

[http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis\\_e\\_elliott/2008/04/benedict\\_xvi\\_the\\_shows\\_and\\_the.html](http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2008/04/benedict_xvi_the_shows_and_the.html)

## Benedict XVI: The Shows and the Rifts

**The Question:** *What can Pope Benedict XVI say and do to repair the growing rifts between the Vatican, the clergy and the laity in America?*

“Nothing” is my first thought: you don’t send the problem to fix the problem.

The problem is not the excellent scholar Joseph Ratzinger, or this good man in the papal role. The problem is the traditional autocratic papacy itself, of which he is the current embodiment.

The Roman pope is the structural descendant of the Roman emperor, whose power was absolute. Most of the Roman Church’s modern woes have this absolute power (in lesser forms distributed in the hierarchical pyramid of bishops under the pope) as a component.

In the Roman *Republic*, which was an influential model in the making of America, all free Romans (of course, not their slaves) had mouths as well as ears. In the Roman *armies*, the generals had mouths but not ears - and all on the pyramid beneath each had ears but not mouths. The republican form of government died when General Octavian proclaimed himself Caesar Augustus Imperator (Emperor) and ruled the Roman realms on the model of the Roman army: under him, the Republic had become the *Empire*. Only the Emperor had a mouth.

The sociomodel for the Roman Catholic Church was not the Roman Republic but the Roman Empire. Under the imperial papacy, only the Pope has a mouth. A sad instance is the 1968 “*Humanae Vitae*,” Paul VI’s rigid instruction for Roman Catholics’ sexual behavior – flatly rejecting the unanimous opinion of the commission he had appointed to study the subject and make recommendations to him. (He had a mouth, but no ears.) Without the wisdom of balancing principle and prudence, the traditional and the existential, the encyclical condemned all artificial conception-control (miscalled “birth control”), a stance cutting the official Church off from the sexual-societal-environmental realities of life as it was being lived and continues to be lived in the West. The authority and even dignity of Rome suffered a massive blow, and the wide-world had a laugh at a male celebrate - living out his life in a male world - instructing men and women what to do about sex.

Since the Second Vatican Council, pressure for power-sharing has increased; and even during the Council, some were using the British-historical analogy: it took the 1649 regicide to re-model British power from “empire” to “*commonwealth*.”

Americans love shows, and the papal shows will be media successes. But no matter what the Pope says or does during his few days in America, the rifts will continue to increase until the weight of Rome’s self-inflicted humiliations sinks the resistance to the emergence of a power-sharing structure in which *all Roman Catholics have both ears and mouths*.

BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT | APRIL 15, 2008; 2:34 PM ETSAVE & SHARE:        

PREVIOUS: [OBAMA: FAITH IS MIND AND HEART](#) | NEXT: [WHY THIS POPE DOESN'T CONNECT](#)

### Comments

Please report offensive comments below.

BJM:

"Why does a Protestant minister think he should comment on the Catholic Church? It is not appropriate. No one is forcing him to attend Catholic services or follow Catholic teachings."

BJM, when I see televised coverage that involves the democratically elected President of my country host a birthday party for a religious leader using my tax dollars, it becomes my business.

When I know that my tax money goes to supporting "faith-based initiatives" I have every right as a citizen to evaluate and criticize the institution that is supported, whatever the religion.

When a religious figure is allowed to address the United Nations assembly publicly, criticism and skepticism become my business.

But mostly, when real people are hurt by an institution that claims to represent the Almighty Creator of the Universe, when criminals are protected from civil trial, when medical science is distorted and misrepresented by the bishops (regarding the "HIV/AIDS-tainted condoms",) when history is against an institution regarding its blessed assurances of "salvation," often at the end of a blade or at the base of a fire, all of us have some justification for criticism.

I loved the quote from someone earlier: "Catholic and loving it." Really, that's fine, but clean up your mess when you leave.

POSTED BY: JEFF P | APRIL 22, 2008 7:28 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Professor Elliott

I am getting to like you more and more.  
See how smart I am getting because of you.

A most insightful and perceptive post, if still a bit convoluted for the hoi polloi who inhabit the universe and this site.

But it IS your obligation to speak the truth as you see it, which is more than the Pope is able to do.

POSTED BY: HENRY JAMES | APRIL 22, 2008 7:23 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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>>"Nothing" is my first thought: you don't send the problem to fix the problem. The problem is not the excellent scholar Joseph Ratzinger ... The problem is the traditional autocratic papacy itself".

Very, very good answer.

POSTED BY: STEVE B, UK | APRIL 22, 2008 10:06 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Mr. Stegman that was precisely Dr. Willis' point. It not only isn't a Democracy but it doesn't listen and apparently doesn't read or there would be no Papacy or priesthood either. AS Christians according to the Bible each of us is a priest and we need no intercessor beyond Jesus himself. We do need instructors but that isn't technically the Job of a priest and the Roman Catholic Church prior to Vatican II didn't even pretend that they were.

POSTED BY: GARYD | APRIL 20, 2008 10:10 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Despite a lot of the calumny directed at Willis Elliot, I do not believe that the man is an anti-Catholic.

He is a faithful Protestant. He has a critique of the Papacy, like most Protestants. You don't expect him to sound like Thomas Merton, do you? Come on.

As a resident of the Boston area, I can tell you this, the lack of accountability in the Roman Catholic Church has been a great source of misery. There were a lot of mouths (and not very many ears) in the archdiocese of Boston. That disaster was a consequence of a dis-empowered laity.

Willis was very careful to acknowledge that Pope Benedict is a good man. So's willis.

The shots at willis, are frankly, lame. The "sola scriptura" reference was laughable.

The papacy has its benefits and it has its downside as well.

POSTED BY: ONE OF WILLIS'S CORRESPONDENTS | APRIL 18, 2008 10:32 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Jimbo;

You can't say that kind of thing here. God is BS indeed. How dare you? You're gonna go straight to Hell saying things like that. You're just lucky that God doesn't use computers and can't read this stuff; but He still has ways of knowing who's been good and who's been bad; hasn't your pastor told you anything?? So quit the blasphemy already.

Show a little respect. Hell is not a place you'd like to spend the Hereafter in. (Trust me on this).

POSTED BY: SIMON CALLED BILLY-BOB | APRIL 18, 2008 8:22 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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You can say anything you like if you're brief saying it.  
ie. God is BS.

POSTED BY: JIMBO | APRIL 18, 2008 8:05 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Seems like short comments get in, long comments don't...thus screening out Jacob Josevs's immensely decorated inanities.

Very cunning.

POSTED BY: YOYO | APRIL 18, 2008 8:00 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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i dont like the apocalyptic tone here

but i would like the pope be more aware of the world around him , that catholics should be more open minded, about the damage he did to his own image when he retracted from the quotes / comments he made about another religion etc.

for example, on the subject of "birth control" referred in the article, the world needs fewer mouths to feed and appealing to love will only make matters worse!

POSTED BY: FULL\_OF\_WONDER | APRIL 17, 2008 11:50 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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My post was stopped too, and it was innocuous.

POSTED BY: NEAL OBSTAT | APRIL 17, 2008 9:22 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Blog screening still in place and selectively eliminating posts. This post will go through I'm betting, whereas many others have been stopped.

A technical glitch?? I'm pretty doubtful - looks more like thought shaping to me.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | APRIL 17, 2008 7:58 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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papacey or sonacey!

papacey is not to be compared to any political system ,but rather to the creed of christianity and the book of the creed of christianity .

since christianity opend the door for the sonship of god why not for the papacey ,provided that both jesus and the pope are basicly mankind who they eat food and walk in the market place???????????

what is the difference between the heirarchyism of jesus the so called son of god and the benedicto the infallible pope to mankind??????????????

jesus is the way the truth and life where this heirarchyism came from????????????????????

jesus son of marry came to mankind to proclaim the sovereignty of god allmighty over mankind no favoritism no exception no colorism no politicism no papaism no momaism no mediatorism no drama no melodrama, no sweatism!.

POSTED BY: MO | APRIL 17, 2008 2:29 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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On a historical note: from what I've read in a Catholic encyclopedia, not only were the first half-dozen or so Church Councils all convened by and presided over by Roman emperors, most were not even attended by the popes.

(Starting the timer to see how long it takes for someone to accuse me of being an anti-Catholic bigot, god-hater, or atheist.)

POSTED BY: NEAL: | APRIL 17, 2008 1:40 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dr Elliott's analysis revealed sheer brilliance in not only providing historical context to papacy, but how much we owe to people who asked similar questions including Martin Luther. And as a result we were able to rid ourselves from shackles keeping us in middle ages forever and instead able to move on into the Renaissance. Seems like there has been a lot of interest in trying to get back into the middle ages including our frat boy president who is going gaga over his hero and can't hide his sheer pleasure at meeting his idol. Separation of church and state? sorry to break your bubble and raining on your parade, but somebody has to tell the emperor he has no clothes.

POSTED BY: JACK SMITH | APRIL 16, 2008 11:47 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Mr Elliot seems to miss the point of the continuance of the tradional heirarchy of the Catholic Church. Some Catholics may leave the church from time to time but it keeps on keeping on. My only disputes with the church are (1) Why all the ponpous presentation by the successor to Peter when we are led to believe that he went about his life as the plain person he started out as. No golden mitre etc. (2) Too many of the rules of the church were made up to please the cardinals and popes and have nothing to do with faith. I don't think the papacy should go away, it should go back to being the "ROCK" that Peter was assigned by Christ to be.

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POSTED BY: GONFRMTN | APRIL 16, 2008 9:48 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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This piece is arrogant, divisive and simply not helpful. It is also just plain wrong.

You are judging an institution that has survived and grown over two thousand years and has never pretended to be a democracy .

You are comparing the church against a political system, which it clearly is not. The church is not about designing new business models that seek to incorporate a "bottom up" approach and take surveys of it's members to determine liturgical policy.

Gee, instead of asking God for guidance when we pray, why don't we just tell him how to run the universe! Better yet, let's all vote on it!

Your comment about Humanae Vitae and having a good laugh at Pope Paul VI reminds one that each generation seems to re-invent itself morally - call it "the New Morality". What we eventually and sadly learn, personally and culturally is that "the New Morality" is nothing more than the old sin.

The crux of your article is really about moral relativism vs. absolutism. As a Catholic who converted from the Protestant Church 16 years ago, I am very happy that my church reflects the faith and that the faith that it reflects is absolute!

POSTED BY: STEVE STEGMAN | APRIL 16, 2008 9:36 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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To Doubting Thomas who wrote, "A question for the members of the Roman Catholic Church: should I come back to the Church, or not? Would you want me in your congregation? How large is the circle of your faith?"

If you can believe (agree to?) all of the doctrine of the Catholic church, especially as put forth by the Catechism, then you are welcome to be a Catholic.

But if you disagree with X, Y, or Z of Mother Church'es teachings... any Protestant church down the street would be happy to have you.

POSTED BY: SLIM | APRIL 16, 2008 6:18 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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For anonymous  
You wrote:

"Daniel in the Lion's Den, since we seem to be too dumb (we lack brain power) to understand the complexity of catholicism then, would you care to enlighten us?."

I have read the first few paragraphs and the first few pages of many Catholic publications, but I am not able to follow along, because, mostly this kind of thinking is not interesting to me.

If you want to know about the complexity of Catholicism, you should consult Catholic theologians, or your Priest, but even your Priest would probably not know much of all there is to know on Catholicism and Catholic doctrine. But he could surely make better suggestions than I, on suitable reading material.

I did not particularly appreciate your snarky sarcasm. I think that you did not understand my point, and I think that you read unintended hostility into what I was saying.

That supports the Doubting Thomas's comment on the defensiveness of many Catholics.

POSTED BY: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN | APRIL 16, 2008 4:48 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Willis E. Elliott hasn't shed any new light on the subject. This is just clip and paste from Wikipedia. There's more to the Church than what you've read from "My Little Missal"

POSTED BY: PAUL LEDDY | APRIL 16, 2008 4:36 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Why does a Protestant minister think he should comment on the Catholic Church? It is not appropriate. No one is forcing him to attend Catholic services or follow Catholic teachings.

POSTED BY: BJM | APRIL 16, 2008 4:24 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Daniel in the Lion's Den, since we seem to be too dumb (we lack brain power) to understand the complexity of catholicism then, would you care to enlighten us?.

Faith cannot be necessarily explained with human logic or science, nobody has been able to do so, affirming the opposite sounds arrogant or deceiving at its worst.

POSTED BY: ANONYMOUS | APRIL 16, 2008 4:22 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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I believe that each one of us inherits our beliefs from the previous generation, and this inheritance depends upon, what I call the setting of ones birth and upbringing, which you could call culture, and upon the landscape of ones experience, which you could say is all of the things that happen to you in your life, and all the things that you encounter on life's journey, all of the physical things, that is.

And therefore, there is not one religious outlook which is pre-figured in any way as being "correct" and there is not any such valid concept as apostasy or heresy; all of these many religions just happen, and we all absorb them up, each in our own way, as we go along, and they define our own personalities, and the way we think, and we do not really have as much free-will as we might suppose, in choosing these things.

Compared to alot of religions, the Catholic Church is extremely complex. Its complexity derives from the fact that it co-exists in a modern world, in competition with modern points-of-view yet has an immense history, tracking back 2,000 years, with legalistic opinions on everything imaginable, each revised and revisited countless times, as the centuries, one by one, have elapsed. Who could possibly be expected to keep up with it all, except for religious scholars and theologians, but certainly not your average everyday guy.

So, alot of Catholics cannot even say for sure all of the things that the Roman Catholic Church stands for. Some have identified actual conflicts with their own inner beliefs, itself a modern concept, and some Catholics can identify prominent points of Catholic doctrine, which they do not, believe. In any event, the Catholic paradigm is "cradle to grave" religious supervision under the care of the clergy; but that, mostly, does not relate to the world that we live in today. For the mass of Catholics, there is no way to enforce this paradigm, and always, there are competing voices, interfering with the Catholic message. Catholics, are, therefore, "on their honor" to follow church doctrine, where ever it may lead, and not very many people are able to do that.

I know alot of Catholic people who are either estranged from their church or do not go along with it on a number of points. Yet they continue to be practicing Catholics, and attend mass regularly. Why? No logical reason; just that it is their inherited tradition, and they do not have enough time or brain power to work all this stuff out, but

just continue with the inertia of their inherited Catholicism. I can see Catholicism, which does not make much sense to me, going on this way for a very long time.

POSTED BY: DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN | APRIL 16, 2008 4:15 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Doubting Thomas, it is up to you if you want to go back to the church, you're an adult, you should know what is best for you and you don't need anybody's authorization unless you are asking all these questions for giggles. Doors are open.

The catholic church doesn't reject anybody but at the same time expects from each one of its members to follow its teachings and be committed to the faith, there is no such thing as a "free ride" here but again, is up to everyone, remember, the Lord doesn't force you either, He just simply lays out all the options in life and is you and your common sense who determine what road to take.

Finally, yes, we are defensive, what's wrong with it?, in an age where convictions are weak and in an age where anybody can discard commitments it is easy to see why we're mocked and vilified for defending our faith, we swear we know everything and we swear we're highly educated and rational but we fail to take care of our souls.

We're not beyond reproach, we accept criticism but we reject gratuitous attacks just for the sake of it. My impression is that those who seem to be against Catholicism or religion in general are individuals who are bitter about something else (or bitter with themselves) and have nothing better to do other than blaming God or religion for that matter. I am not implying you are one of them but in my own experience I have seen that. Life is tough and those who don't care of their spiritual side are most likely to go through life confused and empty. How do they fill that emptiness?: money, mindless sex, addictions of any sort, violence, loneliness, etc.

I am happy to belong to this religion, it gives the strength I need, I have witnessed the little miracles God have performed on me when I needed them the most, I have my own share of sins and yet, my faith is stronger than ever, enough to withstand temptations and stay in the right path although I admit is not easy but I always try my best.

POSTED BY: JORGE | APRIL 16, 2008 4:06 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Why are some Catholics so defensive?

Elliot gives you a perspective on the divide between Roman Catholicism and the Protestant faiths. If he agreed with you, he wouldn't be writing this - so why be offended or feel that you are attacked when he states his views?

(I specify the Roman version of Catholicism as the Eastern Orthodox Church has a different take on the authority of the pope.)

And are there not two different domain-specific worldviews here?

In one, the Church was founded by Jesus and guided by the Gospels, Acts, and the continuing influence of the Holy Spirit. A Divine worldview, if you will.

Elliot offers the Sociological worldview. The structure of the Roman Catholic Church has evolved and changed over time through human actions; humans are not divine; therefore the Church is fallible, and the history may come between believers and the Christ.

If the two views are not reconcilable, isn't Elliot's key diagnosis, that no pope can heal the rift in Christianity, correct?

I've had interesting conversations with my mother over the years. In all good conscience, I can't accept a good part of Roman Catholic doctrine. My mother also dissents in important issues. She remains a strong member of the Church; I have fallen away.

In her youth she was taught by a priest who said 'pray for us clergy, we really need it' and emphasized the fallibility of the leaders of the Church. I was taught by priests who felt it necessary to defend as truth all the hierarchy and doctrine pronounced - as well as nuns who thought they already sat at the right hand of God. She sees a Church that recognizes its limits; I see a Church that is less humble and less open to dialogue.

A question for the members of the Roman Catholic Church: should I come back to the Church, or not? Would you want me in your congregation? How large is the circle of your faith?

POSTED BY: DOUBTING THOMAS | APRIL 16, 2008 3:43 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Mr. Elliott, nobody forces you to like Catholicism, you're free to choose the religion that most accommodates you, even better, create your own (like many denominations that cater to believers who don't want to commit to anything). We Catholics are happy enough with our faith which gives strength to go through life instead of being a walking corpse. We abide to its teaching and rules because we believe in freedom with responsibilities and not to "free for all" kumbaya.

I've heard enough non-sense against my religion that yours is just another rant. Protestants seem very keen in criticizing the Catholic Church without them seeing their own shortcomings despite being so self-righteous and so inclined to tell others what to do because they feel they know everything, however, at the end they know nothing spiritually speaking.

POSTED BY: JORGE | APRIL 16, 2008 2:42 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Catholic followers and religious advocates are preparing for this week's visit from Pope Benedict XVI. He plans to arrive at Andrews Air Force Base on Tuesday and depart from John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York on Sunday evening. Although the visit is anxiously anticipated by many, the media coverage and hype has been minimal. The first time the pope visited New York, my great grandmother made my father wait amongst a mass of people lining the streets of Queens Blvd. Her eyes filled with tears as he passed by and people cheered in genuine hope. I don't think I would be far off in saying that there may be a substantial amount of people but there won't be throngs of them catching a glimpse on Queens Blvd.

The Catholic religion and institutions around the country have been suffering for several decades. Since 1965, hundreds of parishes and parochial schools around the country have been closed and consolidated. There have been a growing shortage of priests and substantial fallout of followers from multiple sex scandals. A lack of funding for aging churches and a diverse demographic that is merging people from different ethnicities are also contributing to the decline in leadership and followers. "Nearly 3 in 10 Catholics who attend Mass weekly or more said they had been personally affected by the priest shortage." The average age of priests currently active is over 60 and there is not enough recruitments to fill the replacement levels.

Although there has been drastic fallout in recent decades, some still eagerly await tomorrow's papal visit in hopes of receiving spiritual guidance and an acknowledgment from his holiness that churches and followers are going through a time of pain and uncertainty.

So what exactly has happened? Have people become so consumed with their own lives that they choose not to focus on faith? Have people evolved into more cynical beings that need absolute truth and concrete evidence to dictate how they must run their lives rather than depending on hope?

The allure of mystery and dependence of faith are on the decline yet religion and politics have found themselves together again. Recent statements by some candidates have ignited controversy and brought faith to center stage.

I am someone who is not tainted by religion in reference to controlling how I live my life and refuse to devote time to something that has so many contradictions and inconsistencies. In the case of Obama and his "clumsy" words, I believe that he may come off sounding a tad more elitist, but this is no surprise. Obama dominates over the more educated and upper class demographic and is going to find it difficult, if nominated, to identify with the



lower income voters. I don't believe he was wrong in his words, for I find myself agreeing that people do cling to religion and faith as some kind of final word or reference to life's obstacles. His remarks were merely a rational response to people's hysteria over seeking answers to what is unchangeable or inevitable in their lives.

People pray to find answers on why injustices have been served to them. People have no one/where to vent their frustrations and sufferings and look to religion as some sort of assurance or absolution to their plight. As Marx once said "Religion is a sigh of the oppressed creature." I believe this is one of the reasons why Catholicism is struggling in this century. Hopefully, as people become more educated, technology continues to advance and civilization expands, I am sure that past mysteries will become unraveled or disregarded and people will not rely on faith for answers to their everyday struggles. Obama's words were realistic and disagreeable. I believe he was right and one day everyone will see the obvious. [www.yourthreecents.com](http://www.yourthreecents.com)

POSTED BY: YOURTHREECENTS.COM | APRIL 16, 2008 2:38 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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A. E. Newman,

Yes, he was in Hitler's army. His artillery unit shot at the American airplanes attempting to liberate Dachau concentration camp.

If you look closely, you'll see "Gott Mit Uns" embroidered in gold thread on his miter.

POSTED BY: EGGY | APRIL 16, 2008 2:34 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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This response shows your a lack of knowledge of the Roman Catholic Faith, our ears and mouths are turned towards God in prayer and it is in this way in which we are heard most in the Church. The Papacy will in fact remain as it is as long as there are faithful Catholics with courage enough to defend it from those who seem to think they have any say in the matter. If you do not agree with Catholicism that is fine, you may do as you choose, but this is OUR FAITH. A Faith we are proud to profess. All of this under the Chair of Peter for it is upon him Christ chose to build His Church... and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it! May the Lord preserve him, and give him life, and make him blessed upon the earth, and deliver him not up to the will of his enemies.

POSTED BY: JACOB | APRIL 16, 2008 1:45 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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EBBOLLES:

the encyclical did not prohibit Catholic's control of conception - it only restated the fact that Catholics are not to use ARTIFICIAL contraception. Catholics are welcome to use Natural Family Planning to determine when they are fertile and therefore avoid pregnancy by avoiding sex on those days. It is not only a simple method that is 99% effective, it can and is learned by people everywhere, even illiterates, and it is FREE.

POSTED BY: MARI | APRIL 16, 2008 1:22 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Thank you, ebolles. It's not just birth control that's at issue. It's the concept of "head of the house," which ignores that women have historically headed homes when their partners have abandoned them or neglected their duties; it's the refusal to accept that God made man and woman to work as partners; neither can accomplish God's aim without the other. If you will ignore us as equals, we will ignore you. It's that simple. I, too, left this church when at 14 the nuns instructed us that the boys in our catechism class were being led to be priests; we girls should do our best to learn to launder the altar cloths! Simplistic, I know. But I am in my heart always a Catholic, because the church's good works cannot be denied, nor can its legitimacy as "the rock," Jesus's anointment as his appointed church. What man and men have done to it in the name of power cannot erase that pure beginning.

POSTED BY: WOMAN AT LARGE | APRIL 16, 2008 12:49 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Wasn't this pope a Nazi?

POSTED BY: A.E. NEWMAN | APRIL 16, 2008 12:40 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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As I read Dr. Elliot's comments I kept thinking about the letters "WWJD" ...which stand for "what would Jesus do". It seems that Dr. Elliot is implying that the papacy will be forced to change because its spiritual direction is dictatorial and unwilling to adjust to as he says, "societal-environmental realities of life as it continues to be lived in the West". So WWJD if He were incarnated today? Would he tell the apostles " I guess My Word isn't going over to well with Western Society so I better alter it? Wasn't Jesus crucified because the powers that be at that time didn't want to change their ways? Did Jesus, knowing He was to die for His Word, tell the apostles that He would form a committee and change His Word based on their input? Jesus was laughed at and scorned for His Word and he told the apostles that they would also receive the same treatment for preaching His Word. So, it is no surprise that, in our times, just as Jesus, Himself, predicted, the spiritual direction of the papacy, the direct descendant of the apostles, would be subjected to, as Dr. Elliot says, "a world-wide laugh". When Jesus was on earth He didn't provide spiritual direction based on "committees"...He was the authority, because He is the Word. In turn, He passed this authority to man when He Himself established the papacy. Thus, in conclusion, regarding accepting the autocratic authority of the the papacy, WWJD?...I believe He would accept it because that was His will.

POSTED BY: STEVE | APRIL 16, 2008 12:35 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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I assume you mean, when you say "all Roman Catholics," you mean women as well as men. Because I don't see the papacy as the problem -- with a few exceptions, the seat has been occupied by educated, moral men -- I see the whole patriarchal structure as the problem. The men who rule the church live, by the nature of the church, one-sided lives. When the church -- and the world -- finally accept that women have minds, souls, wants and desires exactly as men do, and that women can talk to God as well as men can, then we will be on the way to establishing a real church. And a real world, for that matter: this is not a problem confined to religion.

POSTED BY: EMILY LOVE | APRIL 16, 2008 12:35 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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I assume you mean, when you say "all Roman Catholics," you mean women as well as men. Because I don't see the papacy as the problem -- with a few exceptions, the seat has been occupied by educated, moral men -- I see the whole patriarchal structure as the problem. When the world finally accepts that women have minds, souls, wants and desires exactly as men do, and that women can talk to God as well as men can, then we will be on the way to establishing a real church. And a real world, for that matter: this is not a problem confined to religion.

POSTED BY: EMILY LOVE | APRIL 16, 2008 12:32 PM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Oh, and nice beret.

POSTED BY: PAPIST | APRIL 16, 2008 11:54 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Yawn. Nothing, literally nothing unites Protestants more than contempt for the Catholic Church and its hierarchy. Wake me up when Protestants tell us something we Catholics haven't heard and addressed since Luther.

POSTED BY: PAPIST | APRIL 16, 2008 11:51 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Far too simplistic. Infallibility is a very limited concept. The pope is w/out resources to enforce his views and modern history shows little effort to be an enforcer rather than a persuader. You should print articles with more substance.

POSTED BY: JIM HAYES | APRIL 16, 2008 11:35 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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“What can Pope Benedict XVI say and do to repair the growing rifts between the Vatican, the clergy and the laity in America?”

“Nothing” is my first thought.

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To this statement I can only agree. There is nothing that the Pope can do without the aid of the Holy Spirit.

However, I don't think this "rift" is as deep as some suggest. The "rift" is typical amongst people of Dr. Elliott's age. There is certainly a "rift" btw the Pope and some priests, but many priests give him their support.

Nothing will heal this rift outside of prayer and repentance.

POSTED BY: GE | APRIL 16, 2008 11:24 AM  
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Reverend Willis, I must compliment you on a very astute observation, "only the pope has a mouth."

In order for others to gain mouths it was necessary for them to bypass a certain bit of scripture. In so doing they bypassed still another compelling piece of Christian history, that the Christian faith was already in place at the time the Roman Emperor made it the official religion.

Was Christianity as we know it or anything close there at that time is a difficult to answer question. The Roman Emperor created a "stone wall" beyond which we cannot go with any degree of certainty. When those with "the only mouth" also have "the only pen" that which is written will most likely be a bit warped. Let us thank God for the Internet the first ever universal pen.

POSTED BY: BGONE | APRIL 16, 2008 11:24 AM  
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What Dr. Elliott--and many others don't understand, is that the church is not a democracy.

POSTED BY: EBB | APRIL 16, 2008 11:07 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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The problems go deeper than the papacy. The problems are the flaws and errors in the foundations of Catholicism (and Christianity) itself:

To wit:

A synopsis of the last 200 years of studies of said religion for those who have not been paying attention:

Jesus was an illiterate Jewish peasant/carpenter/ simple preacher man who suffered from hallucinations and who has been characterized anywhere from the Messiah from Nazareth to a mythical character from mythical

Nazareth to a mamzer from Nazareth (Professor Bruce Chilton, in his book Rabbi Jesus). Analyses of Jesus' life by many contemporary NT scholars (e.g. Professors Crossan, Borg and Fredriksen, On Faith panelists) via the NT and related documents have concluded that only about 30% of Jesus' sayings and ways noted in the NT were authentic. The rest being embellishments (e.g. miracles)/hallucinations made/had by the NT authors to impress various Christian, Jewish and Pagan sects.

The 30% of the NT that is "authentic Jesus" like everything in life was borrowed/plagiarized and/or improved from those who came before. In Jesus' case, it was the ways and sayings of the Babylonians, Greeks, Persians, Egyptians, Hittites, Canaanites, OT, John the Baptizer and possibly the ways and sayings of traveling Greek Cynics. [earlychristianwritings.com/theories.html](http://earlychristianwritings.com/theories.html)

For added "pizzazz", Catholic/Christian theologians divided god the singularity into three persons and invented atonement as an added guilt trip for the "pew people" to go along with this trinity of overseers. By doing so, they made god the padre into god the "filicider".

Luther, Calvin, Smith, Henry VIII, Wesley et al, founders of Christian-based religions, also suffered from the belief in/hallucinations of "pretty wingie thingie" visits and "prophecies" for profits analogous to the myths of Catholicism (resurrections, apparitions, ascensions and immaculate conceptions).

POSTED BY: CONCERNED THE CHRISTIAN NOW LIBERATED | APRIL 16, 2008 10:09 AM  
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"Submission to the Pope is the core dogma and the only absolutely essential teaching of the Roman church"

This is false, but it's what the church would like you to believe. Power to a few, directly in opposition to what Jesus taught

POSTED BY: TREY | APRIL 16, 2008 10:02 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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As an ex-Catholic who left the Church because of the 1968 encyclical—it gutted the Church's teaching authority—I'm sympathetic to Dr. Elliott's complaint, but I didn't reject the encyclical's authority because of "the sexual-societal-environmental realities of life as it was being lived and continues to be lived in the West." At the time I was living in a small African village and it was plain to me that at least some of the village women did not want endless pregnancies and some of the men were frustrated to by it too. Who was the pope to say these people must not be allowed to take some control over their lives?

POSTED BY: EBBOLLES | APRIL 16, 2008 9:59 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Submission to the Pope is the core dogma and the only absolutely essential teaching of the Roman church. It is this peculiar claim which caused the largest schisms in the Church--that between East and West and that between Rome and Reformers. The Lutheran reformers appealed repeatedly to the historical church councils, church fathers and pre-absolutist Popes to support their positions. Rome could not yield without losing power, no matter how correct their opponents were, and power was what Papacy is all about. What Roman Catholic on the street today would defend their church's selling tickets out of purgatory as a fund raising campaign? Yet, that is exactly what the Roman church did, and has still not renounced because they can't admit they were wrong without eroding their claims of divine authority. By the grace of God, the Roman church is and has always been filled with Christians in spite of the absolutist Papacy--not because of it.

POSTED BY: DAVID | APRIL 16, 2008 9:55 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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POSTED BY: DAVID | APRIL 16, 2008 9:52 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Should we really choose "the sexual-societal-environmental realities of life as it was being lived and continues to be lived in the West" in preference to the Gospel? Perhaps if Dr. Elliot took the trouble of actually reading *Humanae Vitae* he would see that Paul VI actually had a pretty good take on "the sexual-societal-environmental realities of life" and chose to speak the prophetic truth rather than be swayed by the opinions of the majority of his commission. 1 Corinthians 14:8: For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? We can be grateful that Benedict XVI, following the footsteps of his predecessors, sounds a clear signal.

POSTED BY: LESZX | APRIL 16, 2008 9:37 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dave, you're full of horse feathers. Dr. Elliot is correct in his evaluation of the de facto model of the papacy's hierarchical governing organization.

The fact of the matter is that patriarchic, absolute authoritarianism of a God-given mandate bestowed by Jesus upon his followers, meshed almost perfectly with the absolute authoritarianism of the Roman Emperor. The role of the emperor was transferred, assumed, incorporated, whatever, into the role of the pope.

It doesn't matter if Dr. Elliot isn't catholic; I still am (at the moment). I find his analysis to be spot on. Sometimes you can see more clearly the big picture when you are standing outside it.

POSTED BY: MICHAEL D. HOUST | APRIL 16, 2008 9:26 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Woefully uninformed, but typical of some non-Catholics who feel they know Catholicism better than those of us who live it everyday.

POSTED BY: KB | APRIL 16, 2008 9:17 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Catholic and loving it. I suggest you get a life and move on to more important things.

POSTED BY: FRANCIS | APRIL 16, 2008 9:10 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Amen & Amen Dr. Elliott!!! You are right on the money!

POSTED BY: HUNTER | APRIL 16, 2008 9:09 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Dr. Elliot's discussion is fatally flawed. His premise represents an elementary error.

Dr. Elliot writes: "The Roman Pope is the structural descendant of the Roman Emperor ...."

Wrong! (And, as a "sola scriptura" Baptist minister, he should know better).

A review of Mathew 16: 17-19; John 21:15-17; Mathew 10:2; Acts 1:15; Mark 3:16; others ..... would be helpful.

As importantly, a review of the Early Church Fathers would correct the Doctor as to where the Catholic church, and the Magisterium, gets its structure.

POSTED BY: DAVE | APRIL 16, 2008 8:44 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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Typical - a non-catholic telling Catholics what they should do and believe. Do us a favor and stick to your own denomination.

POSTED BY: CATHOLIC MEMBER | APRIL 16, 2008 8:42 AM  
[REPORT OFFENSIVE COMMENT](#)

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