Part 1 of 1: What the New Pope Means for the Future of the Church
with Darrell L. Bock, J. Lanier Burns, Leopoldo Sánchez, and J. Scott Horrell
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Welcome to The Table, where we discuss issues of God and culture. And our topic today is the selection of the new pope and the relationship between Protestant churches and Catholic churches worldwide. It's an important topic because there are so many of both groups in the world. And everybody is keeping an eye on what's happened recently in Rome in relationship to the replacement of a pope who retired – the first time that's happened in 600 years.

So we've got a little bit of an unusual situation. And so this is a new selection, and it's also significant because, in this case, the pope comes not from Europe but from the New World, in fact, from Latin America. So we have assembled a panel of experts to discuss this with us. I have Scott Horrell, who teaches in systematic theology here at Dallas Seminary to my left.

And to my right is Lanier Burns, who also teaches in systematic theology. Lanier is a senior professor. It's a designation I share in New Testament with him. And Scott is professor of systematic theology. And then our guest, by Skype, is Leopoldo Sánchez, who teaches systematic theology at Concordia Seminary. So I'm not allowed to put a single foot wrong because I have all these systematicians next to me who will it together if I blow it apart.

We're pleased to have you all with us. And, Leopoldo, I'd like to begin with you. Talk about your reaction when you heard not just that a pope was selected, but that a pope was selected from Latin America. And tell them your own background as you respond to that question.

Well, an Argentinian pope. I was born in Chile – so just next door – and I was raised in Panama. So I reacted to the news at a very visceral level, if I may say so. It wasn’t a kind of systematic, that final reaction at first. And there was a bit of joy in the sense that it was good to see the church, who calls itself Catholic – capital C – also express in her own leadership and face to the world, a Catholic's mostly global face, and so a Latin American pope.

So my first reaction, I think was one of joy with a little bit of a smile maybe. And at the same time, a reaction of sadness. There was even a little bit of a tear coming out. Because being from Latin America and understanding the history of the presence of Roman Catholicism in the continent, I have family who are Catholics, whom I love dearly.
And so the election of a new pope also reminded me of the divisions that we have in the one holy Christian and apostolic church, very visible a division. And so it was both a moment of joy, but also a moment of sadness. So that was my initial reaction to the election of the new pope.

**Darrell Bock:** Okay. Scott, I'm going to start with you, since you've ministered some time in Latin America. And, again, you might tell people a little bit of that background as you answer the question. What was your response to the election of Francis I?

**Scott Horrell:** Well, my background, Darrell, is starting out in the city of Porto Alegre, which is the closest large city to Buenos Aires and to Argentina, in Brazil. And so the population was largely Italian, German, Russian, more so than what we might think is Spanish and Portuguese, or Indian for that matter. And a number of times I was at the large Roman Catholic Seminary in Porto Alegre, and they would come to join me.

Even in our church there was an openness, a rather extraordinary openness back in the early '80s in that regard. Then moving to Sao Paolo and teaching across the street from the huge Pontifical University, we had quite a lot of rubbing shoulders with – not always amicably, but usually so – Roman Catholics in the larger city of Sao Paulo too. So there's a history there.

When I heard that now Pope Francis the First was put in place, I was impressed by the wisdom of the Catholic Church in so doing. And not only do you have what, 41 percent, more or less, of the Roman Catholic population worldwide in Latin America, but here's a man who has been sympathetic toward a number of different groups, evangelicals as much as any.

And when those, like our own Luis Palau who's representatively evangelical, rejoice when this man that they prayed with has been appointed pope, that's a good sign that there will be, hopefully, fruitful relations in the future.

**Darrell Bock:** Yeah. I'm going to read some of the material that Luis gave Christianity Today when they asked him about this, because he is very, very close to the pope and has worked with him on many, many matters. Lanier, you and I are just average everyday Anglos who have hung out here in the United States for the most part, no extensive overseas ministry. Some overseas experience of course. So what was your take on the selection of Francis I?
Lanier Burns: Well, I don't bring the expertise on the ground that Leo and Scott do. But my doctor of philosophy research was on the Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation in early modern and modern times. And so my approach to all of this is mainly theological and historical. My reaction to Francis I's election – Jorge – my response to his election, like Leo's, is very mixed.

Number one, I think he's the model of a servant leader, and I was deeply impressed by some of his gestures as pope, which can be suffocatingly hierarchical. So I think he is a humble man, and I'm very encouraged by that. I also feel the need to have cooperation internationally, because the Catholic Church is conservative on family values and certain ethical issues. And we simply have to stand together at that level.

However, when we speak of dialogue and we speak of relationships, I'm skeptical until I hear the details. Because if we're talking evangelism and we're talking church growth, I feel that most people don't understand the inner doctrinal workings, the hard system that is Roman Catholicism. So I'm mixed with Leo.

Darrell Bock: Yeah. It is a very, very complex kind of discussion for a variety of reasons. Let me just – and since we're talking about Francis in particular to start off with – let me just read to you some of the things that Luis Palau had to say about his election. This was in response to a question – well, actually, this is an interview that dates back to March 14th of 2013.

And this is in response to a question. "What was your reaction when you heard that Bergoglio – and I probably didn't pronounce that very well – had been selected as pope?" He says, "It was exciting because of Argentina, because of his personality and because of his openness towards evangelical Christians. I got kind of emotional, simply having known him.

"He came in second to Pope Benedict XVI in the last election –" that's something we're not supposed to know, by the way, but apparently it's public knowledge – "and pulled out of the vote voluntarily, because he thought, 'We shouldn't be doing this vote after vote.'"

"I said to him when I saw him afterwards, 'What a pity. I thought I would be able to say I know the pope as my friend.' I said he'd probably get elected the next time. But he said, 'No, I'm too old.' It was a total surprise because I also thought he was past the age. Since last time he didn't win, I figured he wouldn't win this time. But here we go. He got elected. He's not too old."
And so he talks about his personal friendship with Francis and says, "You know he knew God the Father personally the way he prayed. The way he talked to the Lord was a man who knows Jesus Christ and was very spirituality intimate with the Lord. It's not an effort for him to pray. He didn't do reading prayers. He just prayed to the Lord spontaneously. It's a sign that good things will happen worldwide in the years of his papal work."

So here's Luis Palau, probably the most visible or one of the -- certainly, one of the most well-known evangelicals in Latin America, who knows Francis and knows of him, and has prayed with him and has worked with him and their fellow Argentineans, which means that they've rubbed shoulders in much the way that you, Scott, have rubbed shoulders with Catholics from Brazil.

And so, from that standpoint, it seems to me we have insight with someone who may well know him. We have a little bit of the details, to use your phrase, Lanier. Leo, what -- as you hear Luis talk about this figure, what insight do you gain about Francis?

Leopoldo Sánchez: Well, yes, I have sort of an approach to the pope in terms of the person of Jorge, the person of Bergoglio on the one hand. But also an approach of the person of the pope as one who sits in the office of pope and all that that represents. Lanier was talking about the historical and the theological complexities of the office.

And so, as a Lutheran, listening to Luis as a Latin-American Lutheran, on the one hand, the Latin-American in me says, "Jorge Bergoglio," and all this means in terms of the openness and the wisdom, as Scott put it, of the Catholic Church in reaching out to a more liberal community. And, as a Lutheran, then I also have questions.

Darrell Bock: You got your hammer ready, huh, your hammer with the 95 Theses on the door.

Leopoldo Sánchez: Yes. I mean you have the whole history. And even more than that, Luther's statements and the Lutheran Confessor statements on the pope as one who has the marks of antichrist, which is not a very popular language to be using at a time when you're kind of excited to have a pope from Latin America.

Darrell Bock: Right.
Leopoldo Sánchez: But you know it's not something said against the person of Jorge and what that represents in terms of the church's openness to the world. But it's something directed more to the office of pope when it sets itself above the Word of God, which was one of the criticisms of the reformation against the office of papacy, the office. And so I have a mixed reaction again.

On the one hand, I see the possibilities, and I can see how the Holy Spirit through the Word can bring reform to the Catholic Church. And, of course, that is up to the Holy Spirit. We dare not put aside the power of the Word to accomplish things everywhere. And, at the same time, I don't get too overly excited because I do want to hear more, like Lanier says, about what a common witness to Christ would look like.

As you know, the Catholic and the Lutheran Church have been involved in dialogues for quite some time. In those dialogues, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod or the International Lutheran Conference, which whom the Missouri Synod has some association, have not really been invited in the past. It's been mostly the Lutheran World Federation and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

And so what does dialogue look like? Which Lutherans are you speaking to? A couple of days ago, we had a visit from the representative of the Office of Ecumenical Affairs of the United States Catholic Bishops Conference. That was the first time in a long time that we had the official representative come to have some initial talks with the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

And they came here to Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, and what was interesting about that is that it seems that they are pitching a broader tent for dialogue. And part of the reason, I think – going back to what Lanier was saying – is where we are together on some moral issues.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has gone the way of allowing, for example, for same-sex unions, the ordination of homosexual pastors, which is not the case in the Missouri Synod. So I think the Catholic Church sees a connection there on that moral witness and are now having kind of a broader tent for their dialogues, and so we're now being included.

Darrell Bock: And now, just to make clear for everyone, you are a Lutheran, but you're in the Missouri Synod part of Lutheranism, is that correct?
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**Leopoldo Sánchez:** Yes. So we sort of divided, even within the Lutheran family. We have friends and families, some of whom are ELCA, others LCMS Lutherans. So we have our own issues there in terms of dialogue with one another. I imagine with evangelicals you have similar things.

**Darrell Bock:** Oh, absolutely.

**Leopoldo Sánchez:** And now, then you have to talk about discussions with the Roman Catholic Church. So when Pope Francis was elected, I was excited like Luis about all the person of Jorge Bergoglio represents and what that can bring to the church. And, at the same time, I was sad because all these positions among Lutherans – among Lutherans and Catholics came up as well. And it's an opportunity to think about what it means to be the one church. What does it mean to contribute towards unity? Where should we stand together?

**Darrell Bock:** Right. Well, we're going to transition and talk about the Catholic Church in just a second. But I want to finish on Francis for a moment if we may. What signals have you seen Scott and Lanier – and I'll start with Scott – on the character of this pope and what drives him, what he's concerned about?

**Scott Horrell:** Well, that's one thing that's attractive Darrell, in that at least through his sister we're told that his father moved out of Italy to escape fascism in part. It was back in the early 1930s. And as he, the oldest of five children, got into high school, began increasingly – he got to be about age 21, I understand – wanted to move into the Jesuit Order. And so that's that interesting mixture. The Jesuit Order, in itself, is fascinating because they’ve been the kind of Rottweilers and Navy Seals of the Catholic Church since the Counter-Reformation.

Yet, he has taken a more conservative stand, theologically and, yet, something of a liberation sympathy in terms of the way he lives. And so the fact that he would, as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, live in a fairly small room and make his own bed each day and take the subway or the bus to his headquarters, that he would live humbly, is really quite remarkable.

He, on Holy Tuesdays – or Holy Thursdays, excuse me – would go out to wash the feet of prisoners or of even newborn babies – and pregnant mothers – that were born out of wedlock. He has shown a remarkable and genuine desire to identify with the poor and minister to the needy. And he's done so in a way that has yet maintained a firmness within the Roman Catholic camp of theology.
This, at a time when the great majority of Latin-American Roman Catholicism moved toward a liberation theology and, quite frankly, was letting go of many of the cardinal doctrines of the faith. May I give you a little background there?

_Darrell Bock:_ Yeah, sure.

_Scott Horrell:_ You have a Catholic faith in Latin America that was largely identified with the bourgeoisie, the military, and the military dictatorships. Through the centuries, a number of attempts to create a third way were unsuccessful in the 1920s, 1930s, a third way between Marxism and absolute atheism on one side, and the status quo Catholic Church on the other. 1955 brought about the first Episcopal all Latin-American Conference, and that was in Rio de Janeiro and, really, that event amounted to nothing.

But with Vatican II, from 1962 to 1965, you have – representative numbers of the Roman Catholic met, of course in Rome, for this major event, this modernization of the Roman Catholic Church, and that created the communication links all over Latin American, already the largest constituency of Roman Catholics in the world.

And so out of that was birthed a liberation theology that in the second major Episcopal Conference, called CELAM II, in Medellin, Columbia, exploded into what became known as liberation theology. And the 1970s then, you have some of the theologians writing as though Jesus were essentially Che Guevara or Fidel Castro in Palestinian clothing, and almost nothing was said of his deity.

So it was a young John Paul II that was elected as pope in 1979, and months later, came the Puebla Conference, all-Episcopal Conference of Latin America. And it was then that John Paul II, and right behind him, Joseph Ratzinger, began to lay down strictures and limitations to what this liberation theology could look like.

And they, in fact, walled in liberation theology, theologically, on many sides, such that some like a John Sobrino would actual apologize to the pope, saying, "You're right. We've emphasized so much the humanity of Jesus, we have not adequately stressed his deity as well." So you have this third conference at Puebla in 1979.
The next conference occurs in Santa Domingo in the early '90s. And it is there that with the washout of Catholicism into especially Pentecostalism and the hostility created between neo-charismatics, in particular, and the Catholic Church. That's where the barriers really went up. You had in Brazil, on television even, certain figures in one well-known situation putting a statue of Mary on the platform, speaking against it and then kicking it off into the audience, calling the pope the antichrist, and many things like this. So John Paul the II, in CELAM IV in Santa Domingo and the Dominican Republic, basically said, "The pagan traditional religions are God's form of pre-evangelism to bring people into the church. The real problem are the evangelicals." And, at that point, the walls went up. No longer was there dialogue or cooperation between even the major Protestant denominations and Catholicism. There was like an iron wall that came down between them. So the fifth Episcopal Conference was in 2007, again back in Brazil. And it is this Jorge Mario Bergoglio that was one of the main articulators of what is called the Aparecida Document. A lady who has appeared, or Nostra Signora, Aparecida is the patron Saint of Brazil, just like our Lady of Guadalupe is of Mexico. But this document said nothing against evangelicals; in fact, seemed again to be opening the door to some kind of dialogue going on there. So in terms of Latin American Roman Catholicism, the election of now Francis I as pope is an open door that had been closed for at least 15 years, toward again at least talking together and moving on from there. So there's a lot about this pope from a Latin American perspective, even an evangelical perspective that is encouraging.

**Darrell Bock:** That's interesting. You know when I see how he is described and the way he lives, and his lifestyle and the concerns that he has for the poor, the way he reaches out, I'm kind of reminded of a male Mother Teresa. That here is someone whose instincts seem to be driven to be concerned for people who cannot, or are not in a position, socially, to speak for themselves. And that's very, very clear in the way he goes about doing what he's doing. Even the first masses and worship that he has led has shown to have an element of spontaneity about it as opposed to the formality that you're used to seeing from the Roman Catholic Bishop of Rome. And so all these things strike me as very interesting. Lanier, you have any observations about what you've seen from Francis?

**Lanier Burns:** Well, I think that Leo and Scott are very, very insightful. I think in the public square, I think that the Episcopal gatherings mentioned by Scott are unknown to most people.
Darrell Bock: That's right, yeah.

Lanier Burns: And I think another thing that is unknown to most people is the exquisite sensitivity of Catholicism when it looks in the mirror. I think every gesture, I think every little garment tweak, they think through that. And Jorge was a Cardinal and these are not ignorant men. And as a pope, he's a Jesuit, highly intelligent. So I think what you're looking at is a parade of details that are carefully orchestrated and choreographed, which are genuine for him. The thing that strikes me, at the public square level, is that reforming the Catholic Church really can be traced – or attempts at reform to Vatican II mentioned by Scott, ’62, ’64, convened by John XXIII, who was a very remarkable man, probably the most open of all recent popes. And I think John XXIII was quite open because the Catholic Church has been in crisis, a giant medieval organization trying to come to grips with modernity.

When you look at John Paul and you look at Benedict, you're looking at very, very conservative, intelligent people with great public relations. John Paul will no doubt be canonized. Now, with Jorge, I'm not competent to speak just yet, but I understand that he is of the same convictions. And so he's going to be very conservative, theologically, and he's going to try to hold the Catholic Communion together with gestures, and maybe not explicit communication.

Darrell Bock: Yeah. And I think that one of the challenges that the Catholic Church has is actually a challenge for all the churches, is that not only does it have to adjust to modernity, but it has to adjust to post-modernity. And when you're global, like the Catholic Church is, society in Europe is not society in Latin America, nor is it society in Asia. These are different social –

Lanier Burns: Nor is it society in North America.

Darrell Bock: North America, exactly right. And so what little experience I have with the Catholic Church is involved, primarily, in my time in Europe. I've spent four sabbaticals in Europe and Germany and three years doing doctoral work there, seven years of my adult life in the context of theological training in Europe.
And what strikes me – because I've spent some time in Latin America as well – is the difference between how Protestants and Catholics interact in Europe versus the way Protestants and Catholics have historically interacted in Latin America. It's two very different playing fields. It's almost like soccer and football, American football. Two very different games, two very different sets of rules.

In Europe, Christianity is – has become culturally post-Christian. Christianity has become very much minority in any form, evangelical or Catholic, highly secularized. And so you see this pull for Catholics and Evangelicals to work together in Europe, to represent God and morality in a culture that is moving away from that very direction very, very quickly. And so the dynamics are one thing.

Well, come to Latin America, the playing field's completely different. Here, you have millions and millions of Catholics who have been evangelized. You have a core Roman Catholic underneath to the culture that exists. You have evangelicals who have come into Latin America, who are gaining popularity in the hold. And the Catholic response has been for a long time with resistance as you described through the various conferences that you're talking about.

That's a different dynamic. And so one of the challenges is how do you – how do Christians representing all these different groups interact with each other, when even the playing field that they play on are so different from location to location. Leo, you have any observations to make, how this works? We're kind of transitioning into the relationship now between Catholics and evangelicals.

**Leopoldo Sánchez:** Well, let me affirm something that Scott spoke about. And that is the kind of social consciousness that we see in the new pope, given his experience with the harsh realities of poverty in Latin America, and so on, and also what Lanier talked about in terms of his conservative outlook on various moral issues and traditional church doctrine.

It is interesting that the new pope kind of brings a blend of that. He's described as conservative and yet socially conscious. And it is actually characteristic of global South Christians to be conservative on moral issues, like abortion or gay marriage, and yet more socially conscious at the same time in other areas.

**Darrell Bock:** So you're contrasting that to the way Christianity tends to manifest in North America, is that right?
Leopoldo Sánchez: That is exactly right. And Europe. One of the painful stories of division that has taken place most recently in Africa, is that we see African churches affiliated with more liberal Protestant Churches in the U.S. breaking fellowship with those who first brought the Gospel to them, precisely because there is a sense in which North America and Europe have misread the global South.

The new pope actually seems to have kind of a better handle on this you see, and so things like lack of access to education, things like poverty, the environment. These are issues that are experienced overwhelmingly by brothers and sisters in the global South. Your typical Christian, your typical brother and sister in the global South in not only poor, but usually very poor. It's not at all the picture of a Christian that we might have in North America.

And so this pope does open avenues for discussion on both issues that we can stand on in terms of the morally conservative outlook on life and at the same time this kind of socially conscious outlook on the church's mission. And so that can draw a number of conversation partners together.

I do want to say something briefly, Darrell, about the point made about Francis' humility. This has been brought up a number of times. I do want to say that this is very, very important, not only in terms of what this might mean for the Catholic Church and its public persona in the world, but also what it might mean for Lutherans, for evangelicals, for others, because we, too, have issues in our churches. We, too, have an opportunity to be humble.

I think Lanier used the word servant leaders. What are the areas in which we need reformation? What do we need to repent of? Where have we not – where have we been going out to bless people rather than getting their prayers for us first? So because the Catholic Church is so visible, it provides us an opportunity for reformation. What is it that we need to die for?

You know Luther speaks of the Christian life as a life of daily repentance. So the election of a new pope also opens a door for us to die to self in order to be raised to new life. And what does that need to be for us? So I want to just sort of bring some of the threads of the discussion together, which I have found very, very helpful from our guests here today.

Darrell Bock: Good. Thank you, Leo. Let's turn our attention to issues of the Catholic Church and evangelicals. And let's talk a little bit about the papacy, because this is a public podcast and people may or may not have background to understand the history of the papacy and where it comes from.
I'm going to say it this way. The pope has not always been with us. Would that be a fair thing to say that the history of the development of the papacy is part of the history of the development of the Roman Catholic Church? And even though sometimes the impression is that the pope has been in a succeeding line going all the way back to Peter – I've walked into the church in Rome where you can see the head of every pope since Peter up on the wall. In fact, the history of the papacy is quite complex. And I actually don't know who's the better person to discuss this. So I'm going to throw it out and see who jumps on it in terms of the history of the papacy. Why don't one of you tell us where the roots of that come from?

**Lanier Burns:** Roots of the papacy come from a form of hierarchical leadership that spanned the Middle East, Europe, the world really, when you look at how recent American type of democracy is, where votes really count. It's very hierarchical. And historians speak of the duel crown of Europe, which became a duel crown more and more as nation states came into the existence. But the pope was the big honcho. And there were lengthy centuries where Catholicism basically was Europe.

The papacy has – it hasn’t been completely static, but it has always been relatively absolute. There's a substratum that says the pope is inerrant. Another stream of Catholicism would say the church is inerrant, and those are primarily conciliarists. But he is the Vicar of Christ, who, according to Catholic dogma, received the keys of the kingdom from Jesus Christ, himself.

**Darrell Bock:** Through Peter.

**Lanier Burns:** Through Peter.

**Lanier Burns:** He sits on the Petrine seat in Rome. He's the bishop of Rome. It's magical turf. And so, in the public square, you have to understand the pope is an absolute ruler of an invisible empire. And I was – I guess I was very impressed in Francis I that he rode the minivan with his fellow cardinals after being elected pope. That was a little countercultural. Once you're pope, you are the Vicar of Christ for the Catholic Church. And people go through the church to get to Christ, as opposed to the universal priesthood of believers.
Darrell Bock: Yes, and the other thing that I think is interesting — it's the same kind of picture — is when he went to visit Benedict, he insisted that they pray together on the side pew on opposed to praying in the front of the sanctuary together or making a distinction between him and Benedict. These symbolic acts are full of significance in a culture that has been so terrifically hierarchical. The question that I'm really getting at is how far back do we go to get to the formation of the papacy formally.

Lanier Burns: That depends on who you talk to.

Darrell Bock: Okay.

Lanier Burns: Most of us would say Gregory 1, shortly after Saint Augustine.

Darrell Bock: Okay, so just so people — most people don't have the dates.

Lanier Burns: Sixth century.

Darrell Bock: Sixth century, okay.

Scott Horrell: Yeah, you have a plurality of leaders of churches in Alexandria and Ephesus, Constantinople, Rome. And, really, with Gregory 1, at least the Latin Church. The Western church begins to form after a strong — I shouldn't say begins to form it, but crystallizes that strong, strong hierarchy. So defecto, the pope is that word of God into this world.

But it is interesting; you have the Magisterium, which is the term for the collection of cardinals and the collective wisdom that Lanier was referring to as well. So it has been out of that body that many of the doctrines of the church has been formed. But the pope has been, in a way, over all of that. It is with Vatican I, however, back to about 1870, that the idea of the infallibility of the pope speaking ex cathedra, or from the throne, the idea of the infallibility of the pope was locked into place as dogma.

Darrell Bock: And it really a reaction to the things that were happening in modernism. And the church was trying to get control over that process.
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Scott Horrell: And there have been other doctrines since. It would surprise, I think, most of our listeners to know that in 1950 declared absolute dogma is the physical ascension of Mary, called the Assumption, the Assumption of Mary into heaven, that Jesus would never leave his mother to die a physical death. So that contradicts what we have of early church history. Yet, dogmatically, she's not only without sin, either in nature or in activity, but now, she did not die. She's taken into heaven as the queen of heaven, daughter of the Father, mother of the Son, spouse of the Holy Spirit. So there are some very strong doctrines that have locked into place prior to Vatican II – again, from 1962 to 1965 – that yet continue on. No Roman Catholic can negate those doctrines. They are as absolutely infallible as the Bible itself. In fact, many times even more so.

Darrell Bock: And so the structure of Roman Catholic theology is obviously – and the way it works with the Magisterium alongside the Bible, and the pope at the top of the pyramid, if I can say it that way, is one of the theological differences that separate Protestants and Catholics from one another. I do think it's interesting. Most people are not aware that many of the doctrines of the church, or at least a few of them, are very, very recent in terms of their being established as a central –

Lanier Burns: But there was a whole stream of tradition. I mean those were decisions that locked in. I mean Mariology and the papacy were – unh, that's medieval.

Darrell Bock: Right, right. Well, the roots go back, but they don't go back all the way. My understanding has been – you can correct me if I'm wrong – that first impulses to try and unify the church under a head started with figures like Ignatius and Irenaeus, who were trying to elevate the status of the bishops as a whole, and kind of get the church under some level of organization. And then it gradually evolved to the point that by the time we get to the 6th Century and Gregory, this has been formalized.

I remember reading – my son attended – attends, actually; he's still there in a master's program – St. John's University in Queens, which is a Catholic school. He had to take a theology course as an undergraduate of Catholic theology. And, interestingly, the book that they had him read was a history of the Catholic Church by Hans Kung [laughter], which I thought was an interesting little exercise, since Hans isn't exactly the most popular Catholic – or ex Roman Catholic, depending on your point of view – in the church.
But this history of the Catholic Church, which I read while Stephen was reading it, was interesting because the bulk of that book is actually the history of the papacy from Hans Kung's point of view, and how he felt that the papacy, as an institution, really became not a unifier of the church so much as a threat to the unity of the church, which I thought was an interesting way to think about the papacy. So it shows the tension.

I think if you look at how Scripture and the church are related to one another in Roman Catholicism versus Protestantism; you think about the role of Mary in Roman Catholic theology vis-à-vis Protestantism and what that means about the priesthood of the believers, et cetera, and you think about the role of the papacy, that those are probably in – I don't know if that's the Trinitarian roadblock between Protestants and Catholics, but certainly –

**Lanier Burns:** No, actually it's the cult of the saints as well.

**Darrell Bock:** There's the cult of the saints as well.

**Lanier Burns:** I think that Mariology is –

**Darrell Bock:** It's a part.

**Lanier Burns:** – is a major part.

**Darrell Bock:** Right. And so it's no accident that Francis gets up at the very first, after he asked for prayers about himself, and almost as quickly out of his mouth, there are illusions to Mary as he's speaking to the public there in St. Peter's. And I catch those when that happens. So we've been going on here for a while without letting you speak into this. What's your observation on the conversations that we're having here about the historic position of the church, of the Roman Catholic Church?

**Leopoldo Sánchez:** Well, I was thinking that most people would probably be shocked to know that the Lutheran Confessors would actually allow the pope to be the leader of the Western church, if he were to teach in accordance with the Word of God.

**Darrell Bock:** Hmm.
In other words, you could be a pope – one of the arguments the Lutheran Confessors made was that you could be a pope by human arrangement if you wanted to. You could have any form of government in the church because there was nothing divinely mandated in the Scriptures. And so you go ahead and organize yourself the best way you can, but don't say that this is somehow by divine design. And so that was kind of an issue.

The other one, too, was that the authority of the pope also extended over, actually, kingdoms of the world. And so there was kind of a political dimension to the pope's reign as opposed to only a Spiritual, pastoral kind of work on behalf of the sheep. And so Lutherans were actually, at first, willing to consider having the pope by human design and live with that arrangement.

But the issue was one of the Gospel, and so where is the Holy Spirit to be found. You can talk about apostolic succession all you want. But what happens when the teaching is not in accordance with the Scriptures, see. So, ultimately, you don't locate spirits in a particular office because people in office can err. But Luther would say, "You are located in the Word in God," which points to Christ and through which Christ speaks.

So this might be a little bit shocking, but the problem with the office of pope is the office sort of trying to set itself above the Word of God. But in terms of an arrangement, you could go hierarchical; you could go congregational. And this is another issue that Lanier sort of brought up. The Catholic Church, itself, is a little bit – I wouldn't say divided over this, but with Vatican II, you have kind of two intersecting conceptions of the church for Roman Catholics.

You have the hierarchical view and at the same time, you have this people-of-God view. It's more of a from below thing. Lanier also mentioned conciliar theory, which means that the bishops, speaking together with the Bishop of Rome, actually sort of define or articulate Catholic teaching, as opposed to just the pope giving it to you from above.

And then, furthermore, in Vatican II you have another tension in Catholicism, which is between those who want to push for aggiornamento, or the bringing up to date of the church, conceptualizing it. And these are the people who you might call progressives. The church doesn't move fast enough to change some things that should be changed. And, on the other hand, you have sort of those of the continuity party, as it were, more the resourcement, the going back to the sources.
How are we with the continuity with the church of all times and places? So someone like Jorge Mario, someone like Bergoglio, Pope Francis, certainly is more in the continuity party. So things like the dogma of papal infallibility, the Assumption of Mary, those are not going to go away anytime soon.

But, at the same time, he also comes into this tradition of concilliarity, of bringing up to date the church on issues that relate to this societal concern. So we'll have to see. One thing is to talk about what pope represents. Another thing is to talk about what will happen in the church under this pope.

**Darrell Bock:** That's right. Now, let me go back and just close a loophole for people who aren't that familiar with the Lutheran Church and Lutheran theology. When you speak of the Lutheran Confessors, who are you talking about? Who are those people?

**Leopoldo Sánchez:** Yes, thank you. So when we talk about Lutheran Confessors, we talk about those with Luther who wanted to confess the truth of the Word of God over against certain abuses that they saw in the Catholic Church, both theological and practical. And, typically, it's a reference to a set of writings that came together under the Book of Concord.

The Book of Concord, a number of confessional documents, where Lutheran theologians would confess the truth of Scripture over against some abuse that they would see. And so, there is a whole list of these documents compiled under what is called the Book of Concord.

Concord means unity or harmony, meaning that the Lutheran Confessors were not thinking about separating themselves from the Catholic Church. They were thinking in terms of uniting. They were thinking in terms of bringing everybody together.

**Darrell Bock:** They were Catholic progressives of their time.

**Leopoldo Sánchez:** Yeah, that's right. I mean they were actually concerned for the unity of the church. Even though today we think of Lutherans and Protestants as just kind of they're leaving a country in exile, never to come back again. Where, in reality, there was a big concern for the unity of the church with the early reformers.

**Darrell Bock:** Now, I don't mean to bore everyone, but where does Melanchthon's locis – where does it fit into all this? Does it fit in?
Leopoldo Sánchez: Yeah, Luther spoke highly of – Melanchthon was basically a layperson. Melanchthon was a layman who taught Greek and Latin, the classics, at the University of Wittenberg, and was a close associate of Luther, and was one of the ones who actually wrote down some of the initial documents that were presented before the emperor to define the Catholic teaching as it was understood and received by the Lutheran princes and so on. And so Melanchthon wrote – actually was kind of the first systematician. He was the first Lutheran systematician, and kind of put some of these confessions into a more – that final format, with the law, the different articles of faith. So Luther spoke rather highly of Melanchthon. And then other systematics came in the generation after Luther.

Darrell Bock: Um-hmm. So that group as a whole, those are the Lutheran Confessors.

Leopoldo Sánchez: The Lutheran Confessors, yes.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, very good. All right, well as we talk about – let's talk practically about what advice would you give to people who interact with Catholics on a regular basis as evangelicals, and how should we think about those relationships. As you said, there's theology from above, but there's also theology from below; there's theology as it's conducted between people. And sometimes these institutions and what people think about institutions can get in the way of the personal relationships that people have or have the potential to develop. So what would you say about that, Lanier?

Lanier Burns: I've had any number of Catholic friends, and I led a number of Catholic people to the Lord in the 1990s, particularly, and the early part of the 20th century. Our conversations are Christocentric. They are really bound by the system. And Catholics have the feeling that if they leave the system, they're going to hell. One of the things that I'm watching is Catholicism and globalism, because I think it depends on where you are in the world as to how you dialogue with Catholics. We've not talked about Catholic Anglican dialogue. We've had a heavy Lutheran input. But what's very interesting to me is Jorge, Francis I, has on his agenda greater dialogue with the Muslims. Wow. Let's see how that goes.
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But in my friends, and at a local level, we don't talk doctrine deeply. We wish them well as they go on their pilgrimages to Lourdes and that sort of thing. But that some of these people at the bottom level know Christ, participate in Bible-study fellowship and do other things, is beyond question.

_Darrell Bock:_ Yeah. I mean there's some people who really have their feet in two camps simultaneously. They have one foot in the Catholic Church, but they're hanging out and going to Bible studies that are led by evangelicals on the other. And that mixture produces an interesting condition and an interesting dilemma for everybody in terms of how people view their Christian identity. Scott, what do you have to –

_Scott Horrell:_ Well, I would agree with what Lanier's been saying. That you talk Christ and that salvation through grace, that we are indeed fully forgiven. It is interesting that in Latin America, at least in some of the larger cities, the methodology, even of Catholicism, has shifted around to singing evangelical songs, the television productions. It's the handsome people in the front, even with invitations of different kinds.

There is a lot of increasing – what do you say – copying or cloning, or at least paralleling what one or the other's doing. And, yet in my experience in Latin America, I found very few who were even conservative Catholics. And I found almost no – although the numbers were supposed to be great, but I was there 18 years – charismatic Catholics, almost none.

And the number of my students at different schools that I would teach in had been – even in seminaries – training for the Catholic priesthood and then really come – in reading the Bible, in certain cases, to come to Christ directly through faith. They tended to be the most dogmatically opposed then to the Roman Catholic Church. So as we talk about how do we talk with our Roman Catholic friends around the world, it varies so very greatly.

_Darrell Bock:_ Yeah. You're triggering my sense of my interaction with European Catholics that I had contact with. And so many Catholics in Europe are what I would call cultural Catholics as opposed to being church Catholics, by which I mean it wasn’t that they adopted an identification with all the theology of the Roman Catholic Churches.
It's just that it's almost like an ethnicity. They identified themselves, culturally, as Catholics, that if you pushed them they would say "I'm Catholic." But if you asked what that meant, you could anything and everything in terms of what you're hearing. So I think it is – I think it's right to think about. This is a very, very complex relationship.

Not only the relationship at the institutional level complex, but the relationship at the individual level or complex. Because people are on their own individual continuums in terms of where they fit in relationship to the faiths that are being presented to them. Leo, what would you have to say to us in terms of practical advice?

Leopoldo Sánchez: Well, I think the Catholics, they tend to see faith through church. That is to say you may never actually go to church, but you're still sort of part of the family because you were baptized there once. So I think Catholics approach faith mostly through the church, or what Lanier calls, perhaps a system. You know, you're kind of part of the system.

Darrell Bock: And denominational evangelicals can be the same kind – can do the same kind of thing.

Leopoldo Sánchez: Yeah. And so I think in the Lutheran tradition, and I think this might be true of evangelicals, too, is that we tend to approach things in terms of faith in Christ. Now, we don't want to detach that from church. We have to be careful on that that we don't make things so personal that now we're no longer part of the Body of Christ, but just kind of an individual Christian. So that's a challenge.

But let me give you kind of my take on that from below, and this is going to sound a little shocking coming from a Lutheran who actually tends to be pretty heavy on the doctrine. But I think often what happens among people, everyday people, is that they don't come at you with questions right away necessarily. They're looking for your life, the kind of life that you live.

And so if I can trust you with the little things, the things that have to do with welcoming the immigrant; if I can trust you with things like taking care of my family, then I can trust you with the big questions about God and Christ, and then maybe we can talk about Mary and how do you understand that. But global Christians, they tend to approach things from below.
So it's all about building relationships once again. And that will open the door then to talk about maybe other issues that have to do more with what we believe. So I think ecumenism, the promotion of a church's unity, can happen at a very local level, at the level of relationships, not always simply through statements that are put out by churches from above, which never kind of trickle down.

So that's maybe one way of thinking about promoting the church's unity at the local level. And get together with other pastors. How often do we get together with pastors with whom we don't agree on everything, to kind of talk through that? So I think people will follow what their church leaders do. If their church leader has no concern with getting together with other Christians to talk about the issues, they'll never do it.

So how do we model that concern for the unity of the church? How often do we pray that Christians will come together? How often do we pray that divisions will be healed? How often does that happen in the church service, you know? So how do we sort of lose the parochial way of thinking, and think ourselves more in terms of an expression of the universal church, you see, which is not only limited to our own denomination? But the church are all those who believe in Christ. And that, of course, includes more than Lutherans or evangelicals.

Darrell Bock: Now, I'm going to close with this last question. It's a hard question to ask at the end. But what would be your advice in the context of some people who say that any relationship or contact with the Roman Catholic Church should be shunned simply because of the system of what the Roman Catholic Church is, and that there is no – it's kind of the hard Protestant edge, if I can say it that way. How do you have people think through that?

Scott, you mentioned people who sometimes have come out of Catholicism, have come to Christ as evangelicals, and sometimes the people who are harshest against the Catholic Church are former Catholics who feel – if I can say it this way – betrayed that the Roman Catholic Church never drew them to Christ in the way that their subsequent experience has drawn them to Christ. And so they feel like it was an obstacle to their understanding as opposed to a benefit. What would you say?
Scott Horrell: Sometimes I think we – our different cultural expressions of Catholicism or experiences with Catholicism are not always true to the broader church and the church history itself. I often will go back to the doctrines of who Jesus Christ is as the eternal Son of God, and the doctrine of the Trinity and what we call the hypostatic union of two natures of Christ, and show that, in great part, even the Roman Catholic catechism today, the official doctrine of the church, corresponds largely with what we, as evangelicals, believe. There are those areas of the Magisterium, of Mary, of the authority of the church over the Word of God, so to speak, areas that we have to speak against. But there is a lot in common as well. And so as I negotiate with those who are Roman Catholic, I often – one thing that I do, as in Brazil, is I say, "Do you remember those great conversions of Augustine's and others in your church history?" I'll ask, "Why doesn't that happen anymore? Could it be that you've lost some of the original message that was proclaimed by the early church, that is now no longer being heard?"

Darrell Bock: Hmm. Lanier.

Lanier Burns: I think, in the modern technological world, you can't avoid it. I think that the average person with information's revolution technology is forced to come to grips with issues like interrelationships between religions. I've already received four lengthy articles, by e-mail, on the fact that Francis I is a sure sign of the antichrist because he's such a good guy.

Darrell Bock: Yeah. The candidate list always grows.

Lanier Burns: And so, my feeling is that I can't change people's opinion on something that's so deep seated. Usually it comes from an intensely Catholic/Protestant juxtaposition, like Ireland for example, or like Italy for example. And so I choose not to respond to that, and I try to offer a little bit of a more intelligent appraisal of why we have to relate to one another as human beings, with our differences. But, hey, who doesn't differ with other people.

Darrell Bock: That's right. Leo, what do you have to suggest in this regard?
Leopoldo Sánchez: Well, this may be an apocryphal story, but I'll say it anyways. It seems like when Pope Francis was a professor of theology, he was apparently asked once what he thought about divisions in the Catholic Church. And he told his student the problem here – or the solution rather – was for him to stay away from the church because if he would join it, he would make a mess of it.

And I think the bigger point here is that the real issue is not the division in the church, but sin. And we all, insofar as we are not faithful to the Word of God, we will sin. And we will speak at times even against that Word, or do things against what the Scriptures teach. So I think when we talk about ecumenism, there has to be a recognition that, as Luther would say, "We are saints and sinners at the same time.'

So we can, at times, be an obstacle to the unity of the church, by [break in audio] to speak. But, at the same time, from a pastoral point of view, not everybody's in the same place. If you've been really hurt by being in the Catholic Church or an evangelical church or a Lutheran Church, because we find also abuse of children in other –

Darrell Bock: Exactly right.

Leopoldo Sánchez: – right. If you've been really hurt and it's all raw, well you're not one of those who are going to be promoting the unity of the church at that point in time. Maybe later. So you have to meet people where they are at and be sensitive to their – to each of their individual experiences. At the same time, we still have Christ praying that the church be one. And so that's also part of what the Lord's prayer is. And if it is the Lord's prayer, then it should also be the prayer of his disciples regardless of what denomination they're a part of.

Darrell Bock: Well, I think that one of the great challenges, of course, of life in the modern world where knowledge is so free flowing and where the interaction is happening at so many levels, globally and otherwise, is to deal with this diversity, this religious diversity that we all face and have to engage at one level or another. And I just want to thank you all for taking the time to come on and speak with us about the new pope, about the relationship between the Catholic Church and evangelicals.
And, hopefully, those of you who have been listening have benefitted from the conversation and gotten some perspective on the background of not only the new pope but the way to think about engaging in what is a very, very complex world. So we thank you for joining us at The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture. And we look forward to seeing you again soon. Thank you.