

Paradigm Shifts in the Catholic Church?

JEREMY A. KEE



As one who is in the process of leaving the Southern Baptist church for Roman Catholicism, I say without hesitation and full of love and concern that the Church I fell in love with, the Church in which I found, finally, the full embodiment and expression of truth, goodness, and beauty, is becoming harder to recognize almost by the day. What I see is a Church struggling to maintain a healthy distance from a fallen world that seeks her undoing. It is become harder to see the lifeboat as it takes on more of the water from which we are in need of rescue.

In recent months there have been [myriad stories](#) and scandals, some old and [disgracefully persistent](#), others [newer](#), and all ephemeral. Perhaps the most interesting is also the least sensationalized (at least at the root), namely the talk of

“paradigm shifts” within the Church. This view was [first voiced](#) by the Vatican secretary of state Cardinal Parolin, who began to pull at this particular thread not too long ago when he suggested that Pope Francis’s *Amoris Laetitia* signals a paradigm shift in the Church. These sentiments [were affirmed](#) soon after by Cardinal Cupich of Chicago. There has been a predictable slew of commentary since, [most notably](#) by Cardinal Gerhard Müller, demoted prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. On matters of doctrine, wrote Müller, paradigm shifts are not possible.

The view of an outsider eager to come in from the cold is this: the Church needs no paradigm shifts because the Church is the paradigm shift.

The modern world is characterized by nothing if it is not characterized by a fundamental lack of rootedness, and this, it would seem, is by design. Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia recently [delivered an address](#), in which he said,

Our country is built on change because we’re a nation of immigrants. Change is natural. It’s also healthy, as long as a nation remains linked in some key organic ways with its past. A nation’s identity fractures when it changes so rapidly, so deeply and in so many ways, that the fabric of the culture ruptures into pieces that no longer fit together. We’re close to that point as a society right now—if not past it.

As it is on our own shores, so the same is true in most places on earth. And yet, there are some who would see this pseudo-virtue be adopted by and adapted to the Church, hence the talk of paradigm shifts. It seems that this same sort of split experienced so vividly in American culture is perhaps beginning to occur within the Church itself. The word “schism” has been employed increasingly, if sensationally, albeit not always by those in fellowship with the Church

universal. Nonetheless, one need not be on a ship to point out that there are cracks and dents in her hull.

Coming back to the matter of paradigm shifts, it is true—absolutely and beautifully true—that the Church is the paradigm shift. It is the Rock, built upon the rock, which remains unchanged in a world so zealous and eager to change. The modern world revels in its constant drive to reinvent itself. Society has figured out what the greatest physicists and engineers have not, namely how to perpetually sustain forward movement into infinite and unimaginable reaches.

They call it “progress,” because today is different from yesterday, and tomorrow different from today. The destination, however, has yet to be clearly determined, and movement without a destination is nothing but aimless wandering. Man once had a set and decided destination—God. But God was abandoned when man began to wonder if he knew better. Man thus became an existential exile, lost and alone in the cosmos.

For all of its truly great progressions—modern medicine and the once-promising “Space Race” stand out in one’s mind—in what ways has humanity itself improved as a result? All one ever hears is the gospel of progress. Life has become a catechesis of the material, being told that all of reality is one way and that only in believing the officially approved orthodoxy will man experience happiness. And what is this desired happiness? It is to be freed from the shackles of “irrational” superstitions, i.e., religious belief and all the attendant pompous piety (which, interestingly, is nothing but a reframing of man’s existential exile). Freedom is happiness, one is told and sold, and one cannot be free if under the thumb of some divine puppet master. It was Jean-Paul Sartre

who reasoned falsely, “If God exists, I cannot be free; but I am free, therefore God cannot exist.” Thus it is that man, fool that he is, who celebrates his being lost. Is it any wonder, then, that strange and horrible events and “developments” are occurring with such regularity today?

The fact remains that perpetual motion is a physical impossibility. Even our ever-expanding universe, so it is theorized, will one day begin to retract into the infinitesimally minute speck of cosmic primordial matter from whence it came. The modern spirit is wedded to progression, and constant progression is quite literally exhausting. One may say, not unreasonably, that the myriad dysfunctions seen in the world and in the Church are the symptoms of our spiritual exhaustion. It is a time for rest, not for further action.

This, then, is the role of the Church: to remain constant in her faith and in her teaching; to continue offering refuge to the wanderers and the exiles; to show that much of what happens outside of her walls is not real, but superficiality and vanity. She is, in other words, the definitive paradigm shift. The ways and whims of the world may change, but the Church stands at the ready, sentinel like, prepared to offer her counterpoint and, if necessary, her defense.

There is a popular view of history as a pendulum, whereby the events of history swing back and forth from one extreme to the other. One may also think of a tide, rolling in and going back out. Both the pendulum and the tide, however, are confined to a very strict range of motion: right and left, in and out. The Church is above it all. She is the gear that keeps the pendulum moving, and the box that houses both pendulum and gears. She is the boat resting peacefully atop the waters as they roll, however turbulently, in and out.

Houses are built and houses crumble, but the rock remains a rock unless intentionally destroyed.

Whether a net good or not, this debate over paradigm shifts is an important conversation not so much for its merits at face value, but rather for the glimpse it offers into the soul of the Church itself. Theological developments as Newman described are not relevant to this discussion. The Church cannot change in any fundamental way but only build upon pre-existing Tradition. Yes, individual prelates have made certain mistakes in the past that have resulted in unfortunate changes. Those changes are to be expected since the Church is made up of imperfect men, which is to say, of perfect sinners. But that is not the sort of change being suggested here either. Rather, what some Church officials are proposing is an arbitrary and fundamental change that accommodates the shifting sand of worldly sentimentality from which the Church exists to offer refuge.

In the midst of a storm, a wanderer needs shelter. That is the Church. When the roof begins to leak, it must be patched. It would be foolish, however, to replace the entire roof, and all the more to replace it with much more dubious and rickety material.

As one seeking shelter from the storm, it is disheartening to find such senseless and capricious quarrels erupting in the last refuge.

Editor's note: Pictured above is "Christ in the Storm on the Sea of Galilee" painted by Ludolf Backhuysen in 1695.

Don't close yet, one more

When I was ordained in 1992 under the pontificate of Pope St. John Paul II and serving under that of Pope Benedict XVI, I loved to read the daily articles in the media on so many websites, L'Osservatore Romano to which I subscribed (English edition), other periodicals. Below was the type of article, uplifting, challenging, fairly clear (excepting Islamophobia which is a red herring that does not exist but seems to be included in order to promote the rest of the argument, and the inclusion of some bad Christians whose offenses are not nearly as grave or numerous in comparison to the aggression of Islam adherents), faithful to Scripture and Tradition, advancing the faith, developing the soul of the believer, unifying to the Holy Church. This one is a welcome change from the studied ambiguities, polemics and controversies of the last few years, interreligious dialogue in which the church returns to speak her truth to the world.

— Fr. Richard Perozich

What Had Never Been Said In Saudi Arabia. A First For Tauran



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Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, has been in the capital of Saudi Arabia since April 13, and will stay there until April 20,

thereby repaying the [visit](#) made to the Vatican on September 20, 2017, by the secretary general of the Muslim World League, the sheikh Muhammad bin Abdul Karim Al-Issa.

Welcomed by Prince Muhammad bin Abdurrahman bin Abdulaziz, vice-governor of Riyadh, Cardinal Tauran gave at the headquarters of the Muslim League, during his meeting with the sheikh Al-Issa, an address without precedent in the history of relations between Christianity and Islam, not because of the things that were said but because of the place where they were pronounced.

It was in fact the first time that in Saudi Arabia, the homeland of Wahhabism, one of the most radical currents of Islam, a leading representative of the Catholic Church has spoken out in public and with clarity on capital questions like freedom of religion and equal rights for believers of all faiths.

Here is a brief anthology of the things that Cardinal Tauran said in Riyadh, printed in "[L'Osservatore Romano](#)" of April 17.
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ON THE CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS

“What is threatening all of us is not the clash of civilizations, but rather the clash of forms of ignorance and radicalism. What is threatening coexistence is first of all ignorance; therefore, to meet together, speak, build something together, are an invitation to encounter the other, and also means discovering ourselves.”

ON OPENING THE HOLY PLACES TO ALL

The cardinal recalled how the Christian sacred places, “in the Holy Land, in Rome or elsewhere, together with the numerous shrines in many parts of the world,” are “always open to you, our Muslim brothers and sisters, to believers of other religions, and also to every person of good will who does not profess a religion.” Besides, he added, “in many countries the mosques are also open to visitors,” and this, he said, “is the kind of spiritual hospitality

that helps us to promote mutual understanding and friendship, contrasting prejudice.”

ON THE TRUE MEANING OF MARTYRDOM

“Religion is the dearest thing a person has. This is why some, when they are called to choose between keeping the faith and remaining alive, prefer to accept paying a high price: they are the martyrs of all religions and of every time.”

ON FUNDAMENTALISM

“In all religions there are forms of radicalism. Fundamentalists and extremists may be zealous person, but unfortunately they have deviated from a solid and wise understanding of religion. Moreover, they consider those who do not share their vision as unbelievers who must convert or be eliminated, so as to maintain purity. They are misled persons who can easily go on to violence in the name of religion, including terrorism. They become convinced, through brainwashing, that they are serving God. The truth is that they are only hurting themselves, ruining the image of their religion and their coreligionists. This is why they need our prayer and our help.”

ON EQUAL TREATMENT AMONG ALL THE RELIGIONS

After clarifying that “religion can be proposed, never imposed, and then accepted or rejected,” Cardinal Tauran identified as one of the fields in which Christians and Muslims must be in agreement, seeing that “in the past there has been a great deal of competition between the two communities,” that “of common rules for the construction of places of worship.” In fact, all the religions must be treated in the same way, without discrimination, because their followers, together with the citizens who do not profess any religion, must be treated equally,” he remarked in referring to the always relevant theme of “full citizenship” for all. In part because “if we do not eliminate the

double standards of our behavior as believers, religious institutions and organizations, we will foster Islamophobia and Christianophobia.”

ON THE CONDEMNATION OF TERRORISM BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS

“Spiritual leaders have a duty: to keep the religions from being at the service of an ideology, and to be able to recognize that some of our coreligionists, like the terrorists, are not behaving correctly. Terrorism is a constant threat, and because of this we must be clear and never justify it. The forms of terrorism want to demonstrate the impossibility of coexistence. We believe the exact opposite. We must avoid aggression and denigration.”

ON INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

“All authentic interreligious dialogue begins with the proclamation of one’s own faith. We do not say that all religions are equal, but that all believers, those who seek God and all persons of good will devoid of religious affiliation, have equal dignity. Everyone must be left free to embrace the religion that he wishes.” After this came the concluding appeal to join forces “so that God, who created us, may not be a motive of division, but rather of unity.”

*(English translation by [Matthew Sherry](#), Ballwin, Missouri,
U.S.A.)*