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Imagined Communions: The Virtual Nation for Virtuous Nations

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If it is the work of Catholics to discern God's purpose in the modern world not only through piety and theology but also through (in the oft-repeated phrase of the Second Vatican Council) "discerning the signs of the times," then a theoretically Catholic sociology—by which I mean a sociology which examines social life from a theoretical standpoint which incorporates the truth-claims of the Catholic faith, in contrast to one which studies particular features of Catholic institutions, which I would call an "applied Catholic sociology"—has a uniquely important contribution to make to comprehending God's work in the world and the role of the Church in it. This may have always been true, but in the situation today of advanced modernity, in which the Catholic Church has explicitly adopted the disposition and self-understanding of being one actor among many other legitimate religious and quasi-religious actors, it is strongly and emphatically the case. A Catholic understanding of the role and structures of the Church among the social arrangements of modernity cannot be arrived at by appending a discrete concept of the Church, no matter how internally coherent or theologically insightful, to an otherwise secular theory of the modern world. Today more than ever, we must try to understand the meaning of the social world in light of Catholic truth as a preliminary and means to understanding the meaning of and God's purposes for the Church itself, and for all of us must live both in the Church and in the world.

This essay is an exercise in such a theoretically Catholic sociological analysis, in this case of the development of the role and disposition of the Holy See in relation to the changing role of the nation-state and the rise of a transnational order through the latter half of the 20th century. The impetus for this development, I will suggest, lies not only in the Enlightenment ideal of the nation-state and the emergence of a secular ideal of human dignity, but in the interaction of both of these cultural forces with the social arrangements and emerging social teachings of the Catholic Church. This collision of sociocultural factors has shaped not only the emergence of a universal political order but also the rise of the modern papacy, creating the possibility not only of national interests and peoples but also of national virtues.

The issues addressed in this case implicate one of the central problematics of sociology (and one which is crucial for the possibility of Catholic sociology): do human social arrangements cohere around a moral consensus, what Durkheim termed a "collective conscience," or are they patterned according to interests and power as in the familiar Marxian view? At the same time this analysis also challenges the (secular and secularizing) division of social forces into "secular" and "sacred," another contrivance of Durkheim's, in favor of a Catholic/catholic perspective that sees the social forces of the Enlightenment as precipitating both secular and sacred forms. The same set of forces that led to the rise of the nation-state also led to the universality and recognized infallibility of the papacy; they also led, simultaneously and not incidentally, to the emergence of human society as a recognized subject of action and object of study, and to the precipitation of the social sciences, and later sociology, from less differentiated conceptions of the scholastic project. Recently these forces have also led, I argue, to the restructuring of Catholic diversity and dissent, and to the reconstitution of the nation-state, in ways that mirror each other. The questions addressed in this study, finally, have growing practical relevance, in a global order in which the moral deficiencies of national economic arrangements result in transferred pain throughout the world economic system; and which increasingly looks to universal structures to provide moral direction and restraint, not only for violent aggression and international disputes, but also for such (bi- or multi-) lateral national concerns as trade, population, immigration, and environmental degradation.

Accommodating the Nation-state

The relation of the Roman Catholic Church to the modern nation-state has always been an uneasy one. Perhaps alone among current international actors, the Church is not a modern institution, and it has not recently globalized. Now entering its third millennium of existence, the Church's institutional structures and identity were formed a thousand years before the emergence of modern nations. It became a global institution, extending to the perimeter of the known world as the dominant, universally established religion, fifteen hundred years before the current trends of world globalization. Unlike any other religious or secular institution, the center of the Catholic Church today is not in any nation. Although its ruling structures are in Italy, it is not in any constitutive sense the Italian Catholic Church. The offices of the Pope, in fact, technically reside in a separate virtual nation, Vatican City, the only universally recognized national entity that is not a member of the United Nations.

Although the Vatican City State, with its own juridical existence and territory, enters into international agreements in its own right, it has, unlike all other nations, no diplomatic representation, nor can it advance any national or territorial interests. No nation has diplomatic relations with the Vatican. Rather, the Vatican State serves, in the words of the Holy See's U.N. Mission, merely as a "pedestal upon which is posed a much larger and unique independent and sovereign authority/rule: that of the Holy See" (Holy See 2006). As an actor in international diplomacy the Holy See has diplomatic relations with most nations, but represents, not (except in certain specific circumstances) the national interests of the Vatican, but "the central government of the Roman Catholic Church," specifically the juridical person of "the Pope as Bishop of Rome and head of the college of Bishops." This unique arrangement is designed to preserve and clarify the unique independence and neutrality of the Holy See among world actors. A pertinent analogy is the capital city of the United States, which, in order to preserve the unique independence of the national government, is located in a district which does not itself, technically, have separate representation in national affairs. For the same reason, the Holy See has elected not to adopt the status of a full or voting member of the United Nations, but rather that of a "permanent observer," in order, in the words of the Holy See's U.N. Mission, "to maintain absolute neutrality in specific political problems" (Holy See 2006).

If social arrangements have religious affinities, the nation-state has had an affinity for Protestant, as opposed to Catholic, Christianity. It is widely recognized today that modern nations are in large part socially constructed regimes—subjective realms of communicative action in Habermas' thought, or, in Anderson's (1991) apt definition, *imagined communities*. Anderson theorizes that nations are imagined, in that the image of communion with all members of the nation, a kind of "national consciousness" analogous to the Marxian notion of class consciousness, resides in millions of individuals who will never actually interact; communities, that is, characterized by a deep horizontal fraternity among otherwise unrelated persons; sovereign, that is, comprising a sphere of freedom for autonomous individuals; and limited, that is, conceived not as universal, but as having borders beyond which lay other nations (Anderson 1991, 7–8).

In this view, the Durkheimian affinity between social arrangements and religious activities is expressed in the acknowledgment that nations embody subjective views of ultimate meaning that can be properly termed religious. If, as Anderson suggests, nations are in some senses mythic realms, the particular mythos of the modern nation-state is not that of universal Catholicism, but that of

Protestant pluralism. As Anderson (1991, 7) puts it: "Coming to maturity at a stage of human history when even the most devout adherents of any universal religion were inescapably confronted with the living *pluralism* of such religions, and the allomorphism between each faith's ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state."

Since the days of Roman persecution, of course, a universal religious regime such as Christianity has always existed in some tension with political authority. Medieval Christendom sought to resolve this tension by subsuming multiple political arrangements under a single religious ideal; in the nation-state modernity has adopted the opposite strategy, attempting to subsume multiple religious ideals under a single political authority. As an accommodation to religious pluralism, national sovereignty has been problematic for Catholicism since the Enlightenment. It has also, as secularization demonstrates, grown to be problematic for Protestantism. And for at least the last hundred years, it has become increasingly problematic for nation-states themselves.

The problem for sovereignty so construed is that the pluralism that called it into being does not cooperate with the noted imagined allomorphism of ontology and territory. Pascal, who noted in the 17th century that what is truth on one side of the Pyrenees is error on the other, would have to greatly shorten the geographical scope of such a comparison today. The problem of pluralism between nations eventually gave rise to the problem of pluralism within nations, and thus began to corrode rather than reinforce the national mythos. For a time, national religions (or effectively dominant religions) created a bulwark against such pluralism, but with the rise of world consciousness and scientific rationality, national religions gave way to the myth of the secular state.

Surely Casanova (1994) is correct in arguing that, in such a situation, the pre-eminent imperative for religious regimes is to become legitimately public religions. The Yale historian and Muslim expert Lamin Sanneh makes a similar point when he observes that the church—by which he means Christianity generically—has, in contrast to Islam, no native political language, but that the "language" of the Church must be translation. In this view, which is also characteristic of Stanley Hauerwas and similar theological ethicists, the state of Christianity relative to nation-states today is something like that of a benign parasite, or a permanent invader (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989).

These assessments, however, assign too much objectivity to the state and too little to the Church. As Durkheim noted, religion does not merely receive from the state, but also offers important desiderata to the state. The nature and extent of these benefits are debated, but even the most restrictive Marxist view on the matter acknowledges that they have at minimum historically comprised what are generally termed legitimacy, with regard to rulers, and internalization, with regard to the ruled. Until the modern era, and even today with regard to pre-modern regimes, such were universally considered essential qualities of a functioning state.

The modern myth is that these ancient imperatives of church-state relations somehow no longer apply. This is, of course, a self-reinforcing notion, necessary by definition to imagine a secular state. But is it true? Much evidence suggests otherwise. At the prime of nationhood, the 20th century witnessed the proliferation, not of mature secular states in which religion and governance both thrived, but of militantly ideological totalitarian regimes of the right and the left, on the one hand, and of comprehensive yet assertively secular welfare states, on the other hand. In both outcomes, as religion conceded the power to govern to the state, the state began to assume some of the functions formerly filled by religion, such as personal security or identity or compassion (even by means of a vestigial state religion), in order to govern legitimately. The decline of strong functioning state religions, it appears, has led inevitably to the rise of religious or quasi-religious states.

How then to explain the progress and attraction of the secular ideal? If the church-state imperatives still do apply, then the official ignorance by the state of religious matters is part of their current application. As noted above, the separation from religion of the Western secular state is as much a result of religious outcomes as political ones. Thus I suggest that, ironically, the state today is secular because secularity serves religion. The state does not serve religion, but that the state does not serve religion serves religion. And it serves most particularly the world-reforming religions that spring from the Jewish/Christian/Islamic tradition.

Virtual Nationality

In this light it is not too surprising that, in an era of *quasi-religious nations*, the Catholic Church has adopted the form of a *quasi-national religion*. The nature of its diplomatic presence, that of a virtual state with effectively no territory, reflects the persistence of the church-state imperative, in the same way as does elaborate national social service or health care or educational bureaucracies in a state with effectively no religious commitments. Both developments are concomitant responses to the transition from “late nationality” to the emerging international world system. The Catholic Church, as a transnational actor, imagines itself to be a holder of sovereignty absent an actual state as an accommodation to a world system in which nations, as transreligious actors, imagine themselves to be holders of meaning absent an actual religion. In both cases the meaning and the sovereignty are virtual, subjective realities, which in their contingency open up national and religious arrangements to emerging possibilities. The fictive character of Catholic nationality, therefore, mirrors the fictive character of secular meaningfulness, and by extension of state sovereignty itself.

The onset of modernity involved closely related philosophical, political, and religious transformations, which we know today as the contiguous rise of the Enlightenment, the nation-state, and the Protestant Reformation. Similarly, today's processes of globalization involve a confluence of philosophical, political, and religious changes which will likely recast the modern tension among these three movements. The Catholic Church's current unique status in world affairs reflects a meeting of globalizing processes with internal developments in Catholicism that began to emerge only recently, in response to the modern settlement, and have accelerated since the Second Vatican Council.

Four crucial components of these developments, which respectively address the philosophical, economic, political, and religious challenges of modernity, are the recognition of the development of doctrine, the centralization of Church authority structures furthered by the definition of papal infallibility, the emergence and dominance of Catholic social ideals and teaching, and the universalization of the Catholic mission. I will leave discussion of the doctrinal, philosophical developments for another time, and here focus on the issues of centralization, the contribution of Catholic social thought to human rights ideals, and universalization in turn, followed by a discussion of two possible effects, or differences these make: the restructuring of Catholic diversity and dissent, and the reconstitution of the nation-state.

Centralization

It is often recognized that the Catholic Church's centralized hierarchical organization, unique among world religions, is a major factor in its diplomatic effectiveness, expediting its international role and activities and permitting the articulation of a clear global agenda. It is common today to think of the Catholic Church as having always been a steeply hierarchical institution, but the level of centralization and worldwide integration of authority that exists in the Church today is, in historical terms, a fairly recent development, which is connected to the putative decline of the nation-state.

The congruence between national and religious identity that emerged at the Reformation inhibited both the inherently disintegrative tendencies of the new Protestantism and the inherently cohesive inclinations in Catholicism. Today, as the nation-state secularizes and faces challenges of legitimacy, global Protestant organizations and alliances are fracturing in the face of a corrosive post-denominationalism, while Catholicism is in the process of becoming more highly centralized.

Through most of the Church's history the type of pre-eminent authority the Pope exercises today has been challenged by the centrifugal forces of conciliarism (rule by church councils) and gallicanism (rule by national assemblies of bishops). Eight hundred years ago conciliarism was at its height; during most of the twelfth century there were two rival popes supported by competing councils. Gallicanism was in ascendancy just two centuries ago, when the prerogatives of the Pope were severely circumscribed following the French revolution.[1]

The essential components of the current transnational identity of the Catholic Church, formed as a specific response to the Reformation nation-state, can be traced directly to the First Vatican Council in 1870. The major product of this council, of course, was the definition of the doctrine popularly known as papal infallibility, which specifically establishes that the Pope's interpretation of doctrine cannot be over-ridden by a council or national assembly. There had, in fact, been an attempt to define papal infallibility at the Council of Trent (1545–1563), but the success of the proposal had to wait until 1870, by which time the bishops were far less powerful, and a military threat to the Papal States was imminent. Significantly, at the same that Vatican I declared the Pope a supreme moral authority internally, the Council also renounced all use of physical force by the Church against external actors. The immediate effect was to clarify and finally settle the nature of the Church relative to the nation-state. Mart Bax (1991, 14), in a history of these developments, concludes, "Vatican I transformed the Roman Catholic Church into a centralized, hierarchical and supra-national religious regime in which moral interdependencies were carefully formulated….The Roman Catholic regime adopted a stand that was detached from the state and transcended the interests of national states. For these reasons, it developed into an opponent to be reckoned with."

A century later the centralization of the Church was ratified and extended by the Second Vatican Council of the 1960s. Ironically, while progressive Catholics received Vatican II as a manifesto for local autonomy, the net effect of the Council was as much to direct and regulate as to promote and legitimate local variation in the Church. The Council documents strongly reaffirmed papal infallibility (Vatican Council II 1964, #18) and, in language that presaged current global developments, called for increased unity and the elimination of dissent under papal leadership: "Since the human race today is tending more and more towards civil, economic and social unity, it is all the more necessary that priests should unite their efforts and combine their resources under the leadership of the bishops and the Supreme Pontiff and thus eliminate division and dissension in every shape and form, so that all mankind may be led into the unity of the family of God" (Vatican Council II 1964, #28; this passage is quoted in Wojtyla [Pope John Paul II] 1979, 154). It is often forgotten that it was the losing forces of *ressourcement* at the Council who advocated the return to a less Rome-centered Church. With regard to the sociological centralization of the Church, the most obvious fact of Vatican II is almost never noticed: that it was held at the Vatican. After two millennia of councils held everywhere else, with Vatican II the Catholic Church belatedly held two successive councils in under a century at the center of church power.

As a matter of simple fact, in the period following the Council, assertions of centralized regulation have occurred at a pace seldom if ever before matched in the history of the Church. In the last forty years the Catholic Church has issued (a) new or updated universal: lectionary, code of canon law, catechism (the first in 400 years), general instruction for the liturgy, general directory for catechesis, and norms for Catholic universities and schools, to mention only the most significant. During the same period the Pope has issued more universal teaching documents, not just slightly more but several times as many, than at any previous time in the history of the Church. By some measures, more doctrine and discipline has been promulgated from Rome during the last 40 years than in all the previous ages of the Church combined. In historical terms, we may well be at only the beginning of a period of growing centralization in the Catholic Church.

Such centralization is made possible (as we have seen) by the revocation by the Church of statist ambitions. It is made necessary by the de facto articulation of the faith in a growing and sometimes incompatible variety of cultural forms. Here it must be remembered that the Catholic Church understands itself to have a pre-eminent institutional mission, i.e., to faithfully preserve and transmit the historically conditioned revelation of God in Jesus Christ. This imperative affects the Church's institutional elaboration directly, in that the Church extends the incarnation of its founder in the fiction that the Pope incarnates the Church in international affairs.

Thus, along with the global centralization of the Church in the Vatican and its curia has been a trend toward the formalization and centralization of national Catholic churches (Casanova 1997, 136–37). In contrast to national Protestant churches, Catholic national churches have more often prophetically challenged prevailing social and moral norms that counter the Catholic understanding of the Christian faith. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has often taken diplomatic positions on international issues that are in sync with those of the Vatican even when these positions are not popular in the U.S. For example, the USCCB has repeatedly advocated U.S. ratification of international treaties, already signed by the Vatican and every European nation, to impose environmental standards and eliminate the use of landmines—none of which have ever attained the support of a majority of Americans or been ratified by the U.S. In September 2002 the U.S. bishops, in a just war critique closely modeled on one articulated earlier by the Vatican, publicly denounced plans by the Bush administration to invade Iraq, despite overwhelming support for such an action in the U.S. Congress and among the American public, including a large majority of American Catholics. The U.S. Catholic Church has persistently opposed such generally accepted practices as contraception, elective abortion, normalization of homosexual relations, and even (technically) divorce, as well as maintaining uncharacteristically non-democratic and gender-stratified forms of institutional leadership. The Church maintains these positions and structures in conformity with global church norms, in the face of a strong social consensus to the contrary among the U.S. population and even among national Catholic elites. By contrast, the Anglican Communion, the largest and arguably most cohesive international Protestant affiliation, has been unable to prevent the American Episcopal Church from taking steps to normalize homosexual relations, with the result that both the American and international Anglican churches are undergoing various levels of conflict, disaggregation, and realignment.

Catholic Social Thought and Universal Human Rights

The Holy See's effectiveness in the international order is also due, in part, to the current dominance of Christian ideals and forms in the international order. It is common today to think of American power, or perhaps the allied power of the West, as the lynchpin of world order. However, the dominance of the West in world affairs is not primarily a hegemony of political power but a dominance of cultural values and forms; and primary among these values and forms is the Christian faith. The Christian faith, in varying forms and to varying degrees, has been proposed by scholars as the common root of capitalism, democracy, rationalization, the ideal of progress, the project of modern science, even Marxism and secular humanism. To the extent that such forms have promoted global development and comity to date, and considering the actual transitions of power that have occurred and the growing belligerence of the United States with the decline of the cold war, it may be more accurate today to speak of the possibilities of a *pax Christiana* than of a *pax Americana*.

At the center of the norms and ideals that guide the international order is a Christian understanding of human persons. The ideals of human dignity, human rights, freedom, and self-determination are direct elaborations of Christian themes and doctrines. It may be instructive to recall that those who labored to institute the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which forms the juridical constitution of today's international order and legitimacy, as well as the United Nations, did so out of an explicit application of Christian principles. Franklin Roosevelt declared that the United Nations "shall seek…the establishment of an international order in which the spirit of Christ shall rule the hearts of men and nations" (*New York Herald Tribune*, January 7, 1939; quoted in Maritain 1944, 58).

It does not detract from the universal appeal and applicability of the ideals of human dignity to note that their articulation in such form and force reflected the central theme and language of the relatively new body of Catholic social thought. In the establishment and promotion of ideals of universal rights, Catholics were more than marginally implicated. Catholic intellectuals, from Jacques Maritain to John Courtney Murray, argued that world peace, democracy, and the Christian faith were inextricably linked, a line of reasoning which pervades Catholic social thought to this day.

The body of doctrines known as Catholic Social Thought (CST) is remarkable in that it emerged relatively late and developed relatively quickly in the long history of Christian tradition. The first recognized social encyclical—aptly named *Rerum Novarum*, the "New Things"—did not appear until the year 1891, that is, until almost 19 of the 20 centuries we have experienced since the time of Christ's incarnation had already passed. Since their late emergence, furthermore, the social teachings have developed into an identifiable and important part of the Church's teaching with a speed that is, in terms of doctrinal history, nothing short of unprecedented. From the first articulation in *Rerum Novarum* to the mature systematization of the *Compendium* (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace 2005) spans little more than a century.

Some will object that the social teachings did not emerge entirely de novo, but grew from seeds that are evident far earlier in the tradition. This is undoubtedly true; indeed, many of the themes of CST are expressed in Scripture; but this does not weigh against, but rather strengthens, the point I am making. The more the social teachings are implicated in the Christian idea theologically, the less understandable it is on theological grounds why they came so late chronologically. Imagine the degree of social injustice the West might have been spared if the principle of subsidiarity or the equal and inalienable dignity of human persons had been articulated during the feudal era. No, the theological continuity of the social teachings with the central themes of the Christian faith only sharpens the question: if they are so theologically central and essential, why were they not articulated much earlier?

The answer is that CST came to light when and how it did not as a result of an internal theological problematic but in response to emergent changes in the sociocultural order. It is commonly recognized that the social teachings appeared in response to industrialization, particularly the development of commodity wages and growing property inequality that inhibited human freedom among the wage-earning classes. But CST is also far more than a critique of industrialization; it articulates a vision of human being and human society that addresses the root problems of modernity itself. Solidarity, for example, counteracts the atomic individualism of Enlightenment thinking about man in a recognition and promotion of human sociality that goes far beyond mere labor coalitions. The principle of subsidiarity not only creates space for human freedom in intimate associations, but also redresses the tendency toward vertical sovereignty and total control of subordinates which is expressed no less in the rational bureaucratic state than in the divine right of kings. The ideal of the common good provides a justification for collective political arrangements that both challenges and affirms modern voluntaristic or utilitarian ideals of popular sovereignty.

But the primary and most successful exemplar of CST's response to Enlightenment modernity has been the ideal of the dignity of the human person. This formulation has been universally accepted by religious and secular regimes, and, with the related concept of human rights, lays at the root of the modern world order. The Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins with "the recognition of the inherent dignity…of all members of the human family." The formal idea of human dignity, of course, expresses a central impulse of Enlightenment, specifically Kantian, moral philosophy. It was in Catholic social reflection, however, that the idea of human dignity took concrete shape in the expression of moral social arrangements.

In the international realm, the principles of Catholic Social Thought form the context for, and are in turn advocated principally by, the international activity of the Holy See. Just as the Holy See does not pursue national interests in the ordinary sense, so in this arena CST functions not as an ideology but truly as principle, as unapologetically Catholic ideas of human life and freedom are brought to bear, for the most part, for the benefit of all humanity rather than the material interests of the Catholic Church.

Increasingly, the Catholic Church has adopted the role of advocacy for the spirit of Christ, expressed in support of universal human freedoms and values, thus becoming a kind of civil religion of the emerging international order. For at least two decades, and explicitly since *Ut Unam Sint* (John Paul II 1995), the Pope has envisioned the possibility of speaking for all Christians, not just Catholics. In many regards this recognizes what is already a de facto representation, that extends, not without some irony, even as far as other religions (as discussed further in a moment). As a matter of practice, the Holy See's international diplomacy in recent times has been directed far less to the relation of the Church to nations than to the relations of nations with each other. The Holy See's U.N. Mission explicitly acknowledges this role: "[W]hy do so many countries seek official contacts with the Holy See?…What they do seek is what the Holy See, by its very nature and tradition, can offer: orientation and spiritual inspiration that should animate the life of nations and their mutual relationships" (Holy See 2006). Its primary messages in United Nations discourse include: the equality of all nations; the solidarity among nations, particularly across differentials of wealth and power; the priority, in international disputes, of negotiation and jurisprudence over war; and, more recently, the defense of unborn life and natural forms of the family (Tauran 2002).

Universalism

The recent process of centralization of Catholic authority has been accompanied in the 20th century by an increasing universalism in its evangelistic and public policy activities. The social encyclicals, beginning with *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 (Leo XIII 1891), increasingly addressed matters of social and economic life that had traditionally been considered external to Christian doctrine proper. In 1931's *Quadragesimo Anno*, subtitled "On the Reconstruction of the Social Order," Pope Pius XI dedicated the first portion of the document to defending the still novel thesis that "there resides in Us the right and duty to pronounce with supreme authority upon social and economic matters" (Pius XI 1931, #41). Beginning with *Pacem in Terris* in 1963, papal encyclicals (with a few exceptions) began to be addressed, not only to bishops and Catholic faithful, but also to "all persons of good will." At the same time as the Church, due to centralization, increasingly spoke with one voice, it aspired to speak for and address its message to one common humanity.

The process was also accelerated by the Second Vatican Council, particularly as a result of its groundbreaking declaration on religious liberty, which affirmed that even error had rights of conscientious assent. As the implications of this idea have worked themselves into the Church's diplomatic activities since the Council, the policy of *libertas ecclesiae* has been transmuted into an advocacy of *libertas humanae*. Whereas prior to the 1960s the Church sought to defend the particular freedom, and dominance if possible, of the Catholic faith, since the Second Vatican Council the Holy See has supported not just religious freedom for Catholics as an institutional strategy, but religious freedom for all religions as a matter of principle. Consequently global Catholicism has been engaged, not always consistently, in a project of renouncing national institutional privilege in favor of participation as one voluntary religious institution among many in a civil society comprised, within nations, of ideally unconstrained religious discourse. The good of the Church is now bound up with the good of the human person.

Increasingly, the Church seeks to ensure the freedom of the faith, not primarily through negotiating institutional conditions or arrangements but by focusing on structures that promote religious freedom for all persons and religious actors. Where at one time the Church sought to dominate, today it seeks only not to be dominated. Just as, and for many of the same reasons as, a multinational business corporation, the Church ideally seeks a free and open market of ideas, but also, for its own good, no monopoly on the expression of truth. In its current self-understanding, the Church sits more comfortably in the marketplace of religion than in the seat of power.

There are good reasons to worry that in the protection of its institutional interests the Church must engage in a realpolitik that may compromise its social justice ideals. But the Church has no ability to counter the coercive violence of realpolitik in kind; it has no borders to protect; and its institutional force is scant at best. In fact, the ability to compromise and nuance the Church's position is built into its principles regarding the articulation of moral truth. On the whole, the maintenance of centralized authority promotes flexibility, not rigidity, in the articulation and application of Catholic convictions in particular situations. Whether by irony or design, the effect of this policy has been to place the Church in a powerful position in the formation of international civil structures.

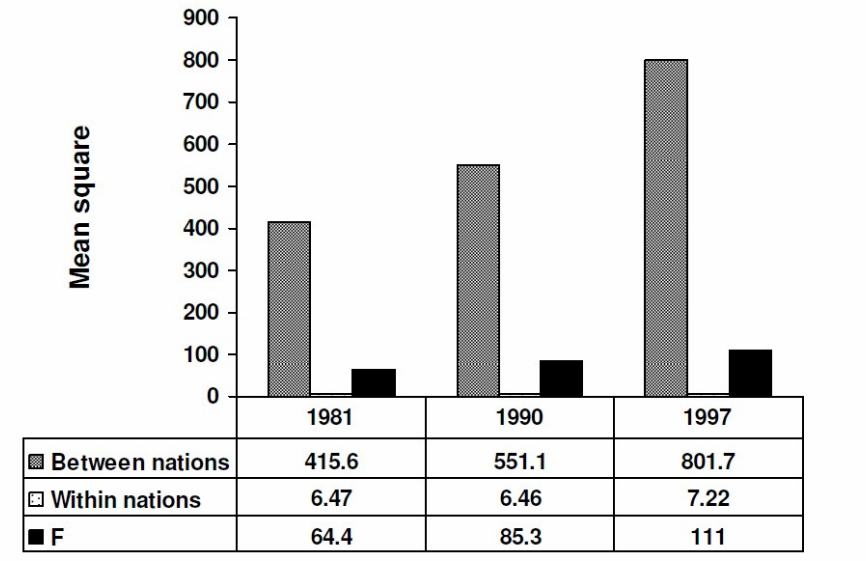
Enabling and Reclaiming Dissent

The nation-state enabled not only the Protestant schism but also a variety of less severe centripetal forces in Catholicism. To be sure, cultural pluralism has characterized the Christian faith since its beginning, when, on the Day of Pentecost, persons of many nationalities and cultures received the Gospel proclamation, so it is recorded, in their own tongue. Since the emergence of the modern world order a wide variety of perspectives, interpretations, disciplines, and liturgical expressions of the faith have been, to a large extent, a resultant of diverse national languages, cultures, sensibilities, ethnicities, and political arrangements. In our day this diversity is being re-ordered.

It has been widely recognized that the ongoing process of globalization simultaneously encourages both global conformity and local diversity. As rationalized norms become universal, disparate oppositional extremes are empowered. In the Catholic Church a similar dual dynamic has led to the strengthening of oppositional forces at the same time as papal authority has become largely universalized. Centralized papal authority, like global trade agreements, is effective for boundary maintenance, limiting diversity when it crosses the line into dissent or is particularly prominent, but cannot efficiently impose the internalization of norms and ideals or desired behavior in local, that is, national settings. Some (e.g., Hervieu-Leger 1997, looking at the Catholic charismatic movement and world youth days) have argued, moreover, that opposition or diversity is decreasingly associated with nations and increasingly resident in cultural elaborations and a network of international organizations that have emerged since the mid-20th century. Like religious orders of an earlier day, modern lay apostolates pursue particular visions of the faith largely unhindered by hierarchical oversight, and increasingly these develop transnational presences and sensibilities.

There is little doubt that this is occurring; however, it is unlikely that, with the possible exception of certain religious elites, such international linkages will effectively homogenize Catholic religious culture. National differences in religious life will persist, and strengthen. Figure 2.1 presents evidence of such persistence and enhancement of national diversity among Catholics worldwide. The figure reports findings from the World Values Surveys (total n = 63,729 Catholic respondents in up to 49 nations) in 1981, 1990, and 1997 on the diversity of opinion among Catholics worldwide on abortion. In Catholic moral teaching, elective abortion is never justifiable; over this period the Holy See engaged in consistent and extensive advocacy to prohibit the practice of abortion. To the question, "Is abortion ever justified?" respondents were invited to indicate their view on a 10-point scale ranging from "Never" to "Always." The figure reports the mean square variance of opinion between nations and within nations, and the corresponding F statistic for each year. It is clear that in every period the variance of opinion within nations is much smaller than that between nations; the between-nation variance is several hundred times larger than the within-nation variance, the bars for which are barely visible in the figure. Since 1981, moreover, the variance between nations has almost doubled (from 415 to 802) while within-nation variance has increased only slightly (from 6.5 to 7.2). These results show directly that the consistent and public opposition of the Holy See to abortion in the international sphere has not prevented the existence and growth of local diversity, largely correlated with national—political and cultural—differences, on this key Catholic issue.

Figure 2.1. Diversity of Catholic opinion on abortion within and between nations: World Values Surveys 1981–1997.



	1981	1990	1997
▨ Between nations	415.6	551.1	801.7
☐ Within nations	6.47	6.46	7.22
■ F	64.4	85.3	111

In his 2000 McGinley lecture, the late Cardinal Avery Dulles suggested that there are certain structural arrangements in the Catholic Church today that promote the simultaneous development of centralization and local diversity in institutional Catholicism. He presents an image of centralization and decentralization as two tendencies that co-exist in a dynamic tension in the Church, such that a greater force in one direction leads to a greater countering force in the other. “Precisely because of the increased activity of particular churches and conferences,” Dulles observes, “Rome is required to exercise greater vigilance than ever, lest the unity of the church be jeopardized” (Dulles 2000). To some extent, as well, the agency of the Holy See operates to preserve local diversity in the face of international oppositional tendencies. By appealing to the Holy See, local churches have recourse to balance the intrusion of centrifugal forces. Dulles presents several cases where this has functioned with regard to translations of church texts, concluding "…as in many [cases], the authority of Rome functions to protect local churches from questionable exercises of power by national or international agencies" (Dulles 2000).

However, the larger reality that opposes the centralizing forces in world Catholicism is ongoing secularization—individual secularization in Bryan Wilson's (1982) sense—manifested in the growing tendency for culture to carry religion rather than the other way around. Increasingly, for most Catholics worldwide, the rise of personal choice in religion is leading to the selective appropriation of religious goods and the assimilation of religious values to humanistic ones elaborated along the lines of cultural, that is, effectively national, differences. As authority is becoming more centralized, explicit, and resident in formal institutional arrangements, elements of diversity or dissent are becoming more globally diffuse, implicit, and resident in informal cultural appropriations of the faith. Although the particular issues in question may be different, Catholics in Africa and South America, no less than in North America, experience little cognitive dissonance in simultaneously affirming strong allegiance to the Pope and selectively ignoring his directives in their private personal behavior.

Ironically, this secularization is in some ways enabled by the advocacy of the Holy See itself. If persons are free in conscience to choose their religion, then dissenting Catholics can claim to be free in conscience to select among Catholic doctrines. If the truths of faith express the truths of humanity, then secularists can claim that humanistic values circumscribe Catholic religious truths. The very values advocated by the highest Catholic authority are capable of misappropriation by a Catholic religious culture that, up to an extent, protests them.

In this irony lies a unique and fundamentally catholic or ecumenical opportunity for the Holy See, for protest is a central problematic of both religious and secular culture today; and if global Catholicism may struggle with too much centralization, global Protestantism struggles much harder with too little. While Catholic diversity today risks being muted, Protestant diversity risks becoming incoherent and self-defeating. As the Holy See increasingly represents universal religious realities and rights in the international sphere, it benefits most strongly, next to Catholic interests, the interests of those separated Christian communities that are most similar to Catholicism, namely, Protestant Christians. Many of the realities and rights involved, moreover, are more characteristic of Protestantism than they are of Catholicism.

When the Pope advocates the primacy of conscience, free religious discourse, the rights of religious minorities, freedom to convert, even unhindered access to religious scriptures and worship in the common language, he is advocating positions that Protestants maintained in the face of Catholic opposition from the Reformation until as recently as the 1960s. In its international role, therefore, the Holy See serves as a unifying agent, not only for the Catholic

Church, but also for the myriad Christian expressions of an increasingly disintegrated Protestantism. For all Protestant groups, the Holy See's framing of moral discourse in the international sphere provides a reference for their own proclamation of the Gospel. In the United States, fundamentalists make common cause with Catholics in opposition to abortion and gay marriage at the same time as liberals appropriate Catholic social teachings in economic policy. In this sense, the Holy See's international agency moves more than a little toward recapturing an *unam catholicam ecclesiam*.

Toward Virtuous Nations

As the forces of globalization, post-modernity, and multinational capitalism, among others, pose ongoing challenges to the legitimacy and autonomy of nation-states, the Catholic Church appears now to be entering an era in which it functions once again in the liminal space between nations and in the emerging international civil society. One of the strong contributions of the virtual nation which is the Catholic Church to the international order in years to come will be a clear articulation of the necessity and proper mission of nations. This situation bears some resemblance to the medieval *res publica Christiana*, in which a common religious faith formed the basis for a civilized world order among relatively weak political actors. Jose Casanova has referred to the emerging era as "neomedieval," and Philip Jenkins has famously called it the "next Christendom." While it is not all certain that the current challenges will ultimately result in an erosion of national power, it is clear that nations, as imagined communities, are being broadly re-imagined on a global scale today. In this process it is crucial that the spiritual potential of nation-states be encouraged and elaborated, that they may mature, as it were, from imagined communities to imagined communions.

This development is crucial to the continued progression of the modern ideal of human rights which lies at the heart of the international order. In a global national order, human rights are not merely individual rights, but also entail the rights of nations. Indeed, it was the weakness of national religions to posit human rights in individuals. Just as it is important to affirm that human rights are not ontologically conferred by the state, but inhere in each person by the action of God, so it is also important to affirm that human rights is an empty concept apart from membership in a nation that makes their attainment sociologically possible. So the 2005 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, #435) explicitly calls for "national rights" to extend and secure "human rights."

Yet the relation between human and national rights is not just functional; it is not merely that the rights of nations in international discourse must be established in order that the rights of persons in national discourse can be secured.

Rather, national rights are an essential species of human rights, because nationhood is an essential human activity. As Aristotle recognized that man is by nature a political animal, so Catholic social doctrine has recognized that, in the modern world system, the formation of nations is a rational, that is, human, activity. The discovery of new and limiting responsibilities in the elaboration of a transnational world order betokens the transformation, adjustment, and maturing of the nation-state, but not its disappearance or even its weakening. Nations, no less than religions and economies, are called to serve the human person, and it will be the ongoing role of the Church, speaking as a nation to the nations, to call all nations to discover and enact their own virtues.

Notes

1. This paragraph and the two following are adapted from D. Paul Sullins, "Beyond Christendom: Protestant/Catholic Distinctions in the Coming Global Christianity," *Religion* 36 (November 2006): 197–213.

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