks and wheels, stakes and fire. While one can only lament the excessive nature of the reactions which heresies engendered in the past, there is still, at the core of the notion an importance that cannot be ignored in the doing of meaningful theology, and especially considering the ecumenical thrust of communion ecclesiology which requires as thorough an understanding of the ways heresy has come to be defined and dealt with.

If reactions to heresies as understood by different Christian communities ended up being so unchristian in the past, it was because deeply variant beliefs were seen as such serious threats “that affected both spiritual and temporal life in all spheres of activity”<sup>1</sup> so as to require swift and total eradication. Furthermore, if those who accused others of heresy clearly recognized their error, so, too, it was thought, did the perpetrators. The possibility that they were acting in good faith was given little if any consideration. They were seen as willing participants in an obvious evil and, if unrepentant, deserving of the worse for their intransigence.<sup>2</sup>

Experience has taught that such forms of coercion rarely work, at least in the long run, and in fact are often counterproductive as the focus shifts from the error needing correction to the promotion of sympathy for those willing to suffer for their beliefs, erratic and bizarre as they might be. Better to deal with such issues in the forum of public discourse when the parties are willing or else follow the constraint of scripture and leave the matter to God. Anglican theologian John Macquarie holds that it is more prudent “not to try to suppress (dissident beliefs and practices) but to bring them into the open and, by free criticism, to show what is mistaken in them as well as learning something of the truth that is hidden in every error.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, the ecumenical movement has created a significant shift in how variant and opposed doctrines are viewed. Orthodox theologian Nikos Nissiotis writes

(I)t is an indubitable fact that the ethos of ecumenism is leading us—even perhaps unconsciously—to adopt an entirely new kind of openness towards other Churches; we are being forced to reinterpret our differences of belief in light of the present tendency of all separated Christians to come together.<sup>4</sup>

This principle of interpretation has been read back into history by theologians such as John Adam Mohler and Henri de Lubac who “argue that the errors of early heretics were not simply falsehoods, but partial truths...often condemned not for what they affirmed but for what they denied.”<sup>5</sup> Still, with all respect given to toleration and courtesy, unacceptable belief or practice as understood by any given faith community, whether in other denominations or one’s own, must be identified and labeled as such. The issue is considered sufficiently important enough that an ecclesiologist like Dennis Doyle devotes a specific section of his

book to the subject as does Karl Braaten.<sup>6</sup> So too has Hans Kung in one of his major works *The Church*.<sup>7</sup> While Doyle has no section heading under heresy, it is mentioned in five different places within his work.<sup>8</sup> This concern is understandable as an important part of the church's mission has been the discernment of religious truth from the vantage point of each generation in accord with the encounter of its particular experiences. Right thought and the right action which should flow from it must be distinguished from that which is in error, that which is *heresy*. Unfortunately we have not as yet coined a less emotionally charged term widely usable in ecumenical dialogues, but progress in these discourses will be ill served by any attempt to gloss over or relativize that which is contradictory to orthodoxy and orthopraxy. "*Heresy and heretical...are ancient Christian words which cannot be removed from the Christian vocabulary or indeed from Christian experience.*"<sup>9</sup> This paper attempts to discern the definition or range of definitions presently in play among leading Catholic theologians and ecumenists as to what constitutes heresy and identify examples of it in the area of communion ecclesiology. It will also, where germane, bring in the views of non-catholic thinkers as well.

*Heresy* is the theological version of *falsehood* in philosophy. Philosophy distinguishes three types of truth criteria: correspondence, coherence and pragmatic. All versions hold that truth is conveyed in propositional form—an "S is (not) P" type sentence, wherein a predicate is either affirmed or denied of a subject. The first holds that truth is the correspondence between idea and reality (otherwise put as between "mind and matter" or "thought and thing"); the second

in the logically connected interrelationship of all the propositions that comprise an explanatory schema; and the third in as much as the beneficial effects of the claim or set of claims can be evaluated as better than those resulting from other alternatives. For St. Thomas Aquinas, correspondence is the paradigmatic form of truth verification. He writes that “the first reference of being to the intellect...consists in its agreement with the intellect—called the conformity of thing and intellect.”<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately where the basic creedal tenets of the Christian faith are concerned, these are rarely ascertained through direct experience (immediate revelations and theophanies are uncommon events given to very few), but by the testimony or authority of another which, from the onset, poses a serious dilemma. If it is the word of God, then the hearer has an assurance of its truth that surpasses all other human sciences. But what if we are dealing with utterances of a false or mistaken prophet? How do we for certain know it to be the word of God (or a valid interpretation of it) if there is not a tradition in place to verify it?<sup>11</sup>

The methodology employed by mainstream Christian theologians is four-fold:

- 1) open up completely the content of dogma and to analyze it by means of dialectics;
- 2) establish a logical connection between the various dogmas and to unite them in a well-knit system;
- 3) derive new truths, called "theological conclusions" from the premises by syllogistic reasoning;
- 4) find reasons, analogies, congruous arguments for the dogmas;
- 5) but above all to show that the mysteries of faith, though beyond the reach of reason, are not contrary to its laws but can be made acceptable to our intellect.<sup>12</sup>

Religious leaders and theologians, then, can, with rare exception, employ only the other two criteria of truth verification. This is why religions, especially

those which claim revelation as their origin, usually have some kind of authority structure in place to determine true (orthodox) claims from false (heterodox) ones. Even Islamic theorists promote the need for some kind of final authority in matters as important as religion.

In the world where our existence unfolds, we have never heard of or seen an organization of administration that is left to its own devices without a supervisor being responsible for it. Human reason and intelligence cannot accept that social institutions be without a leader or ruler, and no thinker will approve of an organizational formula that lacks a responsible leader.<sup>13</sup>

Sayyid Lari is a Shiite Muslim, a branch of Islam holding that the Imam (descendent of Ali) should be the final, sinless and infallible font of authority for all the faithful. Sunni Islam employs consensus from local religious jurists, but this approach has almost from the start to the present day resulted in a number of competing theologies and schools of law with no discernable hope of ever achieving through their various governing bodies (*ulema*) any final unity.<sup>14</sup> As far as Sayyid Lari's idealized Shiite description is concerned, it appears to be an empty form still in want of content. His sinless and infallible Mahdi occultated over a millennium ago and Shiite Islam is governed in a manner not very different than its Sunni counterpart.

How Muslims deal with theological conflicts within their tradition is best left to them. Our focus is on the Christian community. Heresy does not exist in a vacuum; it presupposes an already existing orthodoxy or developing belief system

against which the heresy's representative reacts.<sup>15</sup> This can occur in a variety of ways. It can be

negative [actual denial of what Church teaches] or positive [asserts as revelation something the Church does not]; external [if publicly declared] or internal [if privately held]<sup>16</sup>; formal [deliberate and pertinacious\* rejection] or material [err in good faith].<sup>17</sup>

The focus of this paper will be primarily in heresy that is negative, external and formal. It is this form of heresy that is publicly and deliberately promoted and thereby the kind that will create difficulty within a community of believers. Before getting into that part of this study, however, it would be well to list another set of heretical "shapes and guises" as identified by Lutheran theologian Carl Braaten.

*Reductionist* heresies, which try to boil Christian faith to a single principle, like No Creeds but Christ, or Justification by faith alone, or...papal infallibility.

*Maximalistic* heresies, which make some new theory or practice (e.g., verbal inerrancy, women's ordination) a matter of *status confessionis*.

*Syncretistic* heresies as reflected in New Age Christianity.

*Displacement* heresies that exchange what is central for what is peripheral (e.g., liberation agenda at heart of Church's mission).<sup>18</sup>

*Privatization* heresy which gives priority to private personal experiences...at expense of the fullness of faith.<sup>19</sup>

The last example is one which Baum notes "The view that the message of salvation is offered to the individual has little encouragement from the Bible"<sup>20</sup>--so, one could argue, is that charge also true of the others. Still for all that, heresies have and will continue to come in many forms and guises. It is perplexing to the assurance of believers that so many, openly and seemingly devout fellow Christians should be so at odds with themselves as past and present historical

circumstances attest. How, among so many so well intended believers, could this have happened?

### Causes of heresy:

Both orthodoxy and heresy arise as a result of the human mind attempting to explain reasonably the mysteries of revelation. “(A) religion without mysteries would not be of divine origin.”<sup>21</sup> But the Christian creed was not given initially (or later for that matter) as a complete, itemized and organized list of more important to less important sets of doctrines and behavioral norms. Rather it came in an unorganized and piecemeal fashion and as St. Paul intimated (1 Cor. 13: 9-12) and Kung explicates “all formulations of belief remain imperfect, incomplete, puzzling and fragmentary.”<sup>22</sup> From its inception to the present, believers have attempted to test the belief system by bringing it as much in harmony with human reason as possible in their respective times and places. In doing so they often adopted philosophical or cultural belief systems (including at times non-Christian religious ones) from their immediate environment.

Persons who take their faith seriously are bound to critique and discuss it. Furthermore, as Rahner notes “Every Christian has to some extent or other, according to his condition in life, the duties and responsibilities of a missionary and an apostle, and it is therefore a matter of some importance whether he acquits himself of these cheerfully or in a state of fear.”<sup>23</sup> A mature faith requires critical analysis and that cannot occur in isolation. In these efforts the Holy Spirit “can breath inspiration to whomsoever so willed in the Church—even the poor, the

children, those who are ‘least in the Kingdom of God—and infuse his own impulses into the Church in ways that no one can foretell.’<sup>24</sup> But such impulses and the discussions which follow, whether motivated by the Spirit of God or consciously or unconsciously by the spirits of an age cannot all be true when they oppose one another and it is in such cases that the Church, according to its “true nature and purpose,”<sup>25</sup> must discern the veridical from the false. That process may in some cases be quite tangled and require numerous experiences and discussions over time. Rahner writes that when the church is dealing with issues or

decisions, taken by those with full competence to do so, which can and should, in their own way, effect a sort of provisional (in a positive and negative sense) resolution of conflicts, and which are binding on the individual consciousness. But this never achieves a final reduction of plural consciousness to homogeneity.<sup>26</sup>

In short, resolutions, no matter how exact and binding, are still open to further development, qualifications and application in differing historical and social circumstances.

One of the paradigm examples of this interplay from Church history is the Arian controversy as to the relationship of the Father to the Son. In classical Roman times, sons were inferior, socially and legally, to their fathers. A father had the power of life and death over family members. A son could not leave the home to begin an independent life without his father’s permission. Using this cultural model to develop an analogous understanding of the divine relationship between the Father and Son naturally lead to the Arian view of Jesus Christ (the son) being inferior to the Father, a position that was ultimately rejected at the Council of Nicea.

A more contemporary example of this kind of conflict would be emphasizing the modern virtues of broad-mindedness, tolerance and inclusivity to such an extent that “for the sake of human kindness, we become guilty of the slightest infidelity in regard to the apostolic tradition.”<sup>27</sup> Lines have to be drawn as to exactly how far such *new spirits* are to be allowed before they end up destroying church cohesion. In the end, a religious community incapable in principle of clearly and firmly doing so is doomed to theological relativism for its length of days. Braaten is only one among many Protestant theologians to lament the lack of a final authoritative source in his own religious tradition, but he goes on to state that even within those denominations wherein a clearer hierarchical structure of authority exists, the present condition of a divided Christianity causes all to be affected by an authority crisis to some degree or other.<sup>28</sup> Even churches with a clear authoritative hierarchy like the Catholic Church are not immune from problems that can arise out of that model.

A second reason for these conflicts in the Church is the Church’s sinfulness. Holy Church always confesses that it is also the sinful Church of sinners, though we cannot at this point go into the question of how the two coexist. The sinfulness (of even the hierarchy) affects the Church’s decision makers as well, so that it is liable to set its stamp to some degree at least upon their decisions, even when those decisions are in principle both correct and legitimate exercises of authority. For they may still be hasty and lacking in love, and be culpably less balanced and less nuanced than it is possible for them to be.<sup>29</sup>

While one might wish that Rahner had formulated his sentences to make clearer that the Church *qua* Church, the Bride of Christ, is not sinful, but that its members are prone to every limitation and fault that bedevil humankind and what

he writes certainly gives a welcome opening to those in separated ecclesiastical communities to engage in a more even playing field of discourse with their Roman counterparts. It is of course a criticism that cuts both ways as all members of the dialogue share in the same condition. Such awareness, however, primarily directs the ecclesiastical representatives to recognizing the limitations under which they all labor. These limitations notwithstanding, if Christianity is ever to give to the world a less fractured image of the face of Christ through his Church this crisis will require resolution. Fortunately the leadership of most mainline denominations seems to be moving toward consensus on the matter of authority and a need for resolution. Only time will tell if effective remedies have finally come to be put in place.

### Dealing with Heresy

Dissident beliefs and practices cannot be opposed unless there is in place an authoritative source to do so. “There must be...authorized offices of ministry that discern and test whether the preaching of the gospel is pure and the sacraments are administered according to the gospel.”<sup>30</sup> Braaten further adds “Clearly we are speaking here of the necessity of dogma, the authority of pure doctrine, on the one hand, and a need for a supervisory office of discernment and discipline—the office of bishop—on the other.”<sup>31</sup> The most dramatic instances of how doctrinal and theological disagreements were resolved is through the ecumenical councils when a representative body of Church bishops from different parts of the Christian world gathered together to discuss the issues and come to a consensus. The decisions were forwarded to Rome for final determination and when made, the

results were doctrinally binding. However Schillebeeckx notes that the confirmation at some later stage of some public opinion of common consensus that had developed over time is not “the sole function of the magisterium.” Rather

The teaching office of the church has a decisive function not only in the actual definition of dogma, but also in the whole development of dogma. The subject of the church’s active tradition is certainly the whole of the church’s believing community, but this according to its inner, hierarchical structure.<sup>32</sup>

Or as Braaten puts it, “The Church must not only have normative sources; it must have authoritative offices whose primary task is to teach the whole church” and a page later adds (with a bow to Kant I’m sure) the *caveat* “Orthodoxy without episcopacy is blind; episcopacy without orthodoxy is empty.”<sup>33</sup> One of the primary functions of church life is to continue the development of understanding its beliefs and keeping them in harmony as best it can. On this Rahner notes

No point of reference within history (for example the supreme leadership of the Church), using some formal system of harmonizing rules, is capable of historically conditioning finite human consciousness into a unity recognizable as such. Rules have to be general; they cannot perfectly fit into the concrete reality of each individual consciousness. What is still more important, the authority which is the point of reference for this harmonization has to be perceptible and operative at the human level, which even allowing for the assistance of the Spirit within the Church himself, means that it has to be one more particular historical reality with its own particular consciousness.<sup>34</sup>

In the process of arriving at a deeper understanding of revelation erroneous judgments can be made in the various *arenae* wherein public opinion is generated and it is the function of the hierarchy to apply correctives whenever these might occur. However these do not always call for a response as dramatic as that

of an ecumenical council or a *de fide* papal pronouncement in the Catholic Church and *mutatis mutandis* authoritative assemblies in other religious communities. The gravity of the decisions of the teaching magisterium should be commensurate with the challenges that dissident views present to good order within that body of believers. Ecumenical Councils such as Nicea were called into being because of the seriousness of the threat to the Church, Nicea specifically as a result of the challenges posed by Arius and his view that the Son was less divine than the Father.

Such animadversions do not always result in the wholesale rejection of claims made by those branded schismatics or heretics. The Council of Trent would be a case in point.

(I)n the sphere of doctrine...one must not overlook the element of positive interior reform accompanying the anti-Protestant, and especially anti-Lutheran, element...The decree on justification, which is the glory of the Council, accepts what is valid in the Reformers' position to a surprising degree.<sup>35</sup>

This ability of the Church to take from the contentious issues of the time those insights (in this case how the justification of believers impacted their salvation) that are meaningful to the further understanding of the faith did not stop at Trent in 1547 with the council's pronouncements on the matter. As late as 1997 a joint declaration of Lutheran and Roman Catholic theologians reached such depth of agreement that many concluded that one of the major causes of the schism were in fact rendered null and void although one can glean from an article written by Lutheran John Reuman on the matter, that other issues relevant to it still require discussions and agreement.<sup>36</sup> This could not have happened if either side were

so entrenched in their position as to consider any kind of compromise a sell-out to the *heresy* promoted by the other side. Steps toward convergence will not move forward, likely they will retrench, should one side or the other adopt apologetical and polemical tones, more concerned with “convert-making” than “fruitful dialogue”<sup>37</sup> and requiring submission of one side to the other rather than seeking to reach agreements that are mutually satisfying to all sides.

Something that should be of high priority to those engaged in ecumenical and ecclesiological endeavors is the history of heresies, a subject on which many notable studies have been written.

It is no accident of historiography that successful dissenting movements—first during the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and later, in civil communities during the struggles for toleration and political liberty in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—looked back to the heretics of the early Church and medieval Europe as the precursors of later ideas of freedom of conscience and civil liberty. Nor is it an accident if historical temperament that the history of heresy had only in the twentieth century managed to free itself from the confessional and ideological debates of the centuries until the nineteenth and claimed for itself a place with other kinds of study as a legitimate part of the history of both theology and society as a whole. ... If the history of heresy is no longer a particularly nasty weapon in confessional or ideological conflict, it is something much more useful—a legitimate and disciplined means of understanding the behavior and beliefs of human beings in time, or at least some of the more complex and interesting of those human beings.”<sup>38</sup>

The experiences of the past constitute a treasure trove of materials that need to be gleaned and analyzed so that the same errors, or modern variants, do not operate destructively to prevent the consummation of what Christ most fervently prayed to his Father for his Church--unity. Where philosophy can be of some use in the matter is with respect to the criteria of verification used in making determi-

nations as to the more likely conclusions theologians should reach in their discussions. Earlier it was noted that correspondence forms of verification are, with rare exceptions, unusable in matters of doctrinal determinations. Even if disputants from different camps are agreed as to the sources from which they are drawing the data for their deliberations (e.g., the texts of scripture, the recorded historical traditions, the creedal statements) there is still the matter of how these were understood and applied in the past and are to be interpreted and put to use in the present. This is where coherence and pragmatic criteria can serve their highly useful purposes.

Braaten uses a pragmatic criterion in discerning that Protestantism's lack of a final authority leaves the entire movement open to theological and ecclesiological relativism and heresy. The words of Jesus himself recommend this standard to us: "By their fruits you shall know them." (Matt. 7:16 & 20) But the same criterion has been used, if not by Braaten, certainly by other Protestants, in concluding that the present form of Roman Catholic Church administration must be rejected likewise unless more obvious correctives could be put in place that would assuage suspicions that the circumstance in the medieval Catholic church that had contributed to the two great schisms have also been effectively eliminated. One can hope that this would be affected more by convergence in the area of ecclesiology than in the other theological disciplines although whatever advances are made in agreement in one field must form an overall consistent model of understanding. This occurs on a more exact and formal level in limited arguments by the application of the rules of right reasoning. Illogical arguments are inherently

worthless in the search for truth, even when they by chance hit on it, because the reasoning process is unconvincing. Sound arguments, requiring assent, must be valid or justified.

On a more abstract level, the sum total of agreements in the divisions of theology must add up to a plausible unity when they are all taken into consideration and inter-related as a whole. Rahner has noted that we will “never (achieve) a final reduction of plural consciousness to homogeneity”<sup>39</sup> in all these fields (any more than we will ever arrive at a total philosophy or science) but this in no way absolves us of attempting to push the envelope of understanding and consensus further.

#### Heretic:

While *heresy* is a term that still serves a function within the Christian communities; *heretic*, frequently used in past official communiqués from Catholic Church authorities, especially directed toward Protestant leaders, has virtually dropped from usage in favor of “separated brethren.” Likely begun with Leo XIII encyclical *Orientalium Dignitas* and *Praeclara Gratulationis*, followed by Pius XI’s *Nostis Qua* and *Rerum Orientalium* and Pius XII’s *Orientalis Omnes* were extensions of respect for the Orthodox traditions as well as offers of dialogue and reconciliation. A similar attitude was not forthcoming from Leo or his immediate successors with regards to Protestantism, however, and though he desired eventual unity with them he looked “upon Protestantism as a destructive movement.”<sup>40</sup> Vatican caution was understandable from the fact that

Protestant Christians, however faithful they may be to their understanding of the gospel, are as a group much further removed from the Catholic Church than are Orthodox Christians...(and) are not united by ecclesiastical and sacramental structures...(nor) retained the ancient creeds with the faultless fidelity we find in the eastern traditions.<sup>41</sup>

The “evolution in ecumenical outlook with regard to Protestants begins with Pius XII” in his encyclical *Summi Pontificatus*.<sup>42</sup> It set off a trend whereby “separated brethren” replaced more pejorative terminology previously in use. Emphasis shifted from criticizing and condemning doctrines promoted by Protestants that were contrary to Catholic Church dogmas to the common “good will on the part of” Protestants which it could only be assume, in charity, they shared with Catholics.<sup>43</sup> How much this might have set a climate that fostered theological and liturgical renewals within Protestantism that has brought closer convergence with Catholicism (the common Lectionary is one example) is difficult to assess. But surely we can say that where both sides are concerned an exemplification of what Doyle, paraphrasing Mohler, described in writing that “love and humility lead to a broad and inclusive orthodoxy; egoism and pride lead to narrow confines of heresy”<sup>44</sup> has occurred-- love and humility winning the day over egoism and pride..

### Application

“Think globally, act locally” goes the slogan. To think globally means having one’s finger on the pulse of change that is taking place among Christian denominations today and being ready to contribute what one can to the positive movements within those organizations leading to the fulfillment of Christ’s prayer in

John 17:21 that “all may be one.” Exactly how that unity will occur is not easy to envision. Each of the major divisions of present day Christianity likely see it in terms of the ecclesiological model with which they are more familiar and suspicious of other alternatives presently in place. The *Catholic Church* with its clearly defined levels of authority explains how “the tradition of the papacy has been a tremendous factor for unity in Catholicism.”<sup>45</sup> But this advantage for believers within the fold is a disadvantage in reaching out to the separated in so far as it appears to them monarchical and top-heavy, anti-democratic, unbending, a reconstituted Roman Empire in ecclesiastical garb with the pope functioning as emperor, the curia as senate, and bishops and archbishops as governors, ex-arches, tetrarchs and the like. Certainly it has been viewed that way in the past with scant credit given for the effect that spontaneous impulses from below have historically played on church policies and decisions. Knowledgeable and involved Catholics know it to be an oversimplification. How much Vatican II and present day ecumenical outreach have allayed the fears of other churches that we could return to a state more reminiscent of an earlier, more unified church among Protestants and the Orthodox is not easy to assess.

Protestantism’s resistance has been highly influenced by social and political movements of the Renaissance and modern era, distrusting authority to the point that Lord Acton’s proverb “power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely” is tantamount to an article of faith and often first applied to the papacy itself. Thus the movement to decentralization, rejecting first the papacy (Anglicans) the episcopacy (Calvinists, most Lutherans) the ordained priesthood (Baptists, Con-

gregationalists, etc) and even ministers (Quakers) has resulted in a hodgepodge of churches each going their own way resulting in doctrines, creeds, confessions (in some cases non-creeds and non-confessions) and practices increasingly at variance with one another and resulting in a scandal that is at least as bad, and in some cases admitted by Protestants to be worse, than the originals ones in place in the medieval, pre-Reformation Church. In house attempts at stemming the tide through organizations like the World Council of Churches which have neither historical nor biblical bases for erecting a Protestant super-church, and in fact, according to Gregory Baum have, in its too early attempt to institutionalize its version of ecumenism rendered the movement a disservice.<sup>46</sup> Fortunately, he adds, there are other foci of ecumenism still in place whose potentials have not been fully developed.

On the positive side of Protestant ecclesiological models is the fact that lay involvement in church life at the parish level is often more widespread than is true in Catholic churches. There is less visibility as to separation of pastor and flock leading to a more palpable unity of disciple-ness within the congregation.

*The Orthodox Church* did “not experience the evolution which has affected all Christians of the West whether Roman or Reformed during the past eight centuries.”<sup>47</sup> Its ecclesiology is rooted more in its practice than in theological tracts.<sup>48</sup> Divided into fifteen autocephalous (self-governing) and four autonomous (self-ruling) Orthodox Churches around the world, they have practiced a form of Church union wherein bishops are the primary authorities and decisions are made collegially in episcopal synods and Pan Orthodox conferences. It is some-

thing they not only highly prize but which they see as evangelically rooted and not open to being sacrificed for the cause of Christian unity.

But here again we have the problem of no one within Orthodoxy who can legitimately claim on the basis of history or scripture to speak for the whole church, Orthodoxy and beyond, in matters that might affect all Christians. Furthermore, Catholics outnumber Orthodox believers by some three to one. Numerically Orthodoxy can claim no leverage over Catholic Christianity, especially given that there is not in its historical tradition anyone that can be pointed to as the final authority within its separate groups. Even Constantinople's claim to being the "ecumenical patriarchate" (a rather late development) is not agreed to among the various divisions of Orthodoxy and remains an ineffectual title. Only Rome has traditionally made this claim and only it has at least some gospel verses it can point to in justification of that claim. On this point Nissios writes

Though the dogma of the papacy could be given an ecclesiological or biblical basis, it was not a dogma that the Orthodox saw as flowing naturally from the development of either the history or the teaching of the Church; it seemed far more the result of historical events illustrating Rome's fervent desire (a desire no doubt based on the most excellent of intentions on the part of the popes and bishops of the time) to give the church an additional form of unity, a more solid and efficient basis, which they saw as being entirely and unquestionably for its good.<sup>49</sup>

Now exactly what he means by "dogma of the papacy" is unclear. There was really no *dogma* until Vatican I. There were of course many encyclicals and writing of theologians promoting various claims of papal powers and privileges, and possibly it is to these that Nissios refers. But many of these are no longer operative (as exemplified by the shortened list of longer papal titles that used to head

any pronouncements coming out of the Vatican) and most of these are not immune from being rescinded in the future. What might well aid Orthodox-Catholic ecumenical relations would be the Catholic Church more clearly defining in its ecclesiology the 'job description' of St. Peter's successor.

Unfortunately, tradition and biblical verses notwithstanding, the claims of today's papacy are still vitiated by scandals of the past that seemed to have sprouted easily in the rich soil of the authoritarianism that developed from the time of Gregory the Great through to the Renaissance popes. While great and holy men, confessors and martyrs often sat on Peter's throne, so too did opportunists and reprobates, men who used their offices for personal or family gain rather than service to their flock, men who served Mammon, not God. The problem of the time was that church found itself in a two front war—challenges from without and within. Its leaders fought running battles with secular princes who would gladly usurp church powers and resources and reduce them to instruments of state. Exacerbating the situation from without was the internal condition of its lacking checks and balances, most notably in that the laity (unless rich or powerful—and they constituted only a small minority of the faithful), were without voice or leverage. The rank and file believer had little if anything to say in Church governance. From the fall of the Roman Empire until the fifteenth century most believers were illiterate anyway, and that, one could argue, worked to the eventual long range detriment of the Church though there appears to have been little that it could do about it at the time. Ecclesiastical authorities possessed too constricted of vision to supply remedies in the hopes of revivifying the church from the

ground up. Their model was a descending vector of authority. The result unfortunately was that if popes aspired to be kings (or super-kings) as a way of dealing with the problems they faced, it is anything but surprising that the tables would eventually be turned and kings (e.g., Henry VIII) would aspire to become popes? No wonder, given its history, that the papacy is seen by many as “the chief obstacle to ecumenical unity.”<sup>50</sup>

Today at least two correctives appear to be gaining ground. One is in the clear pronouncements of Vatican II on the important place that the college of bishops, the successors of the Apostles, play in the decisions of the Church. Roman emperors might issue *fiats*, the Roman pontiff should not, or at least reserve them for extreme and obvious cases. But if it were clear in all instances that the Vicar of Christ exercised a primacy of love it would be “something far deeper, more spiritual and more charismatic than any legalistic primacy of jurisdiction.”<sup>51</sup>

The other remedy is to be found in the greater involvement of the part of the laity, the rank and file of the People of God. The Reformation was largely a movement of the laity<sup>52</sup> yet for laypersons to play a fuller role in the revivification of present day Church life they will have to reverse the conditions of “spiritual illiteracy in which most lay people live” preparing to “put themselves to school, and to accept as their share of the new reformation the enormous process of re-education for which the Church must provide (parishes becoming laypersons’ universities) and to which lay people must be willing to accept.”<sup>53</sup>

On the other end of the spectrum, in order for Christ to become more to both the Church and the world, it may well be that Peter (certainly some past papal

claims) will have to become less or be formally jettisoned altogether. The Orthodox Church questions the centralized legal system of the papacy, the Anglicans its authoritative attitude and the Protestants generally whether the papacy can function in a conciliar manner. "The only spark of hope stems from the fact that none of the spokesmen of the other Churches regard these difficulties as insuperable."<sup>54</sup> Our hope is in the many members from all sides that, in spite of the weariness over ecumenical agendas<sup>55</sup> who continue to work doggedly toward convergence.

If Protestants and Orthodox are willing to discuss changes, if they recognize the need for a clearer authority structure, might not the Catholic Church meet them halfway by promoting a change in ecclesiology that would more properly reflect the collegiality aspects spoken of in the documents of Vatican II and so dear to the Orthodox, as well as a sensitivity to cultural and geographic diversity as manifested in Protestantism, and still retain the essential core of the office of Peter's successor? How many times in history has the pope issued *ex cathedra* pronouncements? I would guess probably not more than one a century, and most of those have been in line with the conclusions of the ecumenical councils and the last of those were well over a millennia ago. Would it not be better, in consultation and agreements with Church leaders, especially the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Moscow, to establish other patriarchates throughout the world to which the Petrine succession would be rotated (eliminating the need of consistories--we might miss the drama but not cost)? National episcopal conferences would be in a better position to know the state of the Church under their charge

and to propose changes that would be in keeping with the needs in that patriarchate. Enactments should be in keeping with overall Church traditions and would not necessarily effect changes in other regions of the ecclesiastical world. Patriarchs, of course, should keep in close touch with one another and with the college of bishops under their care, especially when changes to disciplines or practices are being proposed. What will make the process work best is if the attitude in place, first and foremost, is one of love and service, and secondarily one of obedience and servitude.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Peters, ed. *Heresy and Authority in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Philadelphia Press, 1980) 2.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Kung, *The Church* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1976), 321.

<sup>3</sup> John Mcquarrie, "What Still Separates Us from the Catholic Church? An Anglican Reply" *Post-Ecumenical Christianity* ed. Hans Kung, (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970) 49.

<sup>4</sup> Nikos Nissiotis, "What Still Separates Us from the Catholic Church? An Orthodox Reply" *Post-Ecumenical Christianity* ed. Hans Kung, (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970) 22.

<sup>5</sup> Dennis M. Doyle, *Communion Ecclesiology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 21.

<sup>6</sup> Carl E. Braaten, *Mother Church: Ecclesiology and Ecumenism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998) 92-97.

<sup>7</sup> Kung (1976) 313-337.

<sup>8</sup> Doyle, *op. cit.*, 2, 21, 30-32, 35, 158.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory Baum, *OSA Progress and Perspectives: The Catholic Quest for Christian Unity* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1962) 161.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Truth/De Veritate*, trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1952, [q1, a. 1, reply] 6.

<sup>11</sup> Unlike religious organizations, philosophy, like science, has no final forum for the determination of truth other than by the inter-subjective agreement of those taken to have an adequate degree of expertise in the field. The search for philosophical or scientific truths is an ongoing open-ended process forever marked with the quality of fallibility.

<sup>12</sup> Pohle, J., "Methods of Dogmatic Theology" *Catholic Encyclopedia* <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14580a.htm> (August 30, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Sayyid Mujtaba Musavi Lari, *The Seal of the Prophet and His Message*, trans. Hamid Algar, Book II, (Baltimore, MD: Islamic Education Center, [no publication date given]) "Lesson One".

<sup>14</sup> It can be noted in passing that Shiite Islam is no more immune from the same kinds of schismatic fractures as infect the larger Sunni body as the last true Imam, the Madhi, occultated, it is believed by the Shiia, somewhere in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and supposedly makes his will known through the collective earthly decisions of the Grand Ayatollahs. Unfortunately for this theory, individual ayatollahs can as easily find themselves at loggerheads over matters of doctrine and practice as their Sunni counterparts.

<sup>15</sup> Peters, *op. cit.*,

<sup>16</sup> G. M. Vizeninovich *What is Heresy?* (Baltimore, MD: John Murphy Co. 1927) 11.

\* A term used by Robert Grosseteste as reported in Peters, *op. cit.*, 4.

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- <sup>17</sup> Vizeninovich, 13
- <sup>18</sup> Braaten, *op. cit.*, 94-5.
- <sup>19</sup> Braaten, *op. cit.*, 94-5.
- <sup>20</sup> Baum, (1962) *op. cit.*, 18.
- <sup>21</sup> Leon Cristiani, *Heresies and Heretics*. trans. Roderick Bright (New York, NY: Hawthorn Books, 1959) 11.
- <sup>22</sup> Kung (1968) *op. cit.*, 24.
- <sup>23</sup> Karl Raher, *Free Speech in the Church*. trans. not listed (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1959) 54.
- <sup>24</sup> Rahner (1959) *op. cit.*, 18.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.
- <sup>26</sup> Karl Rahner, *Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1978) 82.
- <sup>27</sup> Kung (1969) *op. cit.*, 46.
- <sup>28</sup> Braaten, *op. cit.*, 67ff.
- <sup>29</sup> Rahner (1978) 83-4.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.
- <sup>32</sup> E. Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology* trans. N. D. Smith, (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1967) 81.
- <sup>33</sup> Braaten, *op. cit.*, 96-7.
- <sup>34</sup> Rahner (1978), *op. cit.*, 82.
- <sup>35</sup> Hans Kung, *The Council, Reform and Reunion* trans. Cecily Hastings, (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1961) 78.
- <sup>36</sup> John Reuman, "Justification by faith: the Lutheran-Catholic convergence" *Christian Century*, October 22, 1997, 1.
- <sup>37</sup> Baum (1962) *op. cit.*, 183.
- <sup>38</sup> Peters, *op. cit.*, 3.
- <sup>39</sup> Karl Rahner, *Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit* (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1978) 82.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 36
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-7.
- <sup>44</sup> Doyle, *op. cit.*, 2.
- <sup>45</sup> Nissiotis, *op. cit.*, 26.
- <sup>46</sup> Baum (1970) *op. cit.*, 145.
- <sup>47</sup> Athenagoras Kokkinakis, "Does Our Church Need a New Reformation? An Orthodox Reply," *Post-Ecumenical Christianity* ed. Hans Kung, (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970) 58.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.
- <sup>49</sup> Nissiotis, *op. cit.*, 23.
- <sup>50</sup> Hans Kung, Walter Kasper, Johannes Remmers, "The Extent of Convergence" *Post-Ecumenical Christianity* ed. Hans Kung, trans. Sarah O'Brien-Twohig, (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970), 57.
- <sup>51</sup> Nissiotis, *op. cit.*, 25.
- <sup>52</sup> Stephen Neill, "Does Our Church Need a New Reformation? An Anglican Reply" *Post-Ecumenical Christianity* ed. Hans Kung, (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1970) 77.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.
- <sup>54</sup> Kung, Kasper and Remmers, *op. cit.*, 57.
- <sup>55</sup> Alister McGrath, "What Shall We Make of Ecumenism?" in *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us*, edited by John Armstrong (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 199.