

THE CATHOLOCIZING TENDENCY AS BLESSING & CURSE



1 After reading a book, I ask myself what's being left out that's particularly pertinent, and why (amnesia? ignorance? spin?). This book leaves out any treatment of "**primacy**" (Lat., "first"ness) *as a human phenomenon*. It's an anthology of in-house, churchly statements about ecclesial primacy in general (i.e., in the church, who's "first?") & the papal primacy in particular (i.e., how today should the Roman Church and the other churches construe the Roman pontiff's firstness?).

To put it concisely, human life thrives in societies in which neither order nor freedom has rhetorical advantage, and shrivels when the **freedom/order dialectic** dissolves into a monolog of either (as I put it in my 1970 dialog with Avery Dulles, hypertrophied order is as much tyranny as hypertrophied freedom is anarchy).

2 Many passages in the book expound how the Roman primacy came about, but none touches on the psychohistorical fact that the pope is the successor to the Roman **emperor** (as well as, by pious historical spinning, to Peter). When he's fully rigged out, he's layered with the pagan clothing of senator, imperator, and pontifex maximus as well as outer accoutrements of the Christian religion in general & the episcopal office in particular. This compost pile of clothing represents a continuous pagan-to-Christian leadership effort to wow the booboisie (though, when it's kept in bounds, the human need for pagentry is not to be despised).

But the retrospective continuity does not stop with the emperor, an office which came into being in the late 1st c. BC. The emperor is, as it were, sitting in the lap of the **goddess**, who can be seen on the coin (full-size image, above) dangling from my Vatican pass: the pope as "pastor aeternus," whether or not in any legitimate historical sense the lineal inheritor of Peter's seat, is psychohistorically the successor to "Roma aeterna," the patroness of the city-republic-empire (as Athena was the patronal goddess of Athens).

Yes, the goddess on my Vatican pass is a **fossil**. But she raises the question how much else about the Vatican/papacy is also fossil? Much, I would say, as is true of the British monarchy--but the difference is enormous: the latter is a romantic survival without mon-archic (Gk., only one person decides/rules/must be obeyed), primatial power.

3 For me, the issue of the papacy vis-a-vis all Christians is of far more than passing interest. Research for my Chicago PhD dissertation included intense study of the **transitional period** in early Christian leadership, what I called the "postapostolic-precatholic" time in which leaders produced various types of "control literature." While one must not commit the genetic fallacy, reading the present only in the light of the past, equally to be avoided is the telic fallacy, reading the past (e.g., the so-called primacy of Peter) only in the light of the present: past and present have equal rights to an honest and full hearing for the sake of truth emerging out of the past/present dialectic.

4 The circle of the Faith with the Lord Jesus Christ as Center has always had to mediate between the scattering (**centrifugal**-sectarian) and the gathering (**centripetal**-catholocizing) tendencies, neither in value superior to the other, both necessary. Thank God for Rome, the most important catholicizing center; and thank God for New Rome (Constantinople-Istanbul), symbolic of the Christian East's concern (against Roman primacy) that the the Eastern churches be autocephalous (Gk., [each] self-headed [by its own archbishops-patriarchs]). Thank God also for this pope's concern (especially in UT UNUM SINT, the May 25, 1995 encyclical on ecumenism) for Christian solidarity. And thank God for fresh movements of the Spirit beyond papal control--e.g., the 16th-c. Reformation and the 20th-c. Pentecostal movement. Thank God for the orderly forces defining doctrine and the disorderly forces resisting dogma and insisting on freedom.

Effort
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5 Early in the 20th century, popes began to decry the heresy of "Americanism" (along with "modernism"). America--land of visionaries (all except those who got dragged here: British prisoners [to Georgia] and African blacks), riskers, experimenters, & *haters of hierarchy (in church) & monarchy (in state: G. Washington refused kingship)*. Unlike the Roman Church with its papal primacy, no official in American government at any level has monarchic power. The president's veto power is qualified: Congress can override any veto; but the papal *ex cathedra* power is absolute, unqualified (e.g., that church can do nothing to change 1854 [the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin] or 1950 [the Assumption of the Virgin] despite there being no scriptural warrant for either dogma).

Arafat cannot put on the table his koranic claim to the whole of Palestine (the Qur'an's dogma of once-an-Islamic-land, always-an-Islamic-land): Rome's bilateral & wider ecumenical conversations cannot put on the table any papal/magisterial dogma (though submission to that body of official teaching would, for any other church, be tantamount to submission to the Roman primacy in its dogmatic formulation--an "ecumenical" pipe-dream). All Christians should give thanks for the present pope's goodwill, but he's the prisoner of the Vatican as well as the primate of the Roman Church.

A humorous note on primacy in America: A few evenings ago we had in our home for supper the dean of political science, U. of Penn. As we joined hands for grace before meal, I asked RR to lead us. The dean knew HH (in our family, I'm it: Head of the Household) but not RR (at the other end of the table, Loree is Ruler of the Roost). "Only in America" as the Carolina Israelite used to say. Egalitarian democracy. Gregory the Great's papal title "Servant of the servants" (*servus servorum Dei*) doesn't cut it: it reflects M.10.43-45, but remember how that truly great pope wielded his power!

6 Personally, I've never suffered from Rome's infallibilism. But I have suffered, & been fired more than once, for resisting Protestantism's paper pope, the allegedly infallible Bible--so I can imagine the pains caused by Rome's hypertrophied "oversight" (ἐπισκοπή *episkopé*) of true/false teaching. Neither infallibilism could, on pain of loss of identity, yield to ecumenism. "With God, all things are possible" (Mt.19.26; M.10.27) & his kingdom will come: with infallibilists some things are impossible. Cooperation, even perhaps communion, yes: unity, never "on the ground." But interchurch conversations are useful on other grounds than UT UNUM SINT's ecclesiological reading of Jn.17.21.

CONTRAST: In that encyclical's 1st ¶ we have something solid: "the Son of God...became man in order to save humanity." Then in Intro.sec.4 we have something sandy in foundation: The push for Christian unity "is a specific duty of the Bishop of Rome as the Successor of the Apostle Peter." (The earliest extant witnesses say that Peter & Paul [not Peter] founded the Roman Church.) But at least as the biggest kid on the block, the pope does have a special obligation to promote panecclesial conversations, on the imperial model: popes over bishops as were emperors over kings....I found in the book no reference to (1) the standard Protestant view that the Mt.16.18 "rock" (in the "Peter" wordplay) is not Peter but his two-verses-earlier confession; or (2) Paul's grasp, superior to Peter's, of freedom in Christ (Peter, guilty of "hypocrisy"; Gal.2.11-14). Early Christian literature, including the NT, provides insufficient material to make the claim of a Petrine (& papal) primacy plausible, though the veneration of Peter's remains (under St.Peter's), beginning at least in the early 2nd c., is a historical certainty.

7 J.A.DiNoia, OP, flatly states (162) that "division among Christians is an obstacle to evangelization." Theoretically yes, existentially no. Multicentric fissiparous Christianity spreads faster, each new church/denomination hungry for converts. Rather, churches behaving badly are obstacles to evangelization; & the bigger the bad-behaving churches the greater the obstacle. DiNoia's error arises from a misreading of John 17.21 as "visible unity" (on which see my #3060.1[1]). And not just DiNoia: it's the major logical error in UT UNUM SINT. But on the same p. we have this excellent statement from DiNoia: "the triune God invites all human persons to participate in the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and to enjoy communion with one another in them."