

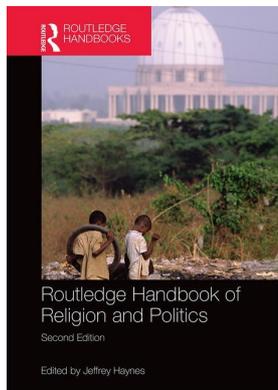
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3

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND CATHOLICISM IN GLOBAL POLITICS

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The oldest institution on earth, the Roman Catholic Church, sustains a far-flung flock whose one billion-plus adherents comprise nearly one-sixth of the world's population and half of all Christians. The tectonic shift of the world's Catholic population to the 'global south' has transformed the Church into a truly global institution. In 1910 two-thirds of Catholics were Europeans; now over two-thirds live in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.¹ Leadership of the Church reflects this new global reality, not only in the person of Pope Francis but in the many cardinals he has appointed from across the world. Also crucial to understanding the Church's political role is its deep tradition of engagement with worldly affairs – a comfortableness with politics not shared by all religious faiths. These facts, combined with the visibility and popularity of Pope Francis, ensure the impact of the Church in world politics.

The Catholic Church, however, defies easy political categorisation. On the one hand it remains a quintessentially conservative body with a hierarchical organisation designed to preserve traditional theological teachings. This impulse produces conservative stances on sexual morality, abortion, and marriage, and puts the Church in alliance with other religious traditionalists, including Muslims. On the other hand, Catholic teachings on the dignity of the human person and the authenticity of the common good produce concern for the poor in the global economy and, especially in recent decades, advocacy of religious freedom, human rights, and democratic governance.² Thus the Church stands in seeming equipoise between contending impulses of tradition and modernity.

Despite this strategic position the Church faces challenges that can blunt its political impact. A shortage of priests and women religious (nuns and sisters) stretches Church resources in some places, while elsewhere the Church must sustain itself amidst syncretic influences of local cultures, desperate poverty, or hostile governments. Thus Catholic politics varies enormously by region, context, and issue.

This chapter begins with a review of the theological and historical context of Catholic engagement with politics, paying particular attention to the evolution of Catholic social teaching. It will then examine Vatican diplomacy and global initiatives, with emphasis on the papacies of John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis. This is followed by a discussion of Catholic politics in different regions of the world. The chapter concludes by examining issues that loom large on the

horizon. The exploration of Catholicism, consequently, will provide a window into the broader and ever-dynamic relationship between religion and politics in the contemporary world.

Theological and historical context

From its inception the Catholic Church has been enmeshed in worldly affairs. Popes raised armies, formed alliances, and anointed political rulers. The Church sought to wield the two swords of spiritual and temporal authority to perpetuate its vision of a united Christendom. In the West this vision was shattered first by the Protestant Reformation and then by republican revolutions that attacked the Church's official role in political governance. In Italy this meant the loss of the papal states in 1870, the last major vestige of the Church's temporal power.

To understand the logic and rationale of contemporary Catholic politics one must trace how the loss of this temporal position led the Church to think afresh about its place in the world. We see this in the dramatic transformation of the Church in the century between the two Vatican councils (1869–70 and 1962–65). Faced with the challenge of antagonistic political movements and governments, the Church's first response was reactionary. Pope Pius IX not only convened the first Vatican Council, which promulgated the doctrine of papal infallibility, he also issued his infamous Syllabus of Errors in 1864. In that document the pontiff condemned modernism, liberalism, religious freedom, the idea of progress, and separation of Church and state. Such a position was not tenable in the face of inexorable forces of modernisation, and Pius's successor, Pope Leo XIII, began in earnest the long rapprochement of the Church to the 'new things' of the world. His encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) argued that the Church must bring to bear gospel values in addressing the crises of the industrial age – untrammelled capitalism, child labour, mass suffering, and Marxist revolutions.³ This encyclical, to which Pope John Paul II often referred, inaugurated modern Catholic social teaching and set the stage for the transformation of the Church at Vatican II. In the words of John Paul II, it gave the Church 'citizenship status' to replace its previous temporal ambitions.⁴

Anchoring *Rerum Novarum* and subsequent social teaching is the idea of *Dignitatis Humanae* – the dignity of the human person. Made in the image and likeness of God and equal in his sight, all people are invested with a 'surpassing dignity'.⁵ Such a dignity demands that the organisation of society foster conditions for human flourishing and justice. Desperate poverty and exploitation violate the gospel message of love and require appropriate political responses, particularly the payment of just wages and provision of leisure time for worship and family succour. Capital owners, therefore, are bound by transcendent duties to treat their workers not as mere instruments of production or 'bondsmen' but as moral persons endowed with priceless worth and nobility.

This language of human personhood also implies that people are social creatures, embedded in families and organic communities that should be supported, not supplanted by the state. This doctrine of 'subsidiarity' – that is, the need to nurture subsidiary institutions of society – contrasted both with the radical individualism of classical liberalism and the collectivism of Marx. Thus Church teaching sought a middle way between laissez faire capitalism and state socialism.

Although the Church sought to lift the yoke on workers in *Rerum Novarum*, it did not yet accept central tenets of liberal democracy. Just eight years after his encyclical on the condition of workers Pope Leo XIII condemned 'Americanism', which among other things meant the 'false' doctrine of religious toleration.⁶ In Catholic countries the Church sought state privilege and the attendant limitation of the rights of non-Catholics. In a symbiotic relationship

authoritarian regimes happily granted such privilege in return for the legitimacy the Church could provide. With the rise of fascism in the twentieth century the Church endeavoured to preserve its position by signing infamous concordats with Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy. The legacy of fascism, instrumental in the devastation of Europe during World War II, shocked the Church into a deeper reflection on the proper governance of society. In his Christmas Message of 1944, for example, Pope Pius XII articulated a detailed endorsement of democracy. In opposing the 'concentration of dictatorial power' as contrary to 'the dignity and liberty of citizens', the Pope speculated 'that had there been the possibility of censuring and correcting the actions of public authority, the world would not have been dragged into the vortex of a disastrous war'. To be sure, the Pope, in Aristotelian fashion, qualified his endorsement of democracy by arguing that it depended on citizens properly guided by natural law and socialised to seek the common good.⁷

Despite this embrace the Church continued to resist a key tenet of pluralist democracy – that all religious groups should enjoy freedom of worship and organisation. As Alfred Stephan has argued, liberal democracy depends on 'twin tolerations': the state protects the freedom of churches to operate in civil society and churches in turn do not seek to use the powers of the state to enhance their prerogatives or limit competitors.⁸ As late as the 1950s, however, the Church's official position was that since 'error has no rights', Catholicism, as the true faith, should alone be sanctioned by the state. And the Church enforced that view on its clergy and scholars. The celebrated American theologian John Courtney Murray made a Catholic case for religious freedom, pluralist forms of Church–state relations, and ecumenical cooperation. But he was reproached and silenced by the Church in the 1950s.⁹

Understanding this background helps us see the significance of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), especially its later documents. In its 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World', *Gaudium et Spes*,¹⁰ the Church developed its most systematic theological defence of democratic governance, human rights, and economic succour. Claiming no earthly ambition the document instead proclaimed the Church's solidarity with suffering humanity and offered its insight on human dignity as a guide to the development of wholesome social institutions, egalitarian political structures, and just economic organisations.

But it was the companion document on religious freedom that would complete the Church's transformation. Tellingly, its 'Declaration on Religious Liberty' was titled *Dignitatis Humanae*,¹¹ and the rationale for protecting the free pursuit of spiritual truth was anchored in the 'sublime' dignity of humanity. Two individuals would be pivotal drafters of this historic document: John Courtney Murray, who brought with him the American experience of Catholic participation in a pluralist democracy, and one Bishop Wojtyla of Poland, whose defence of the faith against the totalitarian tyrannies of Nazism and Communism forged a fierce commitment to free churches as bulwarks of civil society and resistance to oppression. As pontiff, of course, he would be placed in a pivotal position to implement this vision.

When the Church stopped relying on temporal power to pursue its spiritual mission it was freed to challenge the legitimacy of authoritarian regimes, and with a few exceptions it did just that. Indeed, like a great ocean liner that turns slowly but with tremendous force in its new direction, the Church became a powerful engine of democracy. As Samuel Huntington documents, the last great wave of democratisation was largely a Catholic wave. In 1974 three-quarters of all Catholic countries were ruled by authoritarian regimes; by 1990 all but a few were democracies.¹² After 'rising' in Iberia in 1975, 'the Catholic wave then surged across Latin America, carried democracy to the Philippines, and crested in Poland with the first of several East European revolutions against communism'.¹³ In the latter case the visits by John Paul II to Poland electrified the people and spawned the Solidarity movement that helped

undermine communist rule.¹⁴ Extending and deepening the analysis, more recent scholarship documents that the Catholic Church played a lead or supportive role in three-quarters of all democratic transitions between 1972 and 2009.¹⁵

Vatican diplomacy and Catholic global activism

The Catholic Church is a unique multifarious institution. Headquartered at Vatican City, the Holy See retains remnants of state sovereignty, including an elaborate diplomatic structure that sends and receives ambassadors.¹⁶ But the Church's myriad institutions also function as interest groups or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that lobby governments or have observer status at the United Nations.¹⁷ Indeed, the Catholic Church encompasses a vast array of national or regional episcopal conferences, religious orders, relief and development organisations, charities, hospitals, and educational associations enmeshed in politics and government. Finally, as Vatican II declared, the Church is also the 'people of God'.¹⁸ Thus to understand Catholicism and civic engagement one must include the laity who populate Catholic organisations or participate as citizens in nearly 200 nations. This section explores the first of these roles, as captured under the rubric of Vatican diplomacy, then touches on transnational global activism of other Catholic organisations.

As a transnational actor the 'Holy See directs a truly global Church'.¹⁹ Thus it has both tangible interests to defend and religious values to promote at different times and in different settings. A major focus of papal initiatives in the past few decades has been human rights, particularly religious freedom. For John Paul II this involved championing religious freedom behind the Iron Curtain, and then, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, to broader authoritarian contexts. For example, in a widely cited speech before the Vatican diplomatic corps in 1996 he sounded the clarion call against communist remnant and militant Islamic regimes that 'practice discrimination against Jews, Christians, and other religious groups'. The Pope condemned such persecution as an 'intolerable and unjustifiable' violation 'of the most fundamental human freedom, that of practicing one's faith openly, which for human beings is their reason for living'.²⁰

More recently the waxing of militant Islamist movements, imperilling the lives of indigenous Christian communities, has captured the attention of popes and Vatican diplomats. Pope Benedict XVI took a particularly aggressive stance toward the Islamic world. As Joseph Bottom observed, 'as communism was to Pope John Paul II, so radical Islam is to Pope Benedict XVI'.²¹ His Regensburg speech on September 12, 2006, in which he quoted a fourteenth-century Byzantine emperor's statement that Islam brought 'things only evil and inhuman', created a firestorm in Muslim nations.²² Massive demonstrations, riots, and violent reprisals stunned the pontiff, who issued an apology and assured Muslims that the quote did not reflect his views. In an apparent concession Benedict reversed his opposition to Turkey's entrance into the European Union.²³ But Benedict did not back down on his demand for 'reciprocity', that Christians in Muslim nations be afforded the same rights to religious freedom that Muslims enjoy in the West, including the right 'to propose and proclaim the Gospel' to Muslims.²⁴ This position reflected an agreement among the cardinals of the Church, whom Benedict had summoned on March 23, 2006, that persecution of Christians in the Islamic world required a sustained diplomatic push.²⁵

As conditions worsened for Christians and other minorities with the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, Benedict's successor, Pope Francis, responded with both public statements and dramatic gestures to challenge political leaders and enlist ecumenical allies for besieged Christians. During a visit to Turkey he joined Patriarch Bartholomew I, leader of Orthodox

Christianity, in pleading for religious freedom and protection for Christians in their homelands. In a conscious act of humility the Pope 'bowed before Bartholomew and asked for a blessing', a gesture unprecedented in the thousand-year split between the two communions.²⁶ Francis also wrote an open letter to all the Christians in the Middle East, encouraging them in the extreme trials and persecution. Stressing interreligious unity he remarked, 'The more difficult the situation, the more interreligious dialogue becomes necessary. There is no other way. Dialogue, grounded in an attitude of openness, in truth and love, is also the best antidote to the temptation to religious fundamentalism, which is a threat for followers of every religion'.²⁷ The shocking beheading of the Egyptian Copts in Libya in February of 2015 aroused Francis to issue heartfelt prayers for 'our brother Copts' and to speak of a new 'ecumenism of blood'. By this evocative theological language Francis suggested that in modern martyrdom the blood of disparate Christians is mixed in martyrdom.²⁸

Another human rights concern gaining increasing attention by the Vatican is human trafficking. Based on his first-hand work in the slums of Buenos Aires, Pope Francis has invested considerable personal leadership on the issue. Just two months into his papacy Francis sent a hand-written note to the chancellor of his scholarly academies requesting an examination of 'human trafficking and modern slavery'. In response, a global workshop was sponsored by the Pontifical Academies of Sciences and Social Sciences, along with the World Federation of Catholic Medical Associations, which produced detailed recommendations for the Church, governments, and global institutions.²⁹ Guided by this initiative, Pope Francis joined with the Archbishop of Canterbury in launching the Global Freedom Network to fight against 'new forms of enslavement'.³⁰ Then in December of 2014 Pope Francis convened an unprecedented gathering of religious leaders at the Vatican – representing Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jewish faiths – who issued a joint declaration to end slavery.³¹ Francis also devoted his January 1, 2015 World Peace Day message to human trafficking as a crime against humanity and a 'scourge upon the body of Christ'. This was followed by a meeting of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in April of 2015 that convened scholars, law enforcement experts, and activists to highlight successful anti-trafficking strategies and draft recommendations for the UN and national governments.³² These Vatican initiatives link up with a growing network of Catholic NGOs and national Church institutions that confront trafficking syndicates and offer succour to victims.

Direct diplomacy has also emerged as a key feature of Pope Francis' papacy. As one observer noted, while 'the Vatican has long practiced a methodical, discreet brand of diplomacy', Pope Francis has restored 'a vision of diplomatic boldness, a willingness to take risks and insert the Vatican into diplomatic disputes, especially where it can act as an independent broker'.³³ This manifested itself most dramatically in the key role Francis played in the reestablishment of diplomatic relations between the United States and Cuba. Not only did the Pope send letters to both President Obama and President Castro inviting rapprochement, he convened a secret meeting between the two countries at the Vatican that facilitated diplomatic openings.³⁴

Pope Francis also waded into Middle East politics. Striving to reconcile relations between Palestine and Israel, Francis hosted President Shimon Peres of Israel and Mahmoud Abbas of Palestine at the Vatican to pray together and discuss peace. This gathering, termed a Prayer Summit, featured Jewish, Christian and Muslim prayers emphasising common humanity and forgiveness.³⁵ A year later, to the chagrin of Israeli authorities, Pope Francis announced that the Vatican would recognise a Palestinian state.³⁶

Concern about the plight of the world's destitute has led the Vatican to champion efforts to ameliorate poverty and provide succour to refugees. Agencies like Caritas, Catholic Relief Services, and Jesuit Refugee Services work in some of the harshest places on earth and funnel

information and policy recommendations to the Vatican. One example of how this works concerns debt relief, which is particularly pressing in poor African countries whose debt service payments crowd out expenditures for education, health care, and economic development. Catholic development agencies and advocates joined alliances to press governments and international financial institutions to write off burdensome debts. Pope John Paul II capitalised on the turn of the millennium in 2000 to endorse the biblically evocative 'Year of Jubilee' campaign, which achieved considerable success.³⁷

Coming from the developing world, Pope Francis has intensified Vatican attention to the poor and signalled that championing their cause will lie at the centre of his papacy. Indeed, all aspects of his papacy seem to converge to a theology of the poor, to a radical identification with the destitute and exploited and a simultaneous challenge to those with economic resources and political power to do far more than provide alms. Choosing as his namesake St. Francis, he has chided the princes of the Church to abandon their privileges and cast their lot with the poor. He has written that the heart of the gospel is radically for the marginalised. In his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, he wrote that 'God's heart has a special place for the poor, so much so that he himself became poor', through an emptying Kenosis, such that the 'Entire history of our redemption is marked by the presence of the poor'.³⁸ Francis instantiated this concern by repeatedly remonstrating with political and business leaders to ameliorate inequalities, exploitation of poor workers, and marginalisation of cast-offs in the global economy.

In addition, the Pope linked the plight of the poor with the state of the global environment. His message, to be developed in a much-anticipated environmental encyclical in the summer of 2015, is that environmental degradation and climate change fall most heavily on the poor, who lack resources to adapt. Thus development strategies must simultaneously provide uplift for the poor and care for creation.³⁹

Another notable foray of the Church into global politics concerns war and peace-making. While the Church is known for having the most fully articulated 'just war' doctrine, it has moved toward a greater scepticism about the use of force in international relations. As Drew Christensen observes, 'with Pope John XXIII's landmark encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963)', the Church began developing a concept of peace as more than 'the absence of war'. This trend accelerated from 1991 onward, as John Paul II promoted social justice as an antidote to war and lauded 'nonviolence and forgiveness in international politics'. Increasingly the Pope questioned whether modern warfare could meet the criteria of just war, and erected a high moral threshold for the use of force.⁴⁰ This posture was demonstrated during the run-up to the US-led war against Iraq in 2003. Both in private conversations and public pronouncements the Pope inveighed against the war, and his nuncio to the US joined the American bishops in challenging its justification.⁴¹ Pope Francis continued this legacy, in particular when he called upon world powers not to intervene militarily in the civil war in Syria.⁴²

Beyond the Vatican, Catholic NGOs and their peace networks play an active role in conflict mediation. Notable is the Community of Sant'Egidio, an organisation of self-conscious peace-makers headquartered in Rome, which capitalises on a blend of indigenous relationships and international networks. A systematic global study found this group involved in a disproportionate number of successful mediating efforts, in such diverse nations as Mozambique, Algeria, Uganda, Kosovo, Guatemala, and Liberia.⁴³

Catholic development organisations are also sometimes drawn into peace-making initiatives. In 2015 strife in the Central African Republic (CAR) spawned violence by Christian militias against Muslims, resulting in the destruction of numerous mosques and a massive exodus of Muslim refugees. In response, Catholic Relief Services collaborated with Muslim groups in mediating initiatives to quell the violence and promote reconciliation.⁴⁴

If the Church has taken 'progressive' positions on human rights, poverty, the environment, and war, it remains a traditional body when it comes to the constellation of issues surrounding abortion, human sexuality, AIDS prevention, contraception, marriage, and the family. Because the Vatican and Catholic NGOs have observer status at the United Nations and other international forums, the Church remains an active presence in these debates. At population summits, for example, the Church has clashed with Western nations and feminist organisations over their advocacy of abortion access.⁴⁵ With respect to certain forms of sex education and contraceptive services to adolescents, the Church has fought against bypassing parents by emphasising the rights and responsibilities of families. Church officials fear that the approach of liberal NGOs undermines traditional morality and promotes sexual permissiveness that leads to the abuse of girls and women.⁴⁶ During the papacy of Pope Benedict the Church condemned the 'condom message' of AIDS activists, pointing to abstinence and fidelity in marriage as the only sure ways to prevent the spread of the disease.⁴⁷ Finally, in the face of rapidly changing attitudes on gay rights, the Church has fought against same-sex marriage laws, invoking its teaching on the divinely ordained nature of the male-female union and the social benefits of traditional family bonds.

While these positions put the Church squarely in opposition to liberalising social trends, it has joined progressive allies in calling for more spending on AIDS medical treatment, promoting access for girls and women to education, and expanding economic opportunity for the poor, which it sees as the most efficacious means of stabilising populations.

Moreover, Pope Francis introduced a dramatic new tone to these debates. In a lengthy interview, he admitted that he intended to talk less about abortion, contraception, and homosexuality, warning the Church against becoming 'obsessed' with dogmas to the exclusion of love, especially for the poor.⁴⁸ Moreover, in response to a journalist's question on homosexual priests, Francis responded with a question that shocked Catholic traditionalists: 'If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?'⁴⁹ But while Francis has indicated openness to the possibility of civil unions for gay couples, he has not fundamentally changed the Church's opposition to the re-definition of marriage to include same-sex partners. Indeed, a synod of cardinals convened to discuss controversies over the family produced a report which, while 'welcoming homosexual persons', nonetheless depicted gay partnerships as 'imperfect' and stressed that 'unions between people of the same sex cannot be considered on the same footing as matrimony between man and woman'.⁵⁰ As we will see, this position puts Catholic institutions in some countries in jeopardy of running afoul of new anti-discrimination laws that sanction refusal to recognise same-sex marriages.

We now turn to the diverse examples of political engagement by the Church in different regions of the world.

Europe: Christian roots and secularisation

Europe was once the Catholic heartland and the Church played a large role in statecraft. That has changed, as Church growth has shifted to the developing world of the 'global south'. But it is useful to highlight the contributions of Catholicism to the political scene of Europe.

One of several signal contributions involved the formation of the Christian Democratic parties that played a crucial, if unheralded, role in building stable democracies in Western Europe after World War II. Inspired by Catholic social teaching on human dignity, lay intellectuals and activists in Europe pressed for democracy and human rights, in some cases pushing the envelope farther than the Church's official position. A leading figure was Jacques Maritain (1882–1973), who helped lay the intellectual foundations for the Christian Democratic

movement. In particular, he developed the doctrine of ‘Thomistic personalism’, a view of the human person as naturally embedded in organic institutions of society, such as family, Church, community, or guild.⁵¹ Although not explicitly planned by the Church, the emergent Christian Democratic parties drew heavily upon the doctrine of subsidiarity – that the state should support, not supplant, these natural societal institutions. Guided by this vision, Christian Democratic parties enacted family- and Church-friendly social welfare policies. Thus while often depicted as the main ‘conservative’ opposition to social democratic parties, the Christian Democratic movement in fact represented a distinct blend of traditional and progressive elements. A genuine international movement, Christian Democratic parties went on to help consolidate democracy in several Latin American nations.⁵²

In Eastern Europe the story of how the Church helped undermine communism is well known.⁵³ Not only in Poland, but in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in Eastern Europe congregations became places where people could begin to freely express themselves. This shielded religious and secular dissidents alike, who developed trust and solidarity through religious rituals that took on political significance.⁵⁴

With the collapse of communism the Vatican focus shifted to battling secularising trends. When John Paul II returned to democratic Poland, for example, he chided the people for rising consumerism and materialism. Cardinal Ratzinger, in a homily to the conclave that elected him Pope, denounced ‘the dictatorship of relativism’, and as pontiff frequently called upon Europeans to return to their Christian roots. This took tangible form in deliberations over the constitution of the European Union, in which the Vatican backed language that would explicitly acknowledge the Christian heritage of Europe, but only gained watered down reference to cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe.

Throughout Europe the Vatican also fought (largely unsuccessful) battles against socially liberal policies, such as legal abortion, same-sex marriage or civil unions, stem cell research, and euthanasia. Pope Benedict XVI urged Catholics to fight ‘with clarity and determination’ any legislation seeking to redefine the traditional family or compromise the ‘sanctity’ of human life.⁵⁵

While Pope Francis has not departed fundamentally from his predecessors on these questions, his reorienting emphasis on the crisis of the marginalised has fostered new goodwill for the Church on the continent. His dramatic gestures (such as washing the feet of prisoners) evoke an approach to evangelisation rooted in an ideal of sacrificial service rather than doctrine. Whether his enormous popularity will translate into renewal remains to be seen.

The United States: robust presence and emerging challenges

The Catholic Church represents ‘a distinct voice’ in American politics.⁵⁶ It joins conservatives in opposing abortion and gay marriage, or in supporting educational vouchers and public displays of religion. But it unites with liberals in backing humanitarian foreign aid, health care for the poor, social welfare spending, increases in the minimum wage, humane treatment of immigrants, and opposition to the death penalty.

Because of this unique ideological blend Catholics have become the quintessential swing voters in American politics, a strategic voting block assiduously courted by both political parties. One-fourth of the US electorate, Catholics comprise the median voting group whose movement often provides the decisive margin of victory in national elections, with Hispanic Catholic voters more Democratic and white Catholics more Republican.

Catholics in America also operate an impressive array of institutions, including the nation’s paramount parochial school system, a large hospital network, extensive charities and adoption

agencies, diverse religious orders, along with national and state Catholic conferences. This institutional presence provides Catholic lobbies with expertise and heft on a host of issues.

In a sense Catholic Americans came of age with the election of John Kennedy in 1960, which along with the prominent participation by priests and women religious in the landmark civil rights struggle gave the community a certain cachet in American society. The shock of the Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalising abortion in turn spurred an extensive pro-life network in the Church, which continues to provide the most vigorous institutional support for limits on abortion and its funding by government. A growing critique of public schools, especially their perceived failure to adequately serve the poor, led to increased attention to the ways parochial schools compensated for family deficits,⁵⁷ producing alliances with both home-schooling evangelicals and inner city blacks for various 'school choice' initiatives. The bishops' visibility and clout rose in the 1980s, as they aligned with liberals in producing pastoral letters critical of nuclear arms and certain capitalist structures, and in opposing Reagan Administration military initiatives in Central America.⁵⁸

From the 1980s onward the devolution of policy-making authority to the states has enhanced the role of state Catholic conferences, which are permanent agencies composed of dioceses but 'usually headed by a lay executive director'.⁵⁹ In the majority of states these conferences are often the most well-established and influential religious advocacy presence – but in characteristic fashion blending culturally conservative stands with economically progressive positions.⁶⁰

The recent ascendance of assertive social liberalism in America, however, has increasingly pushed the bishops into the traditionalist camp in defence of Church autonomy and conscience rights. As states and the courts rapidly redefined marriage to include same-sex unions, the Church joined with conservative evangelical groups and others in affirming the legal status of traditional marriage. Catholic institutions also joined other religious traditionalists to resist mandates that they include contraceptives and sterilisation in their health plans to meet regulations implementing the Affordable Care Act, President Obama's signature domestic priority. This has produced a prodigious litigation battle between the Obama Administration and an array of Catholic charities, religious orders, and colleges seeking conscience exemption from the mandate. If they lose they face millions of dollars in fines or, ironically, the prospect of dropping health coverage.⁶¹

Throughout the modern era Catholic leaders could count on political leaders of both parties to defend the autonomy of Church institutions. That has changed. As gay marriage has become law by statute or court decree, non-discrimination statutes have been applied to Church institutions, forcing them to choose between defying the law or violating their teaching on marriage. For example, long-standing Catholic adoption programs in Massachusetts, Washington, DC, and Illinois shut down because authorities insisted that they place children with same-sex couples. In the face of these converging challenges, the bishops launched a national educational campaign to defend religious freedom and conscience rights. Letters from the bishops have been read from thousands of pulpits and rallies were held as part of the Church's 'Fortnight of Freedom' events.⁶²

Latin America: democracy and development

The most significant story from Latin America is, of course, the elevation of Argentine Cardinal Bergoglio of Buenos Aires to the seat of St. Peter, producing ecstatic responses of cultural pride. As the first Pope from Latin America, Francis brings a distinct focus on poverty, mercy, and a new evangelisation in the face of competition.

Latin America contains the largest regional Catholic population, comprising some 39 per cent of all the world's Catholics.⁶³ For nearly five centuries the Catholic Church backed authoritarian regimes and economic oligarchs in Latin America. This makes the transformation of the Church following Vatican II especially noteworthy. In a number of instances bishops, priests, and women religious opposed dictatorships and shielded dissidents. Papal nuncios in turn provided international legitimacy of such efforts, helping to lead a wave of democratisation in the last few decades.

An excellent example is Brazil, by population the largest Catholic country in the world. For centuries the Church tied itself to wealthy landowners and authoritarian rulers who granted it vast privileges. But by the 1960s a progressive episcopate embraced the aspirations of the poor and offered the most prominent challenge to despotic military rule. By providing space for civil society and undermining the legitimacy of the regime the Church helped midwife democratisation.⁶⁴

To be sure, democratisation in Latin America was uneven, and Church support for authoritarianism endured until recently in a few countries, such as Argentina, Honduras, and Uruguay. One possible explanation for this variability is that the Church changed the least where it faced little competition, either from Protestant growth or secular movements.⁶⁵

Closely linked to its democratic role was the Church's embrace of justice for rural peasantry and urban poor. Vatican II highlighted the enormous inequalities in the global economy and questioned the justice of destitution amidst unprecedented wealth. This theme was developed at meetings of the Latin American Bishop's Conference (CELAM) in Medellin in 1968 and Puebla in 1979. Church leaders articulated the widely influential idea that public policies should be guided by a 'preferential option for the poor'.

This idea was, of course, bolstered by liberation theology, which applied the analysis of class conflict to press for radical changes in societal structures that would end exploitation of the destitute.⁶⁶ While many bishops may not have embraced the 'Marxist methodology of liberation theologians', as Anthony Gill observes, 'they could not but help to reflect upon their critiques of Latin American society and perhaps arrive at less radical, but still progressive conclusions'.⁶⁷ So whether influenced by Vatican II, CELAM conferences, or liberation theology, Church leaders in many cases became champions of the dispossessed.

Of course, the Marxist dimension of liberation theology troubled the Catholic hierarchy. By the 1980s Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger had condemned liberation theology as a 'fundamental threat' to the Church and silenced Brazilian friar Leonardo Boff, a leading figure in the movement.⁶⁸ Despite this assault, liberation theology lingers among a cadre of priests and lay Catholics, who seek structural changes in confronting desperate poverty.⁶⁹

Pope Francis appears to draw from this wellspring in his critique of the global economy, of the inequality that represents a denial of the dignity of all persons. Chastising the 'idolatry of the market', he challenges 'trickle down theories' as expressing a 'naïve trust in those wielding economic power'.⁷⁰ His conviction that neo-liberal economic trends leave too many in a destitute existence echoes themes of liberation theology, perhaps without the Marxism.

But while the Pope may be popular in Latin America, the Church has lost many of its flock to Pentecostalism or secularism. Its diminished influence is also reflected in the fact that 'countries in the region have been so quick to adopt laws legalising abortion, gay marriage, and the decriminalization of marijuana'.⁷¹

Africa: Catholic leaven in struggles

The Catholic Church has experienced dramatic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa, from a tiny presence in 1900 to over 170 million by 2010, or 16 per cent of the globe's Catholic population.⁷²

At least four African nations are at or near majority Catholic population while a substantial Catholic presence is found in several others.⁷³ Not only is growth accelerating and outstripping other parts of the world, but Africa is producing so many priests that they are being sent to take over churches in the United States and Europe.⁷⁴

As an independent sector of civil society the Church has promoted democratisation in a number of countries. In Malawi, for example, the Catholic bishops distributed a pastoral letter that criticised the one-party rule of Hastings Kamuzu Banda, which was the ‘turning point’ in that nation’s democratization. The Church likewise led popular opposition movements against authoritarianism in Kenya, Zambia, and Ghana.⁷⁵ In war-torn Congo, where the number of Catholics has more than tripled in the past thirty-five years to encompass half of the population, Church leaders have striven to provide a forum for reconciliation as a means of promoting peace and democratic transition.⁷⁶ The bishop’s conference also deployed observers and condemned as tainted the election that returned President Joseph Kabila to power in 2011.⁷⁷

The Church often provides vital educational and health services where governments are either ineffective or corrupt. In Angola the Church transformed itself from a virtual appendage of Portuguese colonisers into a truly independent force. As the nation recovered from civil war in the new century the Church became a ‘surrogate state’, managing a network of schools and charities, operating the country’s premier radio station, and serving as a potent ‘political leader in an independent Angola’.⁷⁸ In Nigeria the Church also compensates for state weakness or corruption, particularly in the face of the Boko Haram insurgency in the north. Bishop Matthew Hassan Kukah of Sokoto in north-western Nigeria observed that the ‘entire architecture of governance has collapsed. The Church remains the only moral force.’⁷⁹

The Church’s international connections also serve as a resource for popular struggle, but that does not ensure success, as we see with its role in the independence movement of the southern Sudanese people. In Sudan an Arab Islamist regime waged a twenty-year scorched-earth war (1993–2003) against the nation’s ethnic Africans of the south, comprised mostly of Christians and tribal religionists. The war resulted in two million deaths and displaced another five million. Indigenous Catholic leaders, such as Bishop Macram Gassis, along with global Church leaders and activist lay Catholics in the United States, played an important role in the coalition that induced the US government to pressure Khartoum to sign a peace treaty with the southern rebel movement,⁸⁰ which ultimately led to the creation of the new nation of South Sudan 2011. International Catholic development agencies, such as Caritas and Catholic Relief Services, invested heavily in the fragile new country. But the country – afflicted by decades of devastation, bereft of infrastructure, beset by tribal and ethnic divisions, and sapped by poor governing capacity – was too fragile to hold. A power struggle in the capital city of Juba in December 2013 erupted into widespread tribal violence and armed insurrection, sparking massive displacement, disease, and famine, and undermining Catholic development initiatives. Sudanese Catholic bishops joined other religious leaders in pressing the combatants to sign a peace deal in August of 2015, but they face a daunting task of rebuilding the shattered land.

Uganda, which is over 40 per cent Catholic,⁸¹ suffered through a different crucible. During the reign of terror of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda, the Church provided centres of refuge for children threatened with abduction. In turn, the Community of Sant’Egidio helped broker peace talks with the LRA that ended the civil war.⁸² In the aftermath of the conflict, the Uganda Church established programs of rehabilitation to help former child soldiers to reintegrate into society. This account underscores both the indigenous resources of the Church and the benefits of transnational networks.

While the above illustrations show the Church’s influence, elsewhere ‘Catholics proved ineffective as brokers of democracy’, particularly in Rwanda.⁸³

Rwanda, the majority of whose population is Roman Catholic, represents an example of abject failure to overcome tribal conflicts. The roots of this failure lie in the fact that the Church colluded with Belgian colonisers, who employed a deliberate policy of playing the Tutsis and Hutus against each other.⁸⁴ This had devastating consequences in 1994 when Hutu forces inaugurated a genocidal campaign against Tutsis and moderate Hutus. Not only did the Church not systematically protest the genocide, but some Catholic priests actually participated in the atrocities, their sanctuaries becoming killing fields. Even after the killing ended Rwandan Catholic leaders continued to downplay the massacres and refused to acknowledge their complicity and failure. Though some observers hold out hope that the Church can still engage in truth and reconciliation processes, its mission has been seriously discredited, opening the way for evangelical Protestant competitors to move into the social and moral void.⁸⁵

Asia: a quest for civil society

With its huge population and geographic reach Asia presents a multifarious setting for Catholic political engagement. Despite diverse nationalities and forms of government, the quest to carve spaces for itself in civil society is a consistent thread throughout the region.

For example, with a growing Catholic population in Taiwan and South Korea, the Church nurtured dissent against authoritarian regimes and helped to encourage democratisation in the two states. Remarkably, in South Korea Catholic Kim Dae-jung, who fought a life-long democracy campaign, used Church settings to arouse the citizenry against South Korea's military dictatorships. He was twice imprisoned and even sentenced to death in 1980. The intervention of the United States led to his release and exile; his subsequent return to South Korea intensified pro-democracy forces. He was elected in 1997 and earned the Nobel Peace Prize in 2000 for his role in democratising the nation.

Similarly, in the Philippines the Church fostered the central opposition to the authoritarian rule of Ferdinand Marcos. This began in earnest in the early 1980s with a series of pastoral letters from the Bishops Conference critical of the regime, which prepared the ground for the 'people power' revolution of 1986. Under pressure from the Church, Marcos called a 'snap election' designed to 'throw the opposition off balance'. But Cardinal Jaime Sin and other bishops frustrated Marcos by in effect backing the candidacy of Cory Aquino, wife of the assassinated opposition leader Ninoy Aquino. The bishops then condemned widespread voting fraud that initially gave the election to Marcos. Finally, in one of the most dramatic episodes in Philippine history, the Church called out hundreds of thousands of Filipinos to flood the streets and protect with their bodies military officers who joined the Aquino forces. Under pressure from the Church and the US government, Marcos resigned and Aquino assumed the presidency.⁸⁶ The Church continues to play an active role in the nation, supporting initiatives for the poor and challenging corruption.

Another example of where the Church became tied up in a people's cause was East Timor. For centuries the Church served colonial power, but the invasion by Indonesia in 1975 severed the Church from the government and ironically freed priests to lead the popular struggle against occupation. As the interests of the Church and the indigenous population merged, affiliation with Catholicism mushroomed. In 1973 less than a third of the population was Catholic; by 1990 that figure was an astonishing 90 per cent. Under international pressure Indonesia agreed to a referendum on independence in 1999. Its passage resulted in violent reprisals by Indonesian military troops and militia, in which some priests and nuns were killed. This brought new pressure on the Indonesian government, which ultimately withdrew its troops and recognised East Timor's independence. The Church now focuses on rebuilding community structures shattered by occupation and war.⁸⁷

Asia contains most of the remaining communist states: China, Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea. North Korea, which crushes religion with some of the worst persecution in the world, is *sui generis*, and there the Church barely clings to life. Internationally, however, Catholics have taken up the cause of refugees who have fled the totalitarian regime, putting pressure on China to cease deporting or exploiting them.

Elsewhere in Asia the Church strives for independence from communist authorities, who seek to keep power by controlling nascent civil society. In China this has produced a persecuted and divided Church. Underground Catholics who pledge fealty to Rome risk harassment or arrest by authorities, and they often disdain those who worship in state-sanctioned 'patriotic' congregations. Wanting to unite both state-sanctioned and 'underground' Catholics (who pledge fealty to the Pope), the Vatican has engaged in a delicate minuet of negotiations. The Vatican has signalled that it might end diplomatic relations with Taiwan and establish them with Beijing in return for the authority to appoint or approve Chinese bishops. But the failure to reach some kind of detente with the regime has perpetuated divisions, which inhibit Church growth and hamper the Church's ability to foster an independent civil society.⁸⁸ The cutting edge for Christian growth in China, therefore, clearly rests with independent Protestants and evangelicals.

Crisis for Christianity in the Middle East

The seizure of Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, by Islamic State (ISIS) militants in the summer of 2014 stunned the world. Especially shocking was their brutal efficiency in killing or expelling the entire Christian population from the city and the wider Nineveh plain. This event captured the existential peril facing Christians and other minorities in the region. The chaotic wake of the American-led overthrow of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq exposed vulnerable Christian communities to sectarian assaults and systematic Islamist terror. The crisis accelerated with the Syrian civil war and the rise of ISIS. Perhaps only a third of the Christian population remains in Iraq, as Christians in the entire region continue to flee their ancient homeland.

Christianity in the Middle East is comprised of distinct communities and traditions, from Orthodox to Eastern Rite to Catholic. Nonetheless, Catholic leaders, drawing upon transnational networks, have emerged as the most visible advocates for the besieged faithful. Patriarch Louis Raphaël I Sako, head of Iraq's Chaldean Catholic community, is the singular example. Before the rise of ISIS he sounded the alarm about the perilous situation for Christians in Iraq.⁸⁹ Since the fall of Mosul he has become a singular spokesman for Christians and other minorities. In a speech before the United Nations Security Council he proclaimed that Islamist extremist groups were 'erasing all traces' of non-Muslims in the region, and he pleaded with world leaders to take coordinated action to protect the remnant.⁹⁰ In a dramatic illustration of the global linkages of the Church, Pope Francis personally called Patriarch Sako to express his solidarity with Iraqi Christians and to endorse the patriarch's plea for international action to protect them.⁹¹

Beyond advocacy, the Church faces the striking challenge of serving a growing refugee population in Kurdistan, Jordan, Turkey, and Lebanon, and reconstituting the Assyrian diaspora into functioning communities. This will require both generosity from the global Church and creative indigenous leadership.

Conclusion: to the future

As this discussion indicates, the Catholic Church will remain a strategic actor in national and global politics. Its effectiveness, however, will depend on its vitality as a religious institution, and that will vary from region to region, nation to nation. The challenges it confronts, in turn,

will vary enormously. The millennia-old challenge of *libertas ecclesiae*, protecting the freedom of the Church from state intrusion, remains an urgent goal in authoritarian contexts, but is also reemerging in the West as aggressive secular policies threaten to undermine the autonomy of religious institutions. Thus the Church and its leaders will continue to be significant voices in promoting religious freedom.

With the continued shift of the Catholic population to the global south, the Church will find itself heavily nested among the world's poor, exploited, and displaced. This demographic reality not only produces a concordance with the emphasis of Pope Francis on being a Church of and for the poor, but will profoundly shape the context for future pontiffs. One of the striking trends is the significant number of Catholics among the world's refugees, migrants, and exiles. From Christians expelled in Middle East, to desperate Central American migrants, to refugees displaced by strife in South Sudan, Nigeria, or the Congo, many live in a diaspora Church – in refugee camps, as sojourners on the move with few possessions, or as undocumented migrant workers vulnerable to exploitation. Such evocative biblical images pose a serious test of whether affluent and comfortable laity in the West will respond with commensurate compassion and advocacy.

Finally, the looming bio-genetic revolution will present new challenges to basic theological understandings of the unique giftedness of persons made in the image and likeness of God. Though hardly on the political radar, genetic engineering poses profound questions about the dignity of human life, even about the definition of human life itself. Cloning, foetus farming, patenting life forms, designer babies engineered with specific traits, even the chimera of animal-hybrid combinations used to harvest organs, mark the horizon. If the abortion controversy hinged on when human life begins, the genetic revolution thrusts forward such questions as 'What is a human being? Who decides? What about new creations?' The genetic revolution also raises the further question of how society will perceive (or welcome) the imperfect.⁹² New technologies may also widen the gap between the poor and the affluent, who are most likely to engineer advantageous traits in their offspring or, as is already occurring, to exploit the poor in organ trafficking.

Although Catholic theologians have begun focusing on these profound questions, it will take a massive educational campaign for the Church to provide a moral lead in the debates to come. Again, its capacity to provide moral guidance in this revolutionary era will hinge in part on whether the Church remains a vigorous spiritual institution around the globe.

Notes

- 1 Pew Research Center, 'The Global Catholic Population'.
- 2 Huntington, *The Third Wave*; Philpott, 'The Catholic wave'.
- 3 *Rerum Novarum*.
- 4 *Centesimus Annus*.
- 5 *Gaudium et Spes*.
- 6 Jelen, 'The American Church', 75.
- 7 'Democracy and a lasting peace'.
- 8 Stepan, 'Religion, democracy'.
- 9 Wills, *Why I am a Catholic*, 214–21.
- 10 *Gaudium et Spes*.
- 11 *Dignitatis Humanae*.
- 12 Huntington, *The Third Wave*.
- 13 Philpott, 'The Catholic wave', 32.
- 14 Weigel, *Witness to Hope*.

- 15 Toft, Philpott and Shah, *God's Century*.
- 16 Allen, *All the Pope's Men*.
- 17 Ferrari, 'The Vatican as a transnational actor'.
- 18 Philpott, 'The Catholic wave', 36.
- 19 Ferrari, 'The Vatican as a transnational actor'.
- 20 Pope John Paul II, 'Annual message to diplomatic corps'.
- 21 Bottum, 'Benedict meets Bartholomew', 14–15.
- 22 Pope Benedict XVI, 'Speech at University of Regensburg'.
- 23 Fisher and Travernise, 'Pope backs Turkey's bid'.
- 24 Kahn and Meichtry, 'A tumultuous world'.
- 25 Allen, *All the Pope's Men*.
- 26 'Pope Francis addresses Christian persecution'.
- 27 Pope Francis, 'Letter to the Christians in the Middle East'.
- 28 'Pope Francis and the Copts'.
- 29 'Statement on trafficking in human beings'.
- 30 Winfield, 'Pope Francis and Archbishop of Canterbury'.
- 31 Barrett, 'World faith leaders join Pope'.
- 32 'Human trafficking: issues beyond criminalization'.
- 33 Yardley, 'Bolder vision of Vatican diplomacy'.
- 34 Yardley and Pianigiani, 'Pope Francis is credited with crucial role in U.S.-Cuba Agreement'.
- 35 Booth, 'Pope Francis hosts Israel, Palestinian leaders'.
- 36 Rudoren and Hadid, 'Pope aids push for statehood by Palestinians'.
- 37 Hertzke, *Freeing God's Children*, Ch. 8.
- 38 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 197.
- 39 Rivkin, A., 'With Pope Francis's encyclical on climate change done'.
- 40 Christiansen, 'Catholic peacemaking'.
- 41 Allen, *All the Pope's Men*, Ch. 7.
- 42 Winfield, 'Pope Francis leads peace prayer vigil'.
- 43 Toft, Philpott and Shah, *God's Century*, 190.
- 44 Bryson, 'When Christians kill and destroy'.
- 45 Cowell, 'How Vatican views Cairo'.
- 46 Crossette, 'Vatican holds up abortion debate'.
- 47 'Pope rejects condoms for Africa'.
- 48 Spadaro, 'Big heart open to God'.
- 49 Donadio, 'On gay priests'.
- 50 Wofford, 'What did the Vatican really say?'
- 51 Maritain, *The Rights of Man*.
- 52 Papini, *The Christian Democrat International*; Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy*.
- 53 Weigel, *Witness to Hope*.
- 54 Havel, *The Power of the Powerless*.
- 55 Nouaille, 'Pope courts intellectuals'.
- 56 Steinfels, *American Catholics and Civic Engagement*.
- 57 Coleman and Hoffer, *Public and Private High Schools*.
- 58 Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*.
- 59 Yamane, *Catholic Church in State Politics*.
- 60 Yamane, *Catholic Church in State Politics*; Cleary and Hertzke, *Representing God at the Statehouse*.
- 61 Hertzke, *Religious Freedom in America*.
- 62 Hertzke and Pudlo, 'Defending civil society'.
- 63 Pew Research Center, 'The global Catholic population'.
- 64 Casanova, *Public Religions*; Huntington, *The Third Wave*.
- 65 Gill, *Rendering Unto Caesar*.
- 66 Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*.

- 67 Gill, *Rendering Unto Caesar*, 45.
- 68 Reel, 'An abiding faith'; Rother, 'Pope Benedict XVI'.
- 69 Reel, 'An abiding faith'.
- 70 *Evangelii Gaudium*.
- 71 Gomez, 'Catholic Church losing ground'.
- 72 Pew Research Center, 'The global Catholic population'.
- 73 CIA World Factbook.
- 74 Nossiter, 'Church helps fill a void'.
- 75 Philpott, 'The Catholic wave'.
- 76 Elenga, 'The Congolese Church'.
- 77 BBC News, January 3, 2012.
- 78 Heywood, 'The Angolan Church'.
- 79 Nossiter, 'Church helps fill a void'.
- 80 Hertzke, *Freeing God's Children*, Ch. 7.
- 81 'International religious freedom report'.
- 82 Toft, Philpott and Shah, *God's Century*, 189.
- 83 Philpott, 'The Catholic wave', 110–11.
- 84 Rutagambwa, 'The Rwandan Church', 176.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 Wooster, 'Faith at the ramparts'.
- 87 Lyon, 'The East Timorese Church'.
- 88 Madsen, *China's Catholics*; Reardon, 'The Chinese Catholic Church'.
- 89 Allen, 'Iraqi Catholic leader'.
- 90 Brown, 'Catholic Patriarch in Iraq'.
- 91 'Pope calls Patriarch Sako'.
- 92 Cameron, 'Evangelicals and bioethics'.

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