It is a tautology to say that we live in a global Catholic Church that is, historically, at its most catholic in actuality to the point that it can truly echo the ideal of this mark of the Church. This catholicity has been made possible with the Church becoming replete with the voices of Catholics in the Global South, voices that have now reached to occupy the See of Peter itself. This welcome reality of a global, polyglot, and multicultural Church does bring up the question of whether we are risking the creation of “ethnotheologies,” which would balkanize the Catholic Church in ways similar to what happened to Eastern Orthodox Christianity with their autocephalous churches drawn on ethnic and national lines, and what happened to Protestant Christianity with their national churches. A working definition of ethnotheology can be understood as when the encounter between the human and the divine is best realized within the life of an ethnic or national group¹ at the expense of a global Christian communion. This problem is an old one for the Church. Christopher Dawson wrote that “most of the great schisms and heresies in the history of the Christian Church have their roots in social and national antipathies.”² The task is more challenging for a Church of unprecedented pluralism, and more urgent for the readers of these pages, because Dawson correctly concludes that “if this [phenomenon of social and national antipathy as a source of Church disunity] had been clearly recognized by the theologians, the history of Christianity would have been a different one.”³ One could add all persons engaged in ministry as a target of Dawson’s statement, since they would likely encounter the problem before the theologians.

It is well known how the Church models its unity theologically on the unity of God: a unity based as much on difference as well as sameness. The Church is one because God is one. Its different peoples should be bound together by relational bonds of love (or of peace) that models themselves from the bond of love which unites the distinct persons of the Trinity who communicate differently, but in relation to one another, the same divine essence.⁴ In tension with this unity is the Church’s acceptance of human difference. God confirms human difference as good by virtue of having created it, by God becoming incarnate in Jesus therefore

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¹ I borrow this definition from Aristotle Papanikolaou, who writes of how ethnotheology among the Eastern Orthodox was a product of the rise of nationalism in the emergent Eastern-Orthodox Christian nations declaring independence from the slow collapse of the Ottoman Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Aristotle Papanikolaou, The Mystical as Political: Democracy and Non-Radical Orthodoxy (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 44. Ethnotheology was a factor too, beginning in the Reformation period, when religion played a role in the formation of nation states which concluded with the consensus of Westphalian nationalism in the seventeenth century.


³ Fitzpatrick, 54.

⁴ See Augustine, De Trinitate, Book IV, 12 and VIII, 12.
signaling an essential acceptance of human nature, and the Church's consequent rejection of anti-incarnational heresies like Gnosticism which, in its rejection of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ, by extension also rejects the incarnated nature of human beings in all its social and cultural variety.

Theology knows well this tension, and has sought to negotiate it with successful efforts including first, working through the ramifications of the doctrine of the Trinity which serve as the model for a diverse and unified Church, whereby unity and diversity reinforce each other; second, articulating how particular ethnic and cultural practices of the universal truths of the faith can be justified by scholastic arguments where the universal can be known through its particular instantiations; and third, using theological justifications for inculturation based on how God accepts our embodied selves, save for sin, through the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. These efforts serve to demonstrate how the Church can be of many peoples yet authentically be one. Therefore, how can our catholicity as one Church of many peoples inform our being one Church, and how can our being one Church fully reinforce our catholicity as a global Church that embraces a people of unprecedented diversity? How should we renegotiate this ongoing tension of an ancient problem of the Church and avoid an “ethnotheological” breakdown?

One important challenge in addressing this tension is to find a means that can be understood and have impact on all the levels theology is done: popularly, pastorally, and professionally. To that end, it is useful to retrieve and employ John Courtney Murray’s use of the term “conspiracy” in the original meaning of that word: “to breathe together.” It can be used within the context of another well-trodden area of theology, the theology of vocation, provided a problem within that particular area of theology can be dealt with: the theology of vocation's tendency to focus on formal ministry, both lay or clerical. This tension can be constructively dealt with, if not permanently resolved, through an understanding of a shared conspiracy of Catholics dedicated to a common vocation that takes up a cultural location but does not get stuck within an ethnotheology that reduces Catholic faith and life to a single, specific, perhaps hegemonic cultural expression of it. This is because Catholics share a common quality that has always been foundational to vocation, both in formal ministry and the informal practices of vocation in day-to-day life: the life of faith as first and foremost a commitment.

People familiar with Murray may find it odd that I use his understanding of conspiracy to apply to the Church. In We Hold These Truths, Murray himself did not. There, he used “conspiracy” to help explain how the American political consensus developed. “Conspiracy” for Murray meant its original Latin sense: unison, concord, unanimity in opinion. A people in conspiracy are united in action for a common end. Murray’s project asked how the then-four conspiracies of the American society of 1960, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and secularist, could form an American society that can be just, civil, and peaceful. (The conspiracies that make up American society have multiplied since.) This Stoic philosophical term, which passed into American political philosophy through Cicero and then through the medieval scholastic tradition, Murray argues, is basic to the success of civil society, where these groups conspire to live together as one: conspiratio plurium in unum.

However, one can use Murray’s understanding of conspiracy in an ecclesial context too. In We Hold These Truths he gives the reader tacit, perhaps tongue-in-cheek permission, to do so, when he states “I shall not object to your calling Catholicism a conspiracy, provided you admit that it is one of several.” Despite the fact that Murray wrote that last sentence as a warning to those who questioned the patriotism and place of Catholics in American civil society and government, it can be converted to a description of a plural Church conspiring to “breathe together”

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6 Murray, 23.
7 Murray, 22.
8 Murray, 22.
as one, because the origins of the word in his thought are ecclesial. Murray's use of “conspiracy” originated in the scholasticism, specifically the Thomism, that undergirded his public theology. First, his use of “conspiracy” was in support of an argument that was essentially theological, with natural law and theism serving as the basis for his argument.9 Second, Murray’s focus on the term “conspiracy” for analysis is a product of Cajetan’s influence on the style of scholasticism Murray studied, where the former insisted on a “philological precision among the senses of individual terms.”10 Third, Murray’s faith that human social conspiracies can conspire to a social consensus is grounded in the affirmation of scholastic ideas11 that there is a natural law to serve as the basis of a consensus based on truth. Human beings, no matter the conspiracy they hold allegiance to, can reason their way to that truth because each person has access to enough specific instantiations of universal truth to move from those particulars to the universal.12 This includes conspiracies of religious groups, which is why Murray examined the question of God at work in human communities beyond the Church.13 Consequently, “conspiracy” can be used as a term to help understand how disparate and very dissimilar ethnic and social groups can nonetheless “breathe together” as one religious communion, as one Church.

This use of “conspiracy” is justified further by the history of how Church unity was often achieved not primarily on theological grounds, but through a dominant cultural mediation of the Christian faith. That, in turn, was itself a byproduct of Church efforts throughout history to unite human beings on a temporal basis into political societies and national unions. It can be argued that these efforts at temporal unity, ironically, could and did undermine Church unity because the Church throughout history often has not allowed different ethnic groups to conspire to become Catholics with their cultural differences, but instead become one Church through a single imposed cultural mediation of the faith that alienated many minority Catholics who could not subscribe to that hegemony.

The origin of this problem over how Church unity has too often been wrongheadedly achieved can be found with the Catholic Church’s urgent need to bring order to a chaotic world following the collapse of the Roman Empire. Since that time, the Catholic Church has possessed a strong (but by no means absolute) preference for national unity from the first medieval European kingdoms to the Westphalian nation-state (a preference that remained despite the fact that many of those states exercised strong, even virulent forms of anti-Clericalism), to the European Union whose foundation is credited to post-Second World War European Catholic politicians.14 Examples of this preference abound throughout history and across the world. Jean-Benoit Nadeau and Julie Barlow observe how the deliberate French government policy of leveling regional differences for the sake of creating a united French culture defined and governed from the center (Paris), is a direct consequence of France being a Catholic country despite its official secularism15 and repeated episodes of anti-clericalism to supplant Church power with an all-

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12 Murray, We Hold These Truths, 327-328.
13 See Hooper, 122.
15 France was an idealized reality that transcended the government of the day for many French Catholics; a great and holy Republic, symbolized by the French revolutionary battle of Valmy (often described as a miracle) and patriots like Joan of Arc. See Emile Perreau-Saussine, Catholicism and Democracy: An Essay in the History of Political Thought, trans. by Richard Rex (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 107.
pervasive state power that is “heavily centralized, hierarchical, and homogenizing.”\textsuperscript{16} The Church in Brazil, despite suffering anti-clerical measures under the reign of Emperor Pedro II and the early First Republic that overthrew him, still saw itself as indispensable to the formation of Brazilian national identity which included unity in faith. Glen Caudill Dealy describes Latin America’s need to structure social conduct and human relationships in an integrated, organic fashion, even to the point of putting in power authoritarian governments to enforce it, as a direct consequence of how the Roman Catholic Church shaped culturally and socially the countries of that region.\textsuperscript{17}

The United States, despite its self-identification as a diverse immigrant culture, found the Catholic Church in this country driving for both Church and national unity together in a common American assimilationist project (reinforced by an ultramontanist ecclesiology)\textsuperscript{18} which encountered resistance by minority Catholic groups. Here are a few examples.

Between 1880 and 1925, Carpatho-Rusyns (commonly known as Ruthenian Catholics) experienced conflict with the American Latin-rite bishops\textsuperscript{19} who termed their liturgy and practices “a foreign rite” with its inculturated practices of liturgy and worship, ecclesial practices such as having married clergy, and their priests possessing the faculty to administer the Sacrament of Confirmation without the need to seek permission from their bishop. The Latin-rite bishops, led by the Archbishop of St. Paul-Minneapolis John Ireland, “could not understand nor tolerate a diversification of rite.”\textsuperscript{20} He sought to place Eastern Catholics and their clergy “under their complete control and absorbing them as they had the other nationality groups of the new immigration.”\textsuperscript{21} A major consequence of these conflicts was that many Ruthenian Catholics left to become Eastern Orthodox,\textsuperscript{22} specifically the once-Russian Orthodox body that is today the autocephalous Orthodox Church of America.

Between 1904 and 1917, the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, under their ethnically German Archbishop Sebastian Messmer, encountered the threat of schism between Polish Catholics and the Church. The flashpoint was over Messmer’s policy of trying to unite a polyglot diocese of eight ethnic groups (mostly from eastern and southern Europe) into an “American Catholic phalanx”\textsuperscript{23} for the greater unity of the Church; to Americanize the Church into an English speaking cohort that could, in his mind, combat a slew of social problems locally.\textsuperscript{24} Poles saw this as an attempt to strip away their language and cultural identity. Tensions were compounded by the Poles’ insistence not only of the preservation of these two things, but preserving them through a measure of autonomy exercised by the appointment of a Polish bishop, preferably as the head of a diocese or through an auxiliary bishop “who would take over as pastor of some prominent Milwaukee Polish church, and in effect be the de facto ordinary and regular minister of the sacraments to the Poles.”\textsuperscript{25} These tensions marked much of Messmer’s time as archbishop,

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\item[\textsuperscript{16}] Jean-Benoit Nadeau, Julie Barlow, \textit{Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong: Why We Love France But Not the French} (Naperville, IL.: Sourcebooks, 2003), 290.
\item[\textsuperscript{18}] Ecclesiologically, the greater autonomy dioceses enjoyed in the nineteenth century gave way in the twentieth “to a stricter chain of command that began with the pope and flowed through the curia to local bishops and their bureaus and departments. The apotheosis of this came when a long-awaited codification of canon law was issued in 1917 and declared effective in 1918. The administrative clarity of the “New” Code of Canon Law gave broader powers to Roman and diocesan officials.” Steven M. Avella, \textit{The Richness of the Earth: A History of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee 1843-1958} (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 317.
\item[\textsuperscript{19}] In the grand scheme of Church history, this American episode was a continuation of the recurring conflict between the Slavonic Rite and the Latin rite bishops of Central Europe, which should have been settled by the efforts of Saints Cyril and Methodius gaining official acceptance of the former rite by Pope Adrian II, but was not. (See Fitzpatrick, 54-60.)
\item[\textsuperscript{20}] Walter C. Warzeski, \textit{Byzantine Rite Rusins in Carpatho-Ruthenia and America} (Pittsburgh: Byzantine Seminary Press, 1971), 108.
\item[\textsuperscript{21}] Warzeski, 108.
\item[\textsuperscript{22}] See “The Appointment of a Greek Bishop in the United States,” In \textit{The Ecclesiastical Review} 7, no. 5 (November 1907): 457-459.
\item[\textsuperscript{23}] The phrase was Messmer’s. See Avella, 320-322.
\item[\textsuperscript{24}] Avella, 320-321
\item[\textsuperscript{25}] Avella, 320-321.
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and were calmed only when Polish priests finally became bishops in their own right and negotiated between the demands of Polish Catholics and the authority of their non-Polish hierarchs. But other dioceses were not so fortunate. The events in Milwaukee and other dioceses with substantial Polish Catholic populations (e.g. Chicago and Grand Rapids) negotiated these tensions in the shadow of the 1897 schism between the Diocese of Scranton, Pennsylvania and what became the Polish National Catholic Church. The latter group crisscrossed America looking for opportunities to add other, disaffected Polish Catholics to their ranks.

What Timothy Matovina correctly identified as the multiple origins of the Catholic Church in the United States reveal other unique, culturally mediated forms of the Catholic faith; forms that tended to buck the American Catholic assimilationist project. A goodly number of South Louisiana's Catholics always worshipped in French using inculturated forms of the faith known to them, and Hispanic populations across the United States have always done so similarly with the Spanish language and the pre-Tridentine forms of worship mediated through symbol and ritual as much as, if not more than, the written word. These examples are numerous to the point that they cannot be dismissed as exceptions to the assimilationist rule, but instead serve as harbingers of the plural Roman Catholic Church we have in the United States today: "the most ethically and radically diverse national ecclesial body in the world."

All of these examples serve as a warning: if the Church cannot renegotiate the means by which different groups of Catholics find a means to conspire together, to breathe together as Church without resorting to a unity imposed by a cultural hegemony, we could lose these groups as happened with the Ruthenian Catholics, many Polish Catholics, and today many Hispanics. (Perhaps one could make a similar conclusion about the Church globally.)

The urgency is amplified by the fact that recognition in the Church is a reliable means for an ethnic group to gain recognition, a fact that holds true not just for the Catholic Church in the United States but for Christian churches in general both here and worldwide. Local Church congregations and organizations continue to serve as a refuge for people to celebrate their particular, inculturated form of faith, and this comfort zone enables them to adapt to the host society on their own terms and at their own pace. Again, examples abound. The United States saw the Second Great Awakening (1800-1830) that served as a direct and major cause of the development of Jacksonian Democracy, where, for better and for worse, faith in the ability of the people to govern themselves intuitively, without the day-to-day direction of an intellectual elite, was asserted. The story of the Pentecostal movement in the United States in the twentieth century mirrored that of Methodists in the eighteenth century and Baptists in the nineteenth. These movements enabled people who "beginning as total outcasts [usually from the lower class], they were to gain a status of suspicious toleration, followed eventually by full acceptance by the community." One sees a similar phenomenon with Hispanics, whose political engagement in U.S. society occurs primarily through their churches. Internationally, in the Caribbean, political and cultural liberation began with the recognition that God

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26 See Avella, 336-338.
27 See Avella, 319-320 and 338.
29 Matovina, 38.
30 See Matovina, 66.
33 Michael Jones-Correa and David Leal found that active Catholic churchgoers generally participated in politics more and this conclusion applied to both Hispanic and non-Hispanic Catholics. The reason lay with the simple fact that the Church performed "a particularly central function for civic instruction and engagement," especially for Hispanics who, unlike non-Hispanics are involved in few associations outside the Church and tend to be politically mobilized through the Church. Michael A. Jones-Correa and David L. Leal, "Political Participation: Does Religion Matter?", Political Research Quarterly 54, no. 4. (December, 2001): 760-764.
sees the people there as not inferior to their former colonial or post-colonial masters, but as human beings and that carries socio-political import for liberation.34

How can the Catholic Church promote authentic conspiracy among its diverse groups to come together as a plural, yet one Church, without resorting to a false unity based on a faith mediated through a cultural hegemony instead of theology? How can this be done on all levels theology is done, popular, pastoral, and academic, so that all people may help realize it? The theology of vocation where all are seen to possess a vocation of some kind from God could serve as one potential working solution. However, the problem with the theology of vocation in the Church is that within industrialized nations, an understanding of vocation has an understandable bias to formal types of lay and clerical vocation. For example, in their document Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord, the Catholic Bishops of the United States define ministry “in its broadest sense, as service (diakonia) and is the means for accomplishing mission in the communion of the Church. It is a participation in and expression of Christ’s ministry. Within this broad understanding of ministry, distinctions are necessary.”35 From there, the document proceeds to distinguish between lay and ordained ministry. So far, the document appears to embrace what I am articulating, but later that same document addresses how bishops ought to guide the work of lay ecclesial ministers in the Church in the following way. “[A bishop’s] guidance can take a range of forms in the life and structure of a particular church: establishing standards for formation and evaluation, providing opportunities and resources for continuing education and professional development, formalizing job descriptions and establishing appropriate processes to authorize those beginning a lay ecclesial ministry, and supporting the resolution of conflict situations between lay ecclesial ministers and the ordained.”36 Theologians who are experts on ministry speak in a similar way. H. Richard McCord, in a series of responses to Co-Workers, speaks of the need to institutionalize lay ecclesial ministry in order that the Church formally authorize its existence and continued sustenance in the Church.37

This bias for the formal extends to the universal call to holiness from which a theology of vocation is drawn. In Co-Workers the Catholic bishops define this call as something lay men and women find “in each and every one of the world’s occupations and callings and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, form the context of their existence.” Notice what comes first.38

Now, this bias toward the formal, or institutionalized forms of ministry and work is not a problem in itself. We in the Church want well-formed, well-educated ministers, both lay and clerical. Or, if people cannot do ministry for the Church full-time, we want them to be in formal, institutionalized jobs and careers so that they can sustain themselves materially so they can minister when and where they can. The recent scandals in the Church will push it for still more formalization of ministry. However, it is a problem insofar as many Catholics around the Global South lack regular access to ministry, but despite this are not cut off from the Church. They often practice what Ondina González and Justo González identify as “private Catholicism.” Historically, for millions of Catholics in Latin America, “it was the only presence the Catholic Church had in their lives.” This phenomenon was defined by González and González, “as Catholics [who] had to find their own way without the guidance—and restraints—provided by official representatives of the church, [and so] they often turned to symbols and rituals that grounded them in the familiar past.”39 This phenomenon is not simply a Latin American phenomenon, but a global one.

34 Lewin L. Williams, Caribbean Theology (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 200, 211.
36 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 23.
38 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 8.
where institutional structures of the Church fall short due to lack of resources and/or the availability of educated clergy and lay ministers to serve the people. Then, ministry and the practice of faith by necessity must become informal. One's spiritual director can be one's own mother or wise elder. Catholic faith is communicated and practiced through the many manifestations of popular religion found worldwide. Here, the theology of vocation, if it insists on its bias toward formal, institutional ministry, cannot apply. In the Global South, informal ministry often accompanies informal forms of economics and government, which function without official, formal recognition, though at their best, they are completely legitimate in their practice. Therefore, a broader category is needed within theology: namely commitment. Commitment may be the core idea in a theology of vocation that can unite all levels, popular, pastoral, and academic, and by extension the diverse peoples of the Church to conspire to “breathe together” as one. It can because commitment is a theological concept with a long pedigree in Church history, and has often been critically retrieved to address contemporary challenges to the Church.

Gustavo Gutiérrez is an excellent example of one such retrieval. He speaks of the Christian life first as a commitment. He writes that “The Christian community professes a ‘faith which works through charity.’ It is—it should be—effective charity, action, and commitment to the service of others.” Theology follows as the “second act” to understand this commitment to God and neighbor. At face value, Gutiérrez appears to challenge to Anselm’s traditional definition of theology as faith seeking understanding which, in his contemplative environment, comes first. This is not the case. Gutiérrez is critically retrieving something from Anselm.

Anselm confirms Gutiérrez’s insight, and therefore shows us that this idea of commitment is neither just a common nor familiar term when one examines the traditional, accepted basis for doing theology on any level: faith seeking understanding. Here, Anselm argues that “the prerequisite for a correct understanding of the faith is ‘solitas fidei’ [‘firmness of faith’], acquired through ‘sapientiae et morum gravitas’ [‘wisdom and serious comportment’].” In other words, he is describing a commitment. Otherwise, “Theology without the practice of the faith is therefore not possible.” While Anselm would understand this within the context of a monastic foundation, the practice of a “firmness of faith” with “wisdom and serious comportment” while best done with the full intellectual and pastoral leadership and resources of the Church in easy reach, can nonetheless be done anywhere in the Church… even on an informal and popular level. Gustavo Gutierrez’s statement that theology begins as a commitment is not the usurping of Anselm, but the critical retrieval of something properly basic to articulating how theology can be practiced as faith seeking understanding on any level of the Church.

It is clear to most Catholics that the election of Pope Francis has signaled the proper recognition of the Global South in a global Church, demonstrating how the Church has become catholic in actuality. Less acknowledged is the means of how to unite these people on all levels, including the informal, popular forms of faith where many Catholics live. A “theology of commitment” properly basic to how we practice the faith in common, can enable us to conspire to breathe together as Church, not fragment into “ethnotheologies,” and attain this unity without the intentional or unintentional creation of a dominant or hegemonic cultural mediation of the faith that imposes unity from without instead of generating it from within the Church, theologically. This effort can, in turn, develop ways to formalize and bring closer into the institutional fold those who have no option save that of the informal practice of their faith. What stands before us is nothing new, but is a reminder, critically retrieved, of a foundational quality of vocation. A quality with which we can conspire together as different peoples who communicate different instantiated communications of Catholic faith and practice, and use those different instantiated expressions of faith to become, with God’s help, more truly one Church.

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41 Leinsle, 81.
42 Leinsle, 81