

“RENDERING UNTO CAESAR?”
STATE REGULATION OF RELIGION AND THE ROLE OF
CATHOLICISM IN DEMOCRATIC TRANSITIONS AND CONSOLIDATION”

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INTRODUCTION

Both Adam Smith (1776, 740-41) and Alexis de Tocqueville (1835, 297f) observed long ago that religious activity seems greater where religion is more “free” from state regulation. In this spirit, the greater degree of separation between church and state often has been invoked as the reason for consistently higher religious participation in the United States than in Europe (Caplow 1985). However, it was only after the publication of Samuel Huntington’s seminal book, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (1991), that political and other social scientists have sought to systematically work out the mechanisms by which varying levels of church-state separation have contributed to enhanced religious vitality and religiously-based political activism, including as concerns the global Catholic Church and National Catholic Churches in individual countries. Huntington’s work was at the forefront of reexaminations of the role of religion in democratization, not least of all due to his observation that the “third wave” of democratization that began in 1974 (two earlier waves began in the 1820s and the 1940s) was “overwhelmingly a Catholic wave” (i.e., one that initially unfolded in predominantly Catholic countries). The 1990s through the present decade have been marked by an increase in scholarship devoted to exploring the role and compatibility of various religious traditions with the spread and consolidation of democratic practices, including Buddhism, Christianity (Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant), Hinduism, Islam (Sunni and Shia), and Judaism. Research in this realm in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, not surprisingly has focused overwhelmingly on the Islamic world, and whether Islam is compatible with democracy. Much less attention relatively speaking has been focused on the relationship between Catholicism and democracy, with the discipline of political science and the social sciences more generally lacking a comprehensive analysis of the Catholic Church’s impact on transitions to democracy and continuing involvement in post-transition democratic arrangements. My project is intended to serve as a corrective to this scholarly shortcoming.

PRINCIPAL RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The emergence and spread of what Huntington (1991) referred to as an overwhelming Catholic wave (see also Anderson, 2007; and Philpott, 2004) within the larger third wave of democratization is concisely captured by the democracy rankings that a think-tank known as

Freedom House puts together on an annual basis for every country of the world, and publishes as part of its annual *Survey on Freedom* (see www.freedomhouse.org). If we focus on the subset of 47 predominantly Catholic countries in which the populations are at least 50 percent Catholic (see Appendix 1 for a full listing), so as to isolate the potential impact of Catholicism on democratic transitions, the statistics are stunning: Whereas only 39 percent (total of 15) of Catholic countries could be classified as democratic in 1973 (the year immediately preceding the beginning of the third wave of democratization), by 2009 an extraordinary 67 percent (total of 31) Catholic countries had emerged as democracies, 30 percent (total of 14) could be classified as partially democratic, and only 2 percent (total of 1) was authoritarian. These figures are especially striking when considered in light of the democracy rankings for all countries within the international system, in which only 46 percent can be classified as democratic, 32 percent as partially democratic, and 22 percent as authoritarian.

One of the classic theologically-inspired explanations for the success of democratic transitions in predominantly Catholic countries during the third wave of democratization is the evolution of overall Catholic Church doctrine as concerns democracy as a preferred form of political governance (Sigmund, 1987). This point was made at a Loyola University Chicago conference held in Rome in 2008 by Father John Langan, Cardinal Bernardin Chair of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University. According to Langan (2008), these changes in doctrine – which filtered down to National Catholic Churches and served as the basis for action against authoritarian regimes – were highlighted by two documents that emerged from the Vatican II process, which opened under Pope John XXIII in 1962, and closed under Pope Paul VI in 1965: *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*) (1963), which is the papal encyclical “On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty” that was issued by Pope John XXIII; and *Gaudium et Spes* (*Joy and Hope*) (1965), the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” which was overwhelmingly approved by the Second Vatican Council. Yet although the doctrinal shift as embodied in these documents provided a principled and doctrinal basis for the Catholic Church’s evolving preference for democracy over other forms of governance, and was crucial to setting the stage for later events, the mere existence and spread of this doctrinal change is not capable of answering the following question: Why did only some National Catholic Churches oppose authoritarian states and hence contribute to transitions to democracy, while other National Catholic Churches remained either indifferent to or allied with those same authoritarian states to block democratic transitions?

My proposed answer to this question – and thus the principal research question of this project – is the need to explore how evolving church-state relationships, and more specifically the degree of church autonomy from state control, have affected the process of democratic transition and consolidation in the globe’s 47 predominantly Catholic countries during the third wave of democratization. Philpott (2007) points us in the right direction in demonstrating that National Catholic Churches with high degrees of autonomy from state control were more likely to embrace the pro-human rights and pro-democracy theology of Vatican II from the early 1960s, and therefore pressure authoritarian states to democratize. This was the case when the Spanish National Church played an important role in Spain’s transition to democracy, by deciding to withdraw its support from the military dictatorship of Francisco Franco. In contrast, the lack of such autonomy from state control meant that the Rwandan National Catholic Church not only failed to condemn the state-sponsored genocide against the Tutsi ethnic group while it was

occurring in Rwanda in 1994, but that portions of the Rwandan National Catholic Church hierarchy were subsequently found to be guilty of participating in the genocide.

An additional answer to the above question – and thus a secondary research question of my research project – is the need to focus on the degree to which religious competition exists within the nexus of the church-state relationship within predominantly Catholic countries. Drawing on the discipline of economics and rational-choice theory (including the work of Adam Smith), sociologists have developed what has become known as the “supply-side” theory of religious behavior (e.g., Iannaccone, 1991), arguing that religious “markets” ought to function like economic markets: Religious participation, including by National Catholic Churches in the political sphere, ought to be higher in “free-market” systems in which there is low state regulation of religion and therefore greater possibility for religious competition, as opposed to “closed-market” systems where certain religious institutions enjoy monopolistic or oligopolistic privileges (i.e., high levels of state regulation of religion), and therefore religious competition is curtailed. Supporters of the “supply-side” approach have proposed and tested measures that attempt to reflect the potential range of a state’s direct financial subsidy or benefit to a religious institution (and hence the degree of state regulation of religion), which in turn should either promote or inhibit monopolistic laziness, and therefore less or more of a proclivity on the part of the National Catholic Church to challenge state authority. For example, Chaves and Cann (1992) develop a measure based on answers to each of the following six questions: (1) Is there a single state church? (2) Is there official state recognition of some denominations but not others? (3) Does the state appoint or approve the appointment of church leaders? (4) Does the state pay church personnel salaries? (5) Is there a system of ecclesiastical tax collection? (6) Does the state directly subsidize, beyond mere tax breaks, the operating, maintenance, or capital expenses of churches? Gill (1994) adopts such a supply-side approach to explore why National Catholic Churches in 12 Latin American countries were either willing or unwilling to confront authoritarian states. He finds that, all other things being equal, National Catholic Churches in competitive religious markets in which there is little state regulation of religion are more likely to pressure authoritarian states to democratize. Conversely, National Catholic Churches in non-competitive religious markets in which there is a high degree of state regulation of religion are less likely to pressure authoritarian states to democratize.

The principal objectives of this research project are therefore twofold:

- Explore whether the degree of church autonomy from state control has affected the process of democratic transition and consolidation in 47 predominantly Catholic countries during the third wave of democratization (1974-present).
- Explore whether the degree of state regulation of religion (religious competition) has affected the process of democratic transition and consolidation in 47 predominantly Catholic countries during the third wave of democratization (1974-present).

RESEARCH STEPS AND METHODOLOGY

This project will include a 4-step research process and methodology.

First, democratic transition points will be determined for each of the 47 predominantly Catholic countries that will comprise the range of cases for this study. Annual scores of democracy will also be established for all 47 countries for the period inclusive of the third wave of

democratization (1974-present). These scores will be established using the Freedom House and Polity datasets. A master list of these countries has already been assembled (see Appendix 1).

It will subsequently be necessary to construct variables capable of distinguishing between degrees of church autonomy from state control and the degree of state regulation of religion for each of the 47 predominantly Catholic countries, including immediately preceding and following transitions to democracy. It will also be necessary to develop indicators of religious activity by country. These variables will be constructed by drawing on existing datasets, such as the State Regulation of Religion measure developed by Chaves and Cann (1992), the Religion and State (RAS) dataset constructed by Fox (2006), and the World Values Survey.

Third, statistical analysis (OLS regression) will be employed to test specific church-state hypotheses for all 47 predominantly Catholic countries during the time-frame of analysis (1974-present). Countries will be broken down by region (Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America) to determine if there are any regional variations. The time-frame of analysis will also be broken down into pre- and post-cold war eras (1974-1989 and 1990-present) to determine if the end of the cold war yields different results. Indeed, some scholars have referred to the post-cold war era of 1990 to the present as constituting part of a unique “fourth wave” of democratization within the international system.

Finally, two critical case studies will be selected from each geographical region for in-depth case study analysis to assess the role of the National Catholic Church in the pre- and post-transition eras.

ANTICIPATED RESULTS

It is expected that the study will substantiate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis #1: The greater the degree of a National Catholic Church’s autonomy from state control, the greater the likelihood that the Church will pressure an authoritarian state to democratize. Conversely, the lesser the degree of a National Catholic Church’s autonomy from state control, the lesser the likelihood that the Church will pressure an authoritarian state to democratize.

Hypothesis #2: The greater the degree of state regulation of religion, the lesser the degree of religious competition, and hence the lesser the likelihood that the National Catholic Church will pressure an authoritarian state to democratize. Conversely, the lesser the degree of state regulation, the greater the degree of religious competition, and hence the greater the likelihood that the National Catholic Church will pressure an authoritarian state to democratize.

Hypothesis #3: A National Catholic Church that successfully pressures an authoritarian state to democratize, and hence contributes to a democratic transition, will remain engaged in the post-transition political system as opposed to “returning” to the traditional religious (i.e., non-political) realm.

ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

The completion of this research project will lead to several academic contributions, including:

- Strengthening Catholic Studies at Loyola University Chicago, the three international partner institutions in Indonesia, Lithuania and Peru, and the wider community of Catholic Studies and Religious Studies scholars;
- Promoting the first comprehensive analysis of the role of Catholicism in contributing to democratic transition and democratic consolidation in the 47 predominantly Catholic countries, unlike earlier studies that have focused on the role of a National Catholic Church in a specific country, such as Poland (see Borowik, 2002), or a specific region, such as Africa (see Gifford, 1995) or Latin America (Gill, 1994).
- Promoting an interdisciplinary understanding by drawing on research from the disciplines of Economics, International Relations, Political Science, Sociology, and Theology;
- The publication of results in scholarly journals (see below).

PUBLICATION OUTLETS

In addition to leading to the publication of a chapter in the envisioned Hank Center edited volume, the research agenda associated with this project is expected to lead to the publication of articles in three different sets of scholarly journals:

- *Journal of Politics*, one of the leading “general” political science journals where I previously published an article on Muslim religious vitality (1994);
- *Democratization*, one of the leading “topical” (democracy) political science journals where I previously published an article on the role of international influences on democratization (2003);
- *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, one of the leading interdisciplinary journals devoted to the empirical study of religion.

SCHOLARLY EXPERIENCE RELATED TO PROJECT

One of my four core areas of research revolves around the concept of “international democracy promotion,” including a focus on the role of religion in the democratization process (please see my cv). My research in this area has included:

- Publishing scholarly articles (2001; 1997) and book chapters (2001, 1998) on the impact of democratization on the formulation and implementation of African foreign policies;
- Serving as the principal investigator/director of an international research network/grant that resulted in an edited book, *Exporting Democracy: Rhetoric vs Reality* (2002) and an article in *Democratization* (2003);
- Investigating more recently the religious and especially the Catholic and Muslim dimensions in the global spread of democracy, as witnessed by my coordination of a grant project, “The Cross, the Crescent and the Ballot Box: Catholic and Islamic Perspectives on International Democracy Promotion,” including the holding of an international conference at the John Felice Rome Center during spring 2008, making a presentation during spring 2009 as part of the Chapel Lecture Series, and editing a scholarly book and writing a scholarly article (in progress).

My inclusion in the “Democracy, Culture and Catholicism International Research Project” sponsored by the Hank Center would enable me to delve more deeply into the Catholic

dimension of the global spread of democracy, and hence strengthen my own professional trajectory as a specialist of the role of Catholicism in democratic transition and consolidation.

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APPENDIX 1 -- LIST OF 47 PREDOMINANTLY CATHOLIC COUNTRIES

(Population that is at least 50% Catholic)

| Country | Total Population | Percent Catholic |
|----------------|------------------|------------------|
| Argentina | 39,537,943 | 92% |
| Austria | 8,265,926 | 74% |
| Belgium | 10,364,388 | 75% |
| Belize | 279,457 | 50% |
| Bolivia | 8,857,870 | 95% |
| Brazil | 186,112,794 | 74% |
| Burundi | 6,370,609 | 62% |
| Cape Verde | 429,474 | 95% |
| Chile | 16,267,278 | 70% |
| Colombia | 42,954,279 | 90% |
| Congo-Kinshasa | 60,085,004 | 50% |
| Costa Rica | 4,016,173 | 76% |
| Croatia | 4,495,904 | 88% |
| Dominican Rep. | 9,105,034 | 95% |
| East Timor | 1,040,880 | 90% |
| Ecuador | 13,363,593 | 95% |
| El Salvador | 6,704,932 | 79% |
| France | 60,656,178 | 83% |
| Gabon | 1,389,201 | 50% |
| Grenada | 89,502 | 53% |
| Guatemala | 14,655,189 | 55% |
| Haiti | 8,521,622 | 80% |
| Honduras | 7,335,204 | 97% |
| Hungary | 10,006,835 | 77% |
| Ireland | 4,234,925 | 88% |
| Italy | 59,102,112 | 90% |
| Lesotho | 1,867,035 | 70% |
| Liechtenstein | 33,863 | 76% |
| Lithuania | 3,596,617 | 79% |
| Luxembourg | 468,571 | 87% |
| Malta | 400,214 | 95% |
| Mexico | 108,700,000 | 77% |
| Monaco | 32,543 | 90% |
| Nicaragua | 5,142,098 | 59% |
| Panama | 3,339,150 | 85% |
| Paraguay | 6,347,884 | 90% |
| Peru | 27,925,628 | 81% |
| Philippines | 87,857,473 | 81% |

| | | |
|--------------|------------|------|
| Poland | 38,635,144 | 90% |
| Portugal | 10,566,212 | 85% |
| San Marino | 29,251 | 95% |
| Seychelles | 81,188 | 82% |
| Slovakia | 5,431,363 | 69% |
| Spain | 44,708,462 | 94% |
| Uruguay | 3,415,920 | 58% |
| Vatican City | 921 | 100% |
| Venezuela | 25,375,281 | 95% |