



KINGDOMS OF THIS AGE: WHO ARE THEY?

By Wilfred Hahn



What have been the most durable and successful human organizations in history? Was it the Roman Empire, or Britain during its heyday as a world power, or some other entity? Possibly. But what about today? Who would be the candidates?

This makes for an interesting topic. While it is true that nations still account for the largest civil organizations of humans, such organizational arrangements have been fast changing their form.

In our time, of course, the heft and power of a nation is mostly now defined through economic size and trade. The statistic of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), unreliable as it may be, has become the all-important metric. Using that gauge, the top human organizations in the world would be the United States, China and arguably also the European Union (not necessarily in that order).

Crucially, the Bible rarely uses “economic might” as the defining criteria of a nation’s or kingdom’s strength (though there are exceptions, such as references to Babylon the Great). In the Bible, a nation’s power is more often related to the size of its population, and by extension, the size of its potential army.

From a soteriological (salvation) point of view, the same perspective applies. God’s Son Jesus Christ, died for each of us individually. We are saved individually ... not organizationally ... or as a group.

Today we see a number of powerful systems and organizations that are concentrating worldwide power—religious, economic and political. As mentioned,

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the forms of human organization have been fast changing. Consider the following four types:

1. Nationhood & Cities. There are some 196 nations in the world today, not including protectorates and territories. Despite the world's advanced state of globalism and globalization, the numbers of nations are increasing, not decreasing. While not all nations represent homogeneous societies, by and large, they do represent an organization of human activities, trade and international relations. This can also be the case for individual cities and city-states. A greater portion of the world's population is living in ever larger agglomerations of cities. More than half of the world's population today lives in urban areas.

2. Corporations. The multinational organization is certainly a very strong and relatively new form of human organization. These have strict hierarchies and highly defined "pecking" orders. Obedience is highly and lavishly rewarded, especially among the higher executive echelons. The largest corporations can have power even on the scale of what the Bible calls "kingdoms."

Indeed, some large multinational firms have more employees than many nations have citizens. Of the top 100 economic entities in the world today, corporations make up 37 of these, the rest being nations according to a report by the Transnational Institute.¹ Lately,

just one of these, Apple Corporation, had \$178 billion (USD) of cash on its balance sheet (a hoard greater than the annual economic output of more than 150 countries). It may very well prove to be the first company valued in excess of \$1 trillion. Time will tell. "Tomorrow's state will have as much in common with the 21st-century multinational company as with the 20th century state."²

The corporate structure was and is a useful legal invention. Nevertheless, seen collectively, the multinational phenomenon has done much to commercialize the world and establish common materialistic values and powerful behavioral systems.

3. Global Non-Governmental Organizations and Globalism. For the first time in human history, organizations of nations and unions have formed spanning the entire globe. The first of these emerged in the late 1800s. Today we have many transnational organizations, as they are called. The United Nations would be the most noteworthy of the many that now exist—i.e. the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, International Criminal Court and a host of others. All of these seek to organize human responses, activities and policies.

4. Religion. Religions can also represent large obedience structures that verge on being veritable kingdoms ... particularly the large organized institutions. Other faiths may only be small, independent,



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unstructured cells. The organized institutional types of religions and denominations may enforce fealty, ecclesiastical hierarchies, membership, beliefs ... and also political actions.

We could add to this list of four. All of these large organizational “kingdoms” are of this world. These are the “kingdoms” that are referred to by the Psalmist: “The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, ‘Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.’ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them” (Psalm 2:2-4).

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Transcending Them All

Actually, yes. It is the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Surprised? This “human organization” is the longest global and most storied of any that have ever existed in mankind’s history. That fact itself draws many.

There are other organizations that have existed much longer; however, they are not human. Here we think of Satan and his hierarchy of fallen angels. It is definitely a hierarchical organization. As well, the Church could be considered. It would be defined as all those who are saved (and whose names will be found in the Book of Life), who are organized as the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit. As of the present time, the true spiritual Church (which would undoubtedly include some saved people who identify themselves as Roman Catholic) is quite small as far as world organizations go. It would be impossible to estimate how many members the Church has in the world today. Suffice it to say that it would be small ... fitting the description found in Revelation 3:8, which says it is of “little strength.”

The Earthly Reign of the Roman Catholic Church

Let’s next recount each of the four organizational types we have listed, paralleling them to the Roman Catholic Church. In doing so, we are here examining “human organizations” and will deal only with facts. This is not an exercise to bash individual Catholics. You, dear reader, can be the final judge and form your own opinion.

Firstly, the RCC qualifies as a sovereign. It today carries sovereignty in world affairs. Even though Vatican City itself qualifies as a country, it is actually the Holy See itself that is the sovereign. This may be somewhat difficult to grasp. Though the Holy See and the Curia find their physical headquarters in the Vatican (this being a city state), it is the See itself that carries this distinction irrespective of having a country. Even if there were no Vatican City, the RCC would still be considered a sovereign by the nations of this world.

Also to note is that the Pope is the absolute king of the Vatican city state. This is interesting as there are very few absolute monarchies left in the world today. The only others are 5 Islamic countries (Brunei, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, United Arab Emirates) and Swaziland. Moreover, the RCC (by virtue of the nation of the Vatican) has its own official currency, the euro. Its coins are imprinted with “Citta Del Vaticano.”

Largest and Longest Global Multinational Ever

Though the multinational corporation has really only sprung to world prominence and power over the last 75 years or so, its history does go back several hundred years. Even before the invention of the legal entity of a corporation as a “person,” there were global organizations. The Roman Catholic Church qualifies as the longest surviving of these. We draw some parallels here to the modern corporation for the purpose of illustration only.

Modern-day “for-profit” corporations organize their structure and behavioral rules in order to achieve success. Largely, these organizations use monetary incentives to drive desired behavior, as well as achieve a differentiated or ex-

clusive business franchise that will bring success (i.e. profits, expansion, growth and power).

The Roman Catholic Church is also a multinational corporation in this sense (not here at all referring to the many thousands of corporate entities that the RCC owns and controls around the world). To be clear, unlike the commercial corporations of the world, many of the RCC’s branches and entities are not interconnected by legal corporate structures. All the same, it remains that the Roman Catholic Church is a multinational corporate obedience structure, that orchestrates and controls these many and varied entities around the world.

Consider the powerful franchise that the RCC has established for itself. The RCC has a potent “business model.” Firstly, it claims a corner on salvation. It “markets” that only through its franchise (exclusive access and sacraments) can people attain salvation. It denies that any other church or religion has this power.

It also markets other product lines globally—dispensations, the ability to remove souls out of Purgatory, the “mystery” of transubstantiation (its great and exclusive sacrament), which only its executives (ecclesia) can perform. This latter franchise distinctive is a so-called “miracle,” though there is no visible manifestation of any miracle.

Down through the centuries, these exclusive franchises of the RCC (among others) have generated much revenue as well as donations. A donation demands nothing in return. Revenue, by contrast, derives from a service or a sale. It would be correct to differentiate.

There is one more facet to the success of the Roman Catholic kingdom on earth. It faces no inheritance issues or



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Jeffrey Bruno
from New York
City, United
States

(theoretically) the dangers of nepotism, or unruly extractive shareholders (though there were some popes and priests that misused the church's wealth). Its amassing of wealth and property over the centuries has continued almost unfettered (though certainly impacted in America of late due to large settlements in its sex scandals).

Just how wealthy is the Roman Catholic Church overall? No one knows. To this point, in most countries (certainly so in North America), religious organization do not have the same disclosure requirements as do business corporations. Though this is gradually changing somewhat, it remains that some religions are able to maneuver their funds in secret (i.e. the Mormon Church, the Church of Scientology ... etc.). Of one thing we can be sure: The Roman Catholic Church is the wealthiest, non-sovereign organization in the world. Its wealth is simply incalculable.

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durable global organization of all time. And, it has the most powerful Chief Executive Officer of them all—the Pope. By way of the brand-enhancement of “infallibility” and the claim of being Vicar of Christ (which means the very replacement of Christ on earth), this CEO of the RCC is indeed powerful and can demand obedience like no other.

Supernational Influence

The Vatican also has diplomats that participate or act as observers in virtually every global non-governmental organization that exists. These would be too many to list in this article. For example, the Holy See has had permanent observer status at the United Nations since 1964. According to *Wikipedia*, “In that capacity, it has the right to attend all sessions of the United Nations General Assembly, the United Nations Security Council, and the United Nations Economic and Social Council to observe their work. Accordingly, the Holy See has established permanent observer missions in New York and in Geneva and has been able to influence the decisions and recommendations of the United Nations.” Again, interestingly, the RCC even sends participants to the Organization of Islamic Nations.

What to make of this? A religion that qualifies as a nation, a world sovereign; that also has its own currency and boasts of the extent of its real estate holdings?

Organizational Obedience

The success of the kingdoms (human organizational structures) of this age is

dependent on obedience. However, these are all under the subjection of Satan, who Apostle Paul calls the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is also similarly called the “prince of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30). His kingdom or power base is depicted as the highest of earthly mountains.

Whereas Christ has been “exalted to the highest place” in the Kingdom of God (Philippians 2:9), the world of this age is in obedience to and exalts the “god of this age.” “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4).

Points to Ponder

When Satan tried to barter for Christ’s obedience with the promise of an earthly kingdom, Jesus replied, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only’” (Matthew 4:10).

The Kingdom of God is not of this world (or age). Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place” (John 18:36).

Therefore, we are obedient to the Lord God, whose kingdom at this time is found in the hearts of men and women upon earth. “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing” (1 Corinthians 2:6). As Daniel tells us: “Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers

will worship and obey him” (Daniel 7:27).

At a practical level, as Jesus said to the scribes, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” (Matthew 22:21). We are subjects of civil powers. However, as for the Christian faith, Jesus Christ said that His kingdom was not of this world. He that had not even a place to lay his head or a property to call his home (Matthew 8:20), most certainly did not lay the foundation of a world kingdom ... one that would even have its own currency.

At the same time, disobedience to God is a hallmark of the last days. Second Timothy 3:1-5 mentions that the perilous times of the last days are characterized by, among other things, “disobedience to parents” and “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” Not loving God is disobedience since “This is love for God: to obey his commands” (1 John 5:3).

Though living on earth, how then must we be obedient? Paul gives us a ready answer: “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ. And we will be ready to punish every act of disobedience, once your obedience is complete” (2 Corinthians 10: 3-6). ^{MC}

ENDNOTES

- 1 <http://www.tni.org/briefing/state-power-2014>
- 2 Bobbitt, Philip. “How market-states can meet global challenges.” *Financial Times*. September 7, 2004.