

**THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE PAPAL CRISIS
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Summary. The paper discusses the life cycle of the Catholic Church as a social and cultural institution making emphasis on the analysis of its leaders (popes). The failure of the church's leadership is shown, as well as the crisis of ideology and organizational strategy, and the reasons for that are analyzed. The inference is made about the decline in creativity of popes over the last 500 years, which could lead to the collapse of the Catholic Church.

Keywords: Roman Catholic Church; organizational life cycle; leadership; papacy crisis; ideological crises; gerontocracy.

Introduction

The Roman Catholic Church is one of the largest religious institutions of the present. It has been around for 2 000 years. During this time, the Church has gone from being an illegal group with a charismatic preacher and his 12 disciples to an officially recognized, influential hierarchical structure with 1,2 billion followers worldwide. Emerged as an informal group with ideals of equality and humanism guided by the principles of meritocracy and a simplified organizational structure, over many centuries the Catholic Church has changed beyond recognition.

Other values dominated when the church evolved. Splendour of rites and ceremonies instead of modesty, strict hierarchy instead of equality, obscurantism and mysticism instead of being a driving force in education, religious fanaticism instead of tolerance, the cult of church and fires of the Inquisition instead of humanism, numerous scandals associated with anti-Semitism, corruption and pedophilia instead of righteousness. In fact, we have witnessed an ideological inversion.

Nobody knows for sure the actual number of supporters of Jesus Christ in the 1st century AD. My guess is somewhere near 10 thousand people. It is likely for a small illegal religious sect which then Christianity was. It is by no means difficult to calculate that 1.2 billion Catholics around the world by the early 21st century had yielded a 120 000-fold increase in the number of followers of Catholicism. Eve-

ry century brought the Catholic Church 60 million followers, i. e. 600 thousand annually, or about 1 644 people every day. This is a colossal success. Wal-Mart, McDonalds, Coca-Cola, Sony, Nokia and other corporations of today would envy such an increase in the number of clients. If the Catholic Church were a business, this could make good money!

Of course, such an increase in the number of adherents of Catholicism is only a rough mathematical modeling. The reality was more complicated. The church has survived the periods of rapid growth and the periods of stagnation and decline. Still, it found the strength to develop further. Laws governing the development of the Catholic Church as well as any institutional system are similar: origin, growth, stagnation, and decline. And then a new round according to the same pattern. In management it is called an organizational life cycle. However, in this paper the case in point is not the life cycle of the Catholic Church, but the people it was headed by, i. e. Roman popes.

**Organizational life cycle and
personnel development: some
remarks**

To start with, a few words about the life cycle of the organization in relation to its staff. When an organization is in a growth stage, new departments and branches are established, and vacancies for senior positions are opened. There is a good chance to make a career, which attracts promising and talented people into the organiza-

tion. If growth rates of the organization slow down, the qualitative composition of its staff may change in the opposite direction. Slower growth or stagnation reduces the opportunity for career growth within the bureaucratic organization compared to similar structures. This is usually a signal for careerists to look for a new job. Disputes among employees deepen. Instead of performing their duties, most of their efforts are turned to internal intrigues and rivalries. All this leads to a decrease in the average skill level of employees.

Individuals holding a high position in the organization begin to realize that there is no hope to rise higher. These careerists gradually become conservatives seeking to stay in power as long as possible, and let no one in their place. The percentage of stuck-in-the-mud employees increases. The bureaucratic structure becomes a refuge for undistinguished people. If an organization ceases to grow in size, with the aging of the organization increases the average age of its employees. The first signs of gerontocracy appear.

All this affects the overall performance of the organization. In most cases, it is increasingly difficult for large structures to obtain new results. This is primarily due to the difficulties in planning and coordination. It is harder for a bureaucratic organization, which in the process of growth becomes more cumbersome and awkward, to show impressive results. So, the most talented employees are forced to deal with the administration and supervision to the detriment of creative work aimed at new achievements.

Repeated reorganization and restructuring can only create the illusion of usefulness. It may well be that by resorting to the reorganization as a major strategy for responding to disturbing signals, managers deny reality. This is somewhat reminiscent of the response to the heart failure or being diagnosed to have cancer expressed by rearranging the furniture in the living room [3, p. 80].

Reorganizations and restructurings can create a false sense that you're actually *doing* something productive. Companies are in the process of reorganizing themselves all the time; that's the nature of institutional evolution. But when you begin to respond to data and warning signs with reor-

ganization as a primary strategy, you may well be in denial. It's a bit like responding to a severe heart condition or a cancer diagnosis by rearranging your living room. Sometimes bureaucracies suffer from the "we've arrived" syndrome – a complacent lethargy that can arise once a company has achieved one big goal and does not replace it with another [2, p. 170].

As the organization getting older, its executives shift their attention from undertaking society-oriented tasks, to making efforts to keep the organization at any cost, even to the detriment of interests of society for whose sake this structure was created. An inversion takes place. A new generation of executives take little interest in the objectives the organization initially was striving to achieve. More important are issues of stability, predictability, high status, money, and privileges.

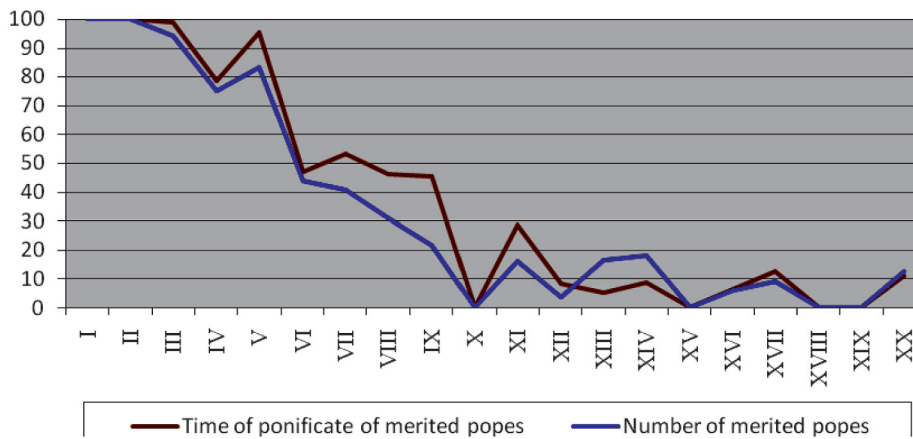
Midlife organizations are run by a third (and sometimes even later) generation of managers who have no strong emotional link with the original culture of the organization and its values, and therefore they are more pragmatic in assessing future directions of its development. The environment is such that conditions are created for promotion of both new creative leaders, successfully putting the organization out of the crisis, and mediocre bureaucrats, drifting along towards the abyss. As Edgar H. Schein, prominent sociologist, rightly pointed out, leadership is primarily the ability to rise above the organizational culture, the ability to feel the need for other methods of work, other than those that arise from the effects of current perceptions of reality. The leader's talent is determined by his ability to understand the culture and to work with it, and one of the most important manifestations of leadership is the destruction of culture, when it becomes dysfunctional [13, p. 11, 410]. If the situation does not change and the organization continues to incorrectly respond to the challenges of the environment, there comes another crisis, decline, and it may cease to exist [4; 6; 11].

The papacy over the last 2000 years: social and cultural crises

Let us examine the level of proficiency of the Catholic Church leadership for which purpose we use a list of popes

published in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Vol. 11), which contains information from the *2001 Anuario Pontificio* (Pontifical Yearbook, the annual yearbook of the Catholic Church). This list shows all the popes in 2000 years since St. Peter to John Paul II, including 37 antipopes, making a total of 301 people. Their services for the church were considered as a criterion for the level of their competence. Canonized popes (saints) and blessed popes are included into the group of merited popes, and all the oth-

ers into the group of ordinary popes. Since the main mission of the church as an organization is to spread among the population the ideas of humanism, kindness, moderation, tolerance, justice, and holiness, the staff should be adequate. The church itself has assessed their leaders, having glorified the outstanding individuals and disregarded the ordinary ones. Referring to Figure, we see the share of merited popes (saint and blessed) both by number and by time of pontificate.



Decrease in the share of merited popes (percent)

Figure shows that the competence level of popes for 2,000 years has been steadily declining. Being called for their faith “saint” apostles and martyrs in the ancient times, on the path to modernity they became increasingly ordinary bureaucratic functionaries, racked by small human passions (greed, arrogance, haughty, jealousy, envy, gluttony, hypocrisy, and snobbery). Of 2,000 years of the Catholic Church existence, 745,8 years fall on the reign of the saint and blessed popes (37,3%). It was a time when at the head of the structure were prominent leaders who have done much to strengthen and expand the dominant position of the church in the world.

There is a noticeable coincidence of two plots, i.e. the number of merited popes and the time of their pontificate. And the number of merited popes in most of the periods was less (blue line) than the time during which they took the highest church position (red line). For example, in

the 7th century, of the 22 popes only 9 were saints, but they accounted for 53,2% of the time of their being pontiff.

The period of 13–16th centuries, on the contrary, was a failure in terms of competency of popes. Talented leaders were few and they did not stay long in power. They administered for a total of 20,3 years out of 400. This was too little. Grandeur and pomposity of the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages, in fact, turned into stagnation and a precursor of the coming decline.

Most unfortunate periods were the 10th and 15th centuries. None of these periods gave any merited popes (or saint or blessed). Later on, each of these periods led to the crisis: the first of them was marked by the Great Schism and the separation of the Roman Catholic Church from the Orthodox Church in the middle of the 11th century, and the second by the grandiose Reformation in Europe in the first half of the 16th century. This fact once again clearly

shows the importance of leadership in the development of the organization. Incompetent functionaries prone to intrigues and personal enrichment at the expense of the whole structure always led their organizations to collapse.

Likewise, in the 18th and 19th centuries the church was in a state of decadence. At this time, it was trying to somehow adapt to the challenges of the environment (rationalism, pragmatism, the Enlightenment, capitalism, materialism), but never acted proactively. Belated half-measures were not able to rectify the situation. Also the Catholic Church became a bulwark of reaction and oppression against the national liberation movement. When Italy in the 19th century fought for the

national revival and territorial integrity, the popes were self-interested. The 20th century with its new challenges (communism, fascism, scientific and technological revolution, sexual revolution, etc.) proved to be similarly unimpressive for the church leaders. Again, the Catholic Church tried to meet these challenges, but instead got entangled in scandals involving corruption, anti-Semitism and pedophilia [more detailed in: 5; 8].

If we assess the merited popes by macro periods (500 years), the decline in the level of competence of the top leaders will become even more evident. Social selection based on false principles and practices led to the complete degradation of ruling class (see Table 1).

The share of the merited popes by 500 years

Table 1

| Period | Total popes | Merited popes | Length of the period (years) | Time of pontificate (years) |
|-----------|-------------|---------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| I–V c. | 55 | 49 | 500 | 472,8 |
| VI–X c. | 99 | 25 | 500 | 191,9 |
| XI–XV c. | 97 | 10 | 500 | 51 |
| XVI–XX c. | 50 | 3 | 500 | 30,1 |
| Total | 301 | 87 | 2000 | 745,8 |

The entire second half of the history of the Catholic Church is the period of decadence, and the last 500 years only clearly confirm this trend. The period gave two saint popes and one blessed pope. In other words, in 40% of the time of its existence the organization produced only 3,4% of outstanding leaders.

How did the church act in such a crisis? What do we see? The share of the blessed and canonized popes increasingly reduced, but the aging church leadership did not seem to notice it. But the papal personality degenerated in the public eye. And in order to prevent the leveling of the pope image in the community, the doctrine of papal infallibility was proclaimed at the First Vatican Council (1869–1870) and finally adopted at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). This step is still a matter of much debate in the community. C. Northcote Parkinson was right in asserting that ‘a perfection of planned layout is achieved only by institutions on the point of collapse’ [9, p. 59]. It is known that at the beginning leaders es-

tablish an organization and draw up rules of the game, and then managers perform their administrative functions. History of the Catholic Church knew few leaders and a lot more managers.

To these facts one can add some interesting conclusions made many years ago by the prominent Russian-American sociologist Pitirim Sorokin (1889–1968). He studied biographies of 256 popes from 42 to 1932 and found that not all of them belonged to highly spiritual (ideational) leaders. Among them there were both vicious popes in servitude of their selfishness and evil passions (sensate rulers) and popes with mixed mentality, who were notable neither for their holiness nor their sins (see Table 2).

And do not forget about another reason of such degradation of ruling class, i. e. about gradual dominance of gerontocracy among the papacy. This is supported by calculations of contemporary researchers. According to Maria Patrizia Carrieri and Diego Serraino, the average age of becom-

ing the pope in 1200–1599 was 60 while in 1600–1900 it was 65,5, the average number of years of administering a pontifical office having grown from 6,5 to 11 [1]. Similar figures are cited by Francois P. Retief and Louise Cilliers for the period from 604 to 2005. In 604–1054 the age of entering the pontiff office averaged 39,3; in 1055–1492 it was 59,1; and in 1493–2005 63,9, while the number of years being in office was 4,9; 7,8 and 10, respectively [12]. And this despite the fact that neither Jesus Christ nor his apostles at the time of origin of the church were not of such an advanced age. The last century was not any exception to the rule. According to my calculations, from 1903 to 2013 the average age of taking the pontiff office from Pius X to Francis was 67,2. The youngest (if one can call it that) at the time of the election was John Paul II (58 years) and the oldest Benedict XVI (78 years). This could not but affect their ability to administer.

Table 2
Distribution of mentality types among the popes

| Mentality types | Number | Percent |
|-----------------|--------|---------|
| Very sensate | 3 | 1,2 |
| Sensate | 34 | 13,4 |
| Mixed | 116 | 45,3 |
| Ideational | 101 | 39,3 |
| Very ideational | 2 | 0,8 |

[14, p. 41]

Psychologists, biologists and physiologists say that after 60 years the human nervous system becomes more and more rigid. Mastering new forms of behavior is not easy. Markedly is reduced physical strength and capacity for work. Work is done more slowly. Past diseases become acute and remind of themselves. The immune defense is reduced. Bones become brittle. Visual, hearing and olfactory acuity subsides. There is a memory change: (1) weakening of mechanical memory, as well as ability of direct imprinting; (2) weakening of the operational, short-term memory; and (3) professional pronounced selectivity of memory. There is a change in memory: (1) weakening of mechanical memory

and ability of immediate fixing in memory; (2) weakening of the operation short-term memory; and (3) pronounced professional selectivity of remembering. Elderly people are able to productively develop ideas, but these are ideas of their past years, which return to them at this stage of their life. No new ideas are generated. In the subjective perception, the structure of psychological time is changed: the share of future time is reduced compared to the increasing share of the past which begins to dominate over the inner world of an elderly man. Elderly people become more cautious, suspicious, and resentful [7; 15].

Of course, with such a “baggage” it is very difficult for popes to administer such a large institution like the Catholic Church and to achieve any outstanding results. It will be remembered that Benedict XVI abdicated at the age of 85 years not only because of the scandals that ravaged the Catholic Church, but also because of the poor health. His successor, 77-year-old Pope Francis told journalists in August 2014 that he, like his predecessor, may abdicate for health reasons [10].

Conclusion

All this indicates that the Catholic Church has long been in a state of permanent crisis, which will be very difficult to overcome. The church does not remember the lessons of history and is unwilling to change. It does not work on its mistakes. Worship of traditions for the sake of traditions and rituals for the sake of rituals, admiration for the form and external splendor to the detriment of the matter, and adherence to the obsolete stereotypes have led the church to yet another major crisis. This is not only a crisis of leadership, but also a crisis of the strategy, a crisis of the goal and mission. For 2000 years, most of the organizational structures have been replaced. All great leaders, no matter how charismatic they were, sooner or later would die. All great ideas would become primitive. Entire economic and political systems would grow decrepit and plunge into chaos, and only Catholicism seemed unshakable, eternal and unsurpassed. But this is a misconception. The church is all too great outwardly, but not in content. The margin of safety of any system is not infinite, and its possibilities are not unlimited.

Catholicism needs a new great idea, a new strategy, and a new mission. Its leaders understand this. New Pope Francis called the church to remember what it was originally, to get back to basics; not to strive for baser worldly goods, not to search for ephemeral benefits, to avoid small honors and go for simplicity, tolerance, moderation and the inner self. Let us hope that the call of Pope will resonate in the hearts of believers, and in the hearts of church functionaries of all ranks. This idea can be a turning point in history, and Francis can become a new true leader of the renewed Church. Only time can show whether the new Pope will succeed in implementing these plans.

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