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THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: History, Organization, Theology

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Abstract

In this chapter we propose a three-dimensional analysis – historical, organizational and theological – of the globalization of the Catholic Church in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. These three dimensions have evolved together to transform it from a mainly European-based organization into a global actor. The historical dimension concerns macro-historical changes like secularisation in Europe, the loss of temporal power of the popes, and global demographic trends. Continents like Latin America and Africa, which were once lands of evangelisation for European missionaries, now represent the bulk of Catholicity and are themselves promoting evangelisation elsewhere.

The organizational dimension includes major structural changes. Five of them stand out: the centralization of the election of bishops in the hands of the pope; a shift in the composition of the college of cardinals that elects the pope: this college, which used to be mainly European and particularly Italian, is now genuinely global; the organization of a diplomatic corps at the Holy See that helps to ensure political relations with a growing number of countries worldwide and representation at the UNO; the establishment of a wide network of charities and other Catholic NGOs that provide social assistance to people in need but also act as political and diplomatic actors and as a powerful network of information; relationships with the global media, a crucial point for the public image of the Church, which is high on Pope Francis' agenda.

The theological level focuses on the Catholic doctrine as it appears in papal teachings. This teaching provides contents, guidelines and inspiration for the activities of Catholic communities and organizations worldwide. We will review five recurrent topics: human rights; family, sexuality and bioethics; migrants and refugees; economics; environment and climate change. Taken together, these issues contribute to forging a global Catholic teaching. For better or worse, this participation in the public sphere has helped greatly to increase the visibility of the Church and its influence in contemporary social and political processes.

The next challenges for the global Church include evangelisation and pastoral care, two issues at the top of Pope Francis' agenda. Indeed, the Church is losing followers to the profit of Protestant and Pentecostal Churches, particularly in Africa and Latin America. Another crucial point concerns internal ideological divisions. The post-conciliar fracture between liberal and conservative Catholics is still not reconciled and may endanger the unity of the Church. The upsurge of new grassroots Catholic movements, from the loosely organized Charismatics to the strictly disciplined Neocatechumenal Way, also raises questions about the liturgical and doctrinal consistency of the various branches of the Church.

On the external front, inter-religious relations represent a crucial challenge for the twenty-first century. In a time when religion has become a major variable in international relations, the establishment of peaceful collaborations between the Catholic Church and other faiths, especially Islam, Judaism and Orthodox Christianity, seems particularly doubtful and delicate.

Introduction

In this chapter we propose an analysis at three levels – historical, organizational and theological – of the globalization of the Catholic Church in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. These three dimensions have evolved together to transform it from a mainly European-based organization into a global actor. In a sense, the Church has always aspired to a universal mission: the evangelisation of all mankind (originally, ‘catholic’ meant ‘universal’). Indeed, in the seventeenth century the Jesuits were already active on a global scale (Clossey 2008). But the rest of the Church was deeply involved in European politics. Until the end of the nineteenth century most of its followers were European, and so was its hierarchy. But the sweeping events which shaped modernity profoundly remoulded its structure. What had initially seemed a dramatic shrinking of its means and scope triggered important changes which, in the end, turned into unexpected opportunities to expand its influence worldwide.

Historical dimensions

Historical dimensions concern macro-historical changes like secularisation in Europe, the loss of temporal power of the popes, and global demographic trends. These processes have evolved independently and often against the wishes of the Church, which has tried hard to resist them. Until the French Revolution and despite the loss of religious monopoly in Europe after the Reformation, the Catholic Church still acted within the frame of the alliance of secular and religious powers in the government of societies. Centuries of fierce conflict between the popes and the Christian emperors over matters of jurisdiction and legitimacy did not shake, but rather confirmed, the general idea that secular powers were of divine origin and therefore needed approval by the religious authority. Contrary to this political theology, the French revolutionaries established the sovereign power of the people. In a wave of violent reaction against the former establishment, they persecuted the clergy, confiscated ecclesiastical properties and brought the French Christian monarchy to an abrupt end. The subsequent Napoleonic reforms spread new models and theories of secularised state power throughout Europe. In particular, the building of the modern Italian state led to a direct confrontation with the popes, who still governed over the Papal states in Central Italy. The Italian troops conquered the city of Rome in 1870, thereby ending the temporal power of the papacy and, incidentally, interrupting the First Vatican Council where Catholic bishops were closing ranks around the Pope and proclaiming his infallibility. This was a traumatic event for the Church, which until the 1950s perpetuated an official policy of resistance, hostility and de-legitimation of modern secular powers. And yet, as Casanova (1997) has argued, the loss of temporal power paved the way for a new universal role of the popes as policy makers and opinion leaders, which we will examine later.

Demographic trends generated other macro-historical processes which have shaped the contemporary Church. In the second half of the nineteenth century, mass migrations of European Catholics to America and Australia began to shift the global distribution of believers. The Vatican had to devise new programs to provide religious and material aid to

these migrants (Turina 2015). In the long run, this proved to be a successful policy. In the USA, traditionally a Protestant country, about 23% of the population is now Catholic (Center for the Study of Global Christianity 2013, p. 62). European mass migrations were followed by the migration of Latinos – most of them Catholic – from Mexico and Southern America. While future trends are open to change, the foundation of a distinct American Catholicism, which has had a profound impact both on American society and on the Church itself, is mostly the work of migrants.

Besides migrations, sheer demographic growth has a strong impact on religions, and it is rapidly changing the face of the Church. The future growth of Catholicism largely depends on Catholic communities in the global South (Jenkins 2002). Currently about 59% of all Catholics live in Latin America and Africa (Secretaria status ecclesiae 2016, p. 43). Those continents, which were once lands of evangelisation for European missionaries, now represent the bulk of Catholicity and are themselves promoting evangelisation elsewhere, including Europe, where it is increasingly common to see African priests or Indian nuns.

Organizational dimensions

While these processes are part of great historical changes and have evolved mostly independently of the Church itself, which could do little to stop or manage them, at the organizational level we identify the structural adjustments of the Church in response to these trends. We will focus on five of these changes: the election of bishops; the College of Cardinals; the diplomacy of the Holy See; the network of Catholic NGOs; and the uses of media.

The appointment of bishops. One of the benefits accruing from the loss of temporal power and the separation of Church and State has been the centralization of the appointment of bishops in the hands of the Pope (Costigan 1966). After centuries of struggles between Rome and the secular powers, in the twentieth century the Holy See gained almost complete control over the appointment of bishops worldwide, the notable exception being currently the Popular Republic of China. In the course of this process, the bishops were freed from the grip of local powers and brought under Rome's direct control. Once mainly a local élite, Catholic bishops are now more like a corps of officials with a relatively homogeneous education who act in accordance with, and under the surveillance of, the pope. This centralization has allowed for a global political agenda orchestrated by the Holy See, as in the case of the campaign against abortion and reproductive rights under the pontificate of John-Paul II.

The college of cardinals. Until the Second Vatican Council, the college of cardinals that elects the pope used to be mainly European and particularly Italian; now it is genuinely global and increasingly so. European cardinals are 42% of the electors, while cardinals from Latin America, Asia and Africa, altogether represent 44% of the electorate and their share is likely to increase in the coming years (data from the website www.vatican.va, last update 28 June 2018; cardinals can elect the pope until the age of eighty). Churches from the global South are gaining weight within the universal Church and they have begun to shift from the periphery to the centre of the organization. They increasingly provide institutional leaders – and more recently Francis himself, the first pope from the Southern hemisphere.

The diplomacy of the Holy See. Although the Vatican City is the smallest country in the world, it is the only existing case of a religious organization that can act as a state. Diplomatic relations are key to its politics. The Vatican currently entertains bilateral relations with 180 states and holds the status of permanent observer at the UNO. Its delegates participate on a regular basis in the assemblies of the UN and of its organisms like UNESCO, ILO, WHO and FAO. It is notably a member of the Executive Committee of the UNHCR, a member of the OSCE and maintains formal relations with the EU.

The Holy See generally enjoys a good reputation for its endorsement of peace, human rights, religious freedom and the rights of migrants and refugees. However, its engagement does not go without criticisms. Its opposition to abortion, reproductive rights and same-sex marriage has led to tensions and ambiguities when women's rights or the rights of homosexual people are at stake. Nevertheless, the Holy See has acted consistently in favour of debt relief for poor countries, against the Iraq War in 2003 and for the rights of Christian minorities in the Middle East (Shelledy 2004). It has sustained campaigns for universal access to water, food and medicine, and it has upheld the cause of poor peasants and indigenous people against land exploitation in Latin America and the Philippines. The Popes' public statements deal mostly with social, spiritual and moral issues, but they can have significant political meaning. This has been notably the case with John XXIII during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, while the diplomacy and travels to Poland of John-Paul II are credited with having favoured the fall of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe (Linden 2009).

Catholic NGOs. While official diplomacy is centralized in Rome, a large number of faith-based organizations around the world assume the task of putting into practice the Catholic teaching in a variety of social, political and local arenas. This task, which used to be undertaken mainly by religious congregations and societies of apostolic life, since Vatican II has been increasingly in the hands of lay Catholics. The galaxy of Catholic NGOs covers a wide range of ideological positions and material tasks, from assistance to the poor to intergovernmental lobbying (Trigeaud 2014). Part of this network is coordinated by the Holy See through its departments; but generally these NGOs enjoy a great deal of leeway or they work mainly with the local clergy. In addition to their material work they can act as a powerful network of information, especially in the case of conflicts, humanitarian emergencies, or in contexts where the official Church is not allowed to move freely. For example, in the 1970s when Vatican delegates had little chance of passing beyond the Iron Curtain, Caritas Internationalis and other NGOs continued to bring material and financial help, to maintain informal contacts between Eastern and Western Europe and to provide information on the real condition of Catholics under Communist regimes (Della Cava 1997). The overall influence of this network has not yet been fully assessed, but it seems to be considerable. Some of these organizations have gained an international reputation, like the Community of Sant'Egidio, which works with the homeless in Rome and at the same time "has developed the world's probably best expertise on the Balkans and in certain African conflicts (Burundi, Congo)" (Matlary 2001, p. 93). Catholic activists are also at the origin of fair trade organisations like Max Havelaar (Landron 2008, p. 406-410).

Uses of the media. Since the 1920s the popes have been aware of the ubiquitous role of mass-media in contemporary society and of their influence on the public. Their response has been twofold: on one hand, they have made use of the new media to spread their own message;

on the other hand, they have warned against the danger that they represent for the public. Thus, in 1931 Pius XI broadcasted the first radio discourse by a pope and in 1936 he issued an encyclical (*Vigilanti cura*) in support of Catholic campaigns of moral censure of films, including the boycott of those that fell below moral standards. In 1963 Vatican II confirmed in its decree *Inter mirifica* this double concern: to make good use of the mass-media for Catholic purposes and to keep watch on possible misuses. At the turn of the twenty-first century the Church has adopted the Internet as a new means of publicity and evangelization (see the 2002 document *The Church and Internet*, by the Pontifical Council for Social Communications). Gauthier and Uhl (2012, p. 59) have shown that the Holy See's official website "emphasises a personal rapport with the Vatican, namely through the living symbol of the Pope".

In recent decades the popes, beginning with John-Paul II, have indeed become media celebrities and the media have been eager to cover some news stories concerning the Church. While this has proved successful on the occasion of events like papal journeys, the election of a new pope or the 2000 Jubilee in Rome, media attention has backlashed in the case of scandals involving the clergy and the Roman curia. As Alain Woodrow has contended, "the Catholic Church was quick to grasp the way it could utilise the media for its own ends, but much less willing to accept the legitimate demands made upon it by those same media" (Woodrow 2003, p. 209). The pontificate of Benedict XVI, racked by frequent scandals, has shown how much relations with the media have become a priority for the government of the Church. In a "commitment to reorganize" the Holy See's information system, in 2015 Pope Francis established the Secretariat for Communication, tasked with coordinating the Vatican media and maintaining relations with external media.

The theological level

These structural adjustments have been accompanied by doctrinal changes. Here we focus on the Catholic doctrine as it appears in papal teachings. This teaching provides contents, guidelines and inspiration for the activities of Catholic communities and organizations worldwide. We will review five recurrent topics in the magisterium of the popes since Vatican II: human rights; family, sexuality and bioethics; migrants and refugees; economics; environment and climate change. Taken together, these issues contribute to forging a global Catholic teaching. It is global because it deals with matters of international significance and also because it is intended to target not only Catholic believers but all mankind. Each of these issues has inspired campaigns and commitment, and it has received considerable attention from the media, scholars and the public opinion, sparking debates and sometimes provoking vehement criticism. For better or worse, this participation in the public sphere has helped greatly to increase the visibility of the Church and its influence in contemporary social and political processes.

Human rights. The Church's reception of human rights has had a troubled history (Menozzi 2012). Initially associated with the *Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen* of the French Revolution, the hierarchy considered such rights as a modern error. In the field of conscience, everyone must follow the truth, so that there is no freedom to hold or disseminate false (i.e. not Catholic) opinions. Well into the twentieth century, the Church was

still opting for an official religion enforced by secular powers. Vatican II helped to advance the debate, accepting the principles of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, together with the separation of Church and State. John XXIII's 1963 encyclical on peace, *Pacem in terris*, was the first to uphold the discourse of human rights. In the 1980s, John-Paul II grafted the doctrine of human rights on his own theology which put the human person at the centre of the Church's advocacy. He openly endorsed the work of the United Nations and was viewed by many as a champion of human rights who spoke on behalf of all humanity. Since then, the issue of human rights has become commonplace in the magisterium of Church leaders and in the campaigns of many Catholic NGOs.

This attitude is not completely consistent, however. Tensions frequently arise on the subject of women's rights, reproductive rights, or the rights of homosexual people, with liberal and radical movements routinely accusing the Church of sustaining and perpetuating a patriarchal and heteronormative order (Chong and Troy 2011). The Church itself is not a democratic society in any case, and its vision of human dignity stems from a conception of men and women as created by God which is not easily reconcilable with more secular approaches. Nonetheless, in the second half of the twentieth century the Catholic thought has turned towards a positive assessment of democracy, peace and human rights. According to Huntington (1991) and Casanova (1996), in the 1980s and 1990s the Church became a decisive actor in the transitions from dictatorial to democratic regimes in many countries throughout the world.

Migrants and refugees. The concern of the Church for the fate of migrants was initially determined by the vicissitudes of Catholic migrants. In the 1940s Pius XII spoke in favour of the free circulation of Catholic believers worldwide and against discrimination in their new lands of settlement. In the aftermath of World War II he publicly embraced the cause of war prisoners and refugees independently of their religion, advocating a rapid and peaceful return of all people to their homes. In 1951, the Holy See was among the twenty-six states that promulgated and signed the Geneva Convention on the status of refugees. Vatican II further developed this interest. In the dogmatic constitution *Lumen Gentium*, the Church identifies itself as "the wandering people of God" whose members live "still as pilgrims in a strange land". Concern for mobile and displaced people has gone hand in hand with a self-conscience of the Church as a supranational entity, not bound to the Westphalian system of frontiers, territorial jurisdiction and national citizenship (Turina 2015). Since Paul VI, the Popes have been travellers on all continents, and papal journeys have become regular media events. John-Paul II was an indefatigable traveller. Visits provided him with opportunities to pursue political aims or to settle conflicts with local churches. In the course of his sojourn he met political leaders and he would personally follow diplomatic relations between the Holy See and secular governments. Modern transportation technology enabled him to combine a solid central power with ceaseless mobility. It therefore comes as no surprise that he was an advocate of human mobility. Lately Pope Francis has been a vocal defender of the rights of migrants. On his first papal trip he visited the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa—a gateway to Europe for thousands of migrants and asylum-seekers from North Africa. In a sermon on Lampedusa he remembered the deaths at sea of hundreds of them and criticized the indifference of host countries.

Sexuality and bioethics. Breaking a longstanding tradition of reticence on sexual matters, in his 1930 encyclical *Casti connubii* Pius XI made the first public statement on eugenics and birth control, basically condemning the intervention of states (forced sterilizations, certificates of eugenic marriage) as well as attempts by the couples themselves to limit the number of their children. *Casti connubii* marked the beginning of an ongoing struggle among the Church, secular powers, public opinion and the medical world around questions of sexuality, human life and what will be later known as bioethics (Turina 2013a). The official doctrine on this matter has not been immutable, however. In 1951 Pius XII permitted the use of natural means of fertility control based on estimates of the ovulation cycle. But in 1968, when considerable numbers of lay Catholics – especially in Western democracies – were persuaded that the doctrine was about to be further liberalized, Paul VI reaffirmed the ban on the pill as well as any other contraceptive method except the “natural” ones. His encyclical *Humanae vitae* was a watershed in the contemporary history of the Church (Massa 2010). It widened the gap between the laity and the hierarchy that Vatican II had begun to close and it exacerbated the culture war between liberal and conservative Catholics. The Holy See has often tried to influence, through its political and diplomatic forces, liberal secular legislations concerning abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage and the diffusion of gender theory (Dobbelaere *et al.* 2015). Indeed, this may be the only domain where tensions between the Church and the modern world, which have been largely resolved in other fields, are still strong. The Holy See has shown a propensity to ally with such unlikely partners as Muslim states in order to counter UN programs on reproductive rights (Chong and Troy 2011). It would be wrong, however, to see the Church as univocal. John-Paul II thwarted internal plurality, and he made conformity with sexual morals the standard of loyalty to the hierarchy. Since his death many dissenting voices – including members of the clergy – have publicly emerged, showing that the Catholic world is far from being of only one mind. Benedict XVI has timidly begun to relax the ban on condoms, and Francis has insisted on the primacy of pastoral care over doctrinal anathemas, thereby adopting a more nuanced consideration of subjective and contextual factors. Nevertheless, the dispute over same-sex marriage and gender theory still continues between the Catholic hierarchy and liberal movements around the world.

Economics. As part of the social doctrine of the Church, inaugurated by Leo XIII in 1891 with the encyclical *Rerum novarum*, the Catholic teaching on economics traditionally emphasizes the dialogue between labour and capital and the need for a wage that guarantees a decent life for workers and their families. In a polemic against communists on one side and free-market enthusiasts on the other, the Church has stressed the role of intermediate bodies like trade unions and grassroots organizations. In 1931, Pius XI opted for corporatism as the system best able to assure a just and reasonable economic order. In the 1950s Pius XII was a moderate supporter of free enterprise (Percy 2004). After Vatican II, the doctrine on economics became global. *Populorum progressio* (1967) by Paul VI brought North-South inequalities and economic development to centre stage. In 1991, immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the encyclical *Centesimus annus* by John-Paul II was read by some as welcoming free entrepreneurship and capitalism (Novak 1993). Although this interpretation would need to be qualified – John-Paul II was certainly no advocate of the consumer society – the international financial crisis that began in 2008 caused a shift towards a more open critique of the negative consequences of global capitalism. The claim that the

economy “must be structured and governed in an ethical manner” runs through Benedict XVI’s encyclical *Caritas in veritate* and has been forcefully reiterated by Pope Francis. Indeed, the latter is developing a strong indictment of the ruthlessness of global corporations and the misdeeds of impersonal financial transactions which altogether are worsening the conditions of poor people worldwide and exploiting them (Cavanaugh 2015). Just as John-Paul II’s campaign against communism drew on his personal experience under the Polish regime and had the Cold War as its backdrop, Francis’s message against global inequalities takes stock of his Latin American background as well as the global justice movement (in 2014 the Vatican summoned a World meeting of popular – i.e. grassroots – movements). His teachings dovetail with pre-existing Catholic initiatives for economic justice, such as those for debt relief, fair trade or the Economy of Communion project by the Focolari Movement.

Environment and climate change. In 2015, Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato si’* on “the care for our common home” has evoked comments from various sections of the public, including scientists, politicians and social movements. The Church’s engagement with ecology dates back to the early 1970s (Keenan 2002), but *Laudato si’* was the first document to give a full-fledged account of the environmental crisis. The official Catholic attitude towards environmentalism differs from that of many secular movements because it is wary of demographic policies, it stops short of “deep ecology” and biocentrism and it shuns references to Eastern spirituality which are commonplace among many activists (Turina 2013b). But even within these limits, Francis has strongly denounced land exploitation and pollution by governments and corporations as well as weak, superficial environmental policies. He emphasizes the link among safeguarding the environment, global justice and the misdeeds of an unbridled free market. He pairs “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor”, a sentence that echoes the title of a book by the Brazilian liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff. Taking stock of the scientific consensus on global warming, he rebukes climate change deniers. Together with his indictment of neoliberalism, this stance has earned him the reproaches of Catholic conservatives, notably in the US and Australia. It is noteworthy that he makes frequent references to the documents of national bishops’ conferences, a detail which suggests the slow formation of a genuinely global theology, nourished by non-European and particularly Southern Churches.

The issues examined above have allowed the Church to take an active role in the most urgent debates that have riven modern societies in the past century. They have channelled political alliances and they have favoured convergences and cleavages with other agencies. They have induced theology to confront living problems and they have fuelled grassroots commitment. They have accompanied the globalization of the ecclesiastical structures and they have given it corresponding global contents. They have contributed to keeping the visibility of the Church high and to having its voice heard by other relevant actors worldwide. They are a witness to the engagement of the Church with the modern world at the same time as the Church was loosening its former rejection of it.

Conclusion

Our three-level analysis started with those historical changes that in the past two centuries have affected the Church and pushed it into the turmoil of modernity: secularization,

the separation of Church and State, the loss of temporal power, mass migrations and world demographic trends. The initial reaction was one of outright rejection of these and other characteristics of modern societies. These unwanted changes, however, triggered a series of organizational adjustments that in the long run have shaped an unexpected new profile of the Church. The popes could finally manage the appointment of bishops; through the encyclicals and thanks to the new technologies of communication, they have learned how to address an international public, gradually gaining a wide reputation as world leaders, relevant political actors and even media celebrities; the establishment of a skilled diplomatic corps and of a network of Catholic NGOs has greatly enhanced the power of the Church as mediator in international relations and as a provider of information and services on different continents; the college of cardinals summoned to elect the pope has shifted from a mostly Italian and European entity to a genuinely global constituency that represents also Southern and Eastern countries: after about twelve centuries, the election of a European pope is no longer taken for granted.

Doctrinal developments have accompanied these structural changes. The pre-conciliar magisterium was more concerned with otherworldly matters. Now it is deeply involved in contemporary social and political issues. The Church has often something to say about the most hotly debated topics in the public sphere. Its main areas of intervention include peace and human rights, migrants and refugees, sexuality and bioethics, economics, and the environmental crisis. As a result of these processes, the Catholic Church has left behind its former identity as a European-based organization to take on a truly global profile. If this is an accomplished fact, it is nevertheless difficult to make a critical assessment of the next challenges. On the one hand, the Pope attracts worldwide attention and media coverage. But this high visibility risks becoming a two-edged sword when disastrous news emerges: the recent child abuse scandals have greatly eroded the credibility of the Church, particularly in the US, Ireland and Belgium but also in Peru. Moreover, an excessive concentration on the Pope might be a liability if it hides problems that emerge at grassroots level. Pope Francis has put evangelisation and pastoral care at the top of his agenda. Indeed, the Church is losing followers to the profit of secularism, especially in Europe and North America, and of Protestant and Pentecostal Churches, particularly in Africa and Latin America. In China too, which is likely to be strategic for the future of world religions, Independent and Protestant Christians outnumber Catholics and they are growing faster than them (Center for the Study of Global Christianity 2013, p. 36). The balance between elite power and grassroots vitality is likely to be a major stake for the future of the Catholic Church. In the end, its prestige as a world actor is founded on its representing large masses of believers. If it were to lose substantial numbers of followers, in the long run the influence and legitimacy of its leaders would also predictably wane.

Another crucial point concerns internal ideological division. The post-conciliar fracture between liberal and conservative Catholics is still not reconciled and may endanger the unity of the Church. An almost exclusive focus on the person of the Pope can temporarily hide these problems and enhance the influence of Catholic elites, but it does not really help to cope with them. The balance of power between the centre in Rome and the National Bishops' conferences is also a delicate matter that causes deep concern when an official agenda is *de facto* ignored or disregarded. For all his authority, John-Paul II was more successful in

assuring public compliance with his positions on abortion than he was with peace. As Linden remarks, “despite the ability of parts of the Church to leap nation-state boundaries in pursuit of the Common Good, the Church has rarely transcended ethnic and national identities in times of war” (Linden 2009, p. 275). The civil war of 1994 in Rwanda opposing two ethnic groups, both of them Catholic, is a tragic reminder of this inability. The upsurge of new grassroots Catholic movements, from the loosely organized Charismatics to the strictly disciplined Neocatechumenal Way, also raises questions about the liturgical and doctrinal consistency of the various branches of the Church.

On the external front, inter-religious relations represent a crucial challenge for the twenty-first century. Indeed, inter-faith dialogue is strictly intertwined with political and diplomatic affairs. Currently, the persecution of Christian minorities in the Middle East is a formidable obstacle to Muslim/Catholic dialogue, while ecumenical rapprochement with Orthodox Christianity in Russia is hindered by fears of Catholic proselytizing. Likewise, “it seems that dialogue between Jews and Catholics will still be held hostage by the unsolved Palestinian issue” (Vukićević 2015, p. 70). Therefore, in a time when religion has become a major variable in international relations, the establishment of peaceful collaboration between the Catholic Church and other religious actors seems particularly doubtful and delicate.

Finally, the Church’s constant visibility has raised the issue of public accounting. The child abuses cases, together with financial and political scandals that have swept the Vatican in recent years (Thavis 2013) have dramatically exposed the traditional culture of secrecy which until recently was widespread among the clergy and deeply entrenched within the Roman curia. Theological analyses of public accounting and the civil responsibilities of the clergy are few and far between. The damage that this unpreparedness has caused to the global image of the Church is only too evident.

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