

Imagined communion: virtual nationality and virtuous nations

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As Father Reese has detailed so well, the Catholic Church has appropriated a place, with respect both to political and religious regimes, that is unique among world institutions. I've been asked to address the question, what difference does this make? My response will consist primarily of trying to put the facts presented by Fr. Reese in a larger context and suggesting some implications for the Church's current place in international civil society.

The context for understanding the unique place of the Church in world affairs, I suggest, is in a process of mutual adaptations engendered by the development of the modern state system, on the one hand, and institutional development in Catholicism, on the other. While the external developments date back at least to the rise of the nation-state, the corresponding internal developments in the Church are much more recent. I want to pursue this claim by looking in turn at the related dynamics of sovereignty, centralization and universalization.

Accommodating the nation-state

Part of the unique position--and power--of the Church in world affairs today can be related to growing problems in the idea and practice of national sovereignty. The notion of sovereignty, of course, is intrinsic to nationhood. Since the Enlightenment, sovereignty, as an accommodation to religious pluralism, has always been problematic for a universal religious regime such as Catholicism. It has also, as secularization demonstrates, grown to be problematic for Protestantism. And for at least the last hundred years, it has becoming increasingly problematic for nation-states themselves.

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 millenium 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, unversally 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, the 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 represents, not (except in occasional, 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 capitol 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 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 acknowledgement that nations embody or assume subjective views of ultimate meaning that can be properly termed religious. Nations are mythic realms; and 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."

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. In the most recent versions of the nation-state myth, no religion is dominant, and all religions, qua religion, are disadvantaged in or even excluded outright from public discourse.

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 the Christianity relative to nation-states today is something like that of a benign parasite, or a permanent invader. These assessments, however, posit too much objectivity to the state, and too little to the Church. Religion does not merely receive from the state, but also offers, as Durkheim noted, 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 historically comprised, at minimum, 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, but of totalitarian regimes of the right and the left, on the one hand, and of comprehensive welfare states on the other. 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 meaning or compassion, in order to govern legitimately. The decline of 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. Three crucial components of these developments, addressing respectively the philosophical, 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, and the universalization of the Catholic mission. I will leave discussion of the philosophical developments for another time, and here focus on the issues of centralization 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. While I think these ideas are well founded, please bear in mind that these discussions are, in the spirit of this conference, somewhat speculative, in process and by no means complete.

Centralization

Fr. Reese observes, in a clear and compelling way, that the 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 fractive 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 alignments are evaporating in the face of a disintegrating post-denominationalism, while Catholicism is in the process of becoming more highly centralized.

(The following 3 paragraphs are adapted from my paper *Beyond Christendom*, forthcoming in *Religion*.) 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.

The essential components of the current trans-national 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. This 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. As Mart Bax states (1991:14): "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."

The centralization of the Church was affirmed and furthered 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 has been as much to direct and regulate as to promote and legitimate local variation in the Church. The Council documents strongly reaffirmed papal infallibility (*Lumen Gentium* 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 (*Lumen Gentium* 28. This passage is quoted by Karol Wojtyla, elected Pope John Paul II, in *Sources of Renewal*, p. 154)." It is often forgotten that it was the losing forces of renaissance at the Council who advocated the return to a less Rome-centered Church. And the most obvious fact of Vatican II, with regard to centralization, is almost never noticed: that it was held at the Vatican. After two millennia of councils held everywhere else, with Vatican II we had two successive councils held at the center of church power in under a century.

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 97: 136-7). In contrast to national Protestant churches, Catholic national churches have more often prophetically challenged prevailing social and moral norms that counter the unitive Catholic understanding of the Christian faith. As Fr. Reese notes, "the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has taken positions on international issues that is in sync with those of the Vatican even when these positions are not popular in the U.S." In addition to the diplomatic positions he notes, we could also note the U.S. Catholic Church's official opposition to 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.

Universalism

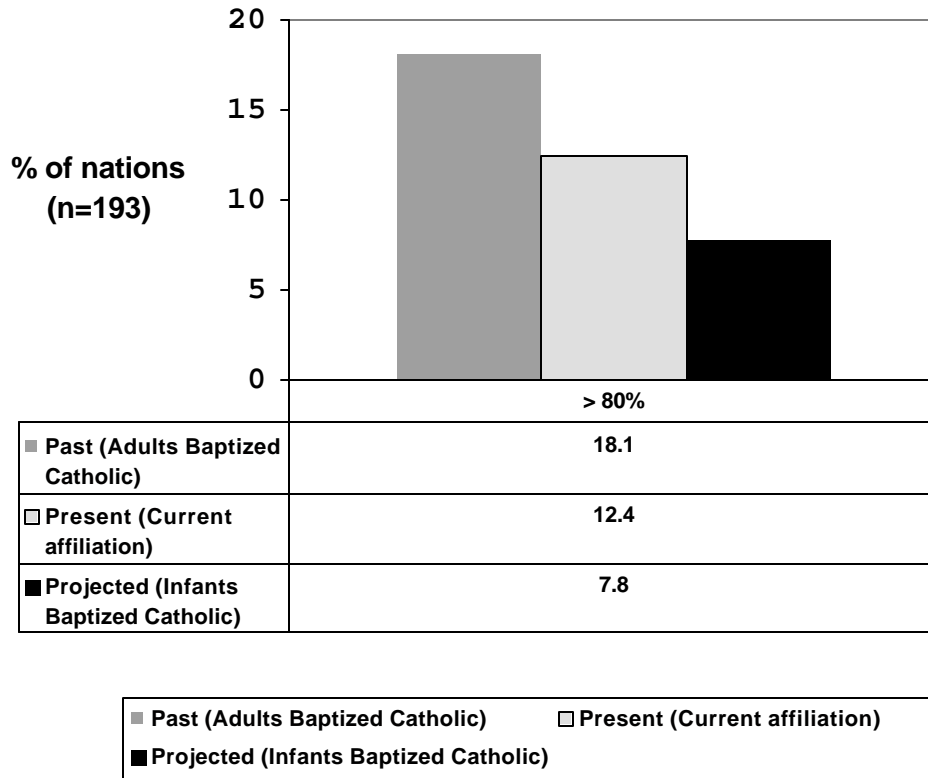
The recent process of centralization of Catholicism has been accompanied, in the 20th century, by an increasing universalism in its evangelistic and public policy activities. The social encyclicals, beginning with *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, increasingly addressed matters of social and economic life that 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." 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." As, due to centralization, the Church 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. As the implications of this idea have worked themselves into the Church's diplomatic activities, the policy of *libertas ecclesiae* has been transmuted into an advocacy of *libertas humanae*. As Fr. Reese notes, "Since the Second Vatican Council, the Holy See has supported not just religious freedom for Catholics but also, as a matter of principle, religious freedom for all religions."

Beginning with its groundbreaking declaration on religious liberty, which affirmed that even error had rights of conscientious assent, 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 was now bound up with the good of the human person. Figure 1 illustrates the decline of Catholic dominance within nations.

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 market place of religion than in the seat of power.

Figure 1
Past, Present and Projected Global Concentration of Catholics by Nation



Reese worries, with good reason, 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. And it has no borders to protect. Its institutional force is scant at best. As Reese notes elsewhere, the Church's "options are limited when faced with government thugs willing to use force and violence." In fact, the ability to compromise, nuance, is built into the Church's 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. In part, this is due to, and serves to advance further, the 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 lynch-pin 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 ideals of human dignity, human rights, freedom and self-determination are direct elaborations of Christian themes and doctrines. 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 to speak of the possibilities of pax Christiana than pax Americana.

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, Jan. 7, 1939, quoted in Maritain 1944:58)." 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 today.

Increasingly, the Catholic Church has adopted the role of advocacy for the spirit of Christ, expressed in support of universal human freedoms and values, in the emerging world order, thus becoming a kind of civil religion of the emerging international order. For at least two decades, and explicitly since *Ut Unam Sint* in 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, also to 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: ". . .why 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 defence of unborn life and natural forms of the family (Tauran 2002).

Enabling and reclaiming dissent

The nation state enabled not only the Protestant schism but also a variety of less severe centripetal forces in Catholicism. A wide variety of perspectives, interpretations, disciplines and liturgical expressions of the faith were, to a large extent, a resultant of diverse national languages, cultures, sensibilities, ethnicities and political arrangements. A result of the inculturation of the faith, this situation 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. In our day this diversity is being re-ordered.

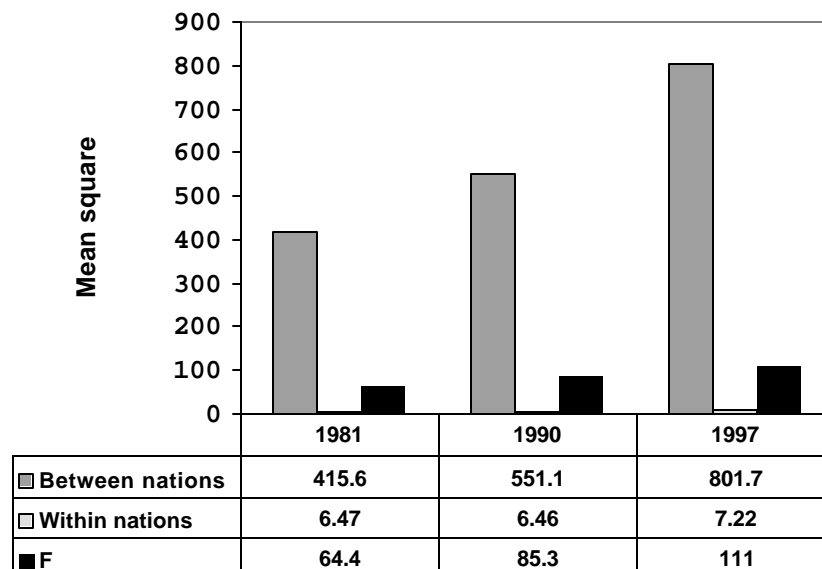
It has been widely recognized that the ongoing process of globalization simultaneously encourages both global conformity and local diversity. As rationalized norms become universal,

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 presents evidence of this trend, i.e., the persistence and enhancement of national diversity. 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. To the question, “Is abortion ever justified?” respondents were invited to indicate their view on a an unlabeled 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 to see that the variance of

Figure 2
Diversity of Catholic opinion on abortion within and between nations: World Values Surveys 1981-1997



■ Between nations □ Within nations ■ F

opinion within nations is much smaller than that between nations; and that since 1981 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).

To an extent, 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. Avery Dulles (2000 McGinley lecture) describes 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.”

For Catholicism, we should not think that the spread or persistence of diversity will lead to greater decentralization in the Church. Just the opposite is likely. This is because centralization and decentralization in the Church is not a zero-sum question, such that if you get more of one you get less of the other. Rather, they are two tendencies that co-exist in a dynamic tension, such that a greater force in one direction leads to a greater countering force in the other. Just because there is increased diversity in national and international agencies, the Holy See exercises greater oversight to maintain the unity of the Church. (As Dulles notes, in his 2000 McGinley lecture, “Precisely because of the increased activity of particular churches and conferences, Rome is required to exercise greater vigilance than ever, lest the unity of the church be jeopardized.”)

However, the larger reality that opposes the centralizing forces in world Catholicism is ongoing secularization—intensional secularization in the Berger/Luckmann 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. (Note, in passing, that this statement could also be made, *mutatis mutandis*, for worldwide Islam. Mark Juergensmeyer has argued that resurgent Islamic traditionalism, far from weakening nationalism, is helping to reconstitute the nation-state. He maintains that “traditional forms of social identity [religion and ethnicity] have helped to rescue one of modernity’s central themes: the idea of nationhood.” I’m making the same argument here with regard to resurgent forms of Catholic diversity. However, instead of saying religious identities are reconstituting national ones, it may be better to say that the interaction of religious and national (and ethnic) identities are mutually strengthening each other.)

In this sense the internationalization of Catholic values reflect a secularization of Catholic truth. Rhetoric of the popes, noted by Fr. Reese, which in Benedict focuses on truth. Actually there’s no great contrast here with John Paul II, who also emphasized truth. The Church speaks the real truth that modernity seeks, that modernity itself cannot discover. Church is a holder of general

religious goods, then. And, as it has adapted its message to modernity in speaking it, so modernity will adapt its message in hearing it. The Church hopes that the message will change modernity. But it is also possible that modernity will change the message in hearing it. In the culture of individual religion, modernity takes the message of the Church as a resource to rearticulate its rationalizing, homogenizing, individuating force.

So Benedict speaks of sexual love. The human body, passions, is the hardest to rationalize. And sex de-individuates at the animal, thus pre-rational(izable), level.

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 Catholics must be free in conscience to select among Catholic doctrines. If the truths of faith express the truths of humanity, then humanistic values can circumscribe Catholic religious truths. The very values advocated by the highest Catholic authority underlie a Catholic religious culture that, up to an extent, protests them. In this irony lies a unique and fundamentally catholic 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. Many of those realities and rights, 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, and we have a born-again polyglot evangelical President who repeatedly makes reference to the "culture of death". In this sense, the Holy See's international agency moves more than a little toward recapturing an *unam catholicam ecclesiam*.

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. 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.

One of the strong contributions of the virtual nation which is the Church to the international order in years to come will be a clear articulation of the necessity and proper mission of nations. The recent Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine (435) calls for "national rights" to extend "human rights". This is to say, 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. Yet the relation between human and national rights is not just functional; the claim here 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 essentially a 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. On this view, 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.

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