

# Catholicism and Democracy

## A Reconsideration

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### Introduction

[1] It has long been believed that there is a connection between culture and sustain democratic forms of government. The ancient Athenians maintained that their democracy was a result of their culture. Montesquieu, Rousseau, and J. S. Mill also maintained that culture and democracy were related, and a wide variety of social



[8] There are two, related aspects to the cultural theory as it pertains to Catholicism and democracy. One conceals aspects of Catholicism that are designed directly to influence political outcomes. The other involves the claim that the acceptance of Catholic faith and doctrines predispose one to reject or at least seriously question democratic principles. Examples of both are given below.

[9] In a piece written in 1942, Kingsley Davis states that a Catholic state church tends to be irreconcilable with the liberalism, individualism, freedom, mobility and sovereignty of the West. Davis also notes that so much fixity of status and submission to authority, and to remain so independent of secular authority that it invariably clashes with the liberalism, individualism, freedom, mobility and sovereignty of the West. Davis also notes that during World War II a very large proportion of Western European Catholics were deeply distrustful of democracy if not explicitly anti-democratic.

[10] S. M. Lipset, whose early work on this topic was influenced by Davis, also postulates a link between Catholicism and non-democratic belief and practice. He points out that in Protestant countries, the church no longer figured in politics. In Catholic nations, by contrast, the church remained a political force into the twentieth century. Its continued presence gave conflicts such as those surrounding class issues a religious hue, but a deep-seated conflict between God and Satan.

[11] The linkage between democratic instability and Catholicism may also be accounted for by elements inherent in Catholicism as a religious system. Democracy requires a universalistic political belief system in the sense that it legitimates different ideologies. And it might be assumed that religious value systems which are more universalistic in the sense that they place less stress on being the only true church will be more compatible with democracy than those which assume that they have the only truth. The latter belief, held much more strongly by the Catholic than by most other Christian churches, makes it difficult for the religious value system to help legitimate a political system which requires, as part of its basic structure, the acceptance of a pluralistic society.

To underscore this notion, Lipset notes that the acceptance of a pluralistic society is viewed as salient by Catholics or other believers in a one true church. In fact, a real dilemma exists for the religious value system to help legitimate a political system which requires, as part of its basic structure, the acceptance of a pluralistic society.

[12]





DQG LQIOXHQFH WKL V LV ³UDWLRQDO´ VWUDWHJLF EHKDYLRU \$ FR  
Hong Kong, a jurisdiction the U.K. ruled from 1842 to 1997. British authorities made no effort to introduce  
electoral democracy there until reforms were implemented in 1994 and 1995, by which time the U.K. had  
nothing to lose since the reversion to Chinese rule was scheduled to take place shortly thereafter. One could  
add that colonization itself violates democratic principles insofar as the subject peoples oppose it.

[23] Another example comes from Italy. Around 1909 the Italian parliament was considering extending the  
franchise to people who could not read or write, a group that made up a sizable proportion of the  
population at the time. Liberal and socialist politicians, who had previously been supportive of allowing greater numbers of  
, WDOLDQV WR YRWH YHKHPHQWO\ RSSRVHG WKL V SURSRVDO RQ W  
W K X P E R I W K H D S U B H V 9 0 , V . é . , they would probably not vote liberal or socialist.

[24] A corollary of this phenomenon is that disenfranchised groups in a particular society will lobby for the  
spread of democracy more vociferously than those who already enjoy certain privileges. An example of  
this can be found in the Dutch Catholic experience. In the Netherlands in the nineteenth century, rights to  
suffrage were denied Catholics (but not Protestants) by a Calvinist dominated government. For years, Dutch  
Catholics clamored for a more inclusive democratic system, one that did not exclude them on the basis of their  
religious affiliation; they finally won their rights in the 1870s (Tumin: 556). In a commentary on the  
evolution of democracy in the Netherlands, Tuz D Q Q R E V H U Y H V ³ W K H U H L V D J R R G G H D  
authoritarian, and democratic sentiment has persisted among politicians and the general public well into the  
twentieth century. . . . If there is a principle that history illustrates, it is not the enormous power of democratic  
values . . . but the simple rule that people favor democracy when it suits their interests, and recoil from it when  
L W W K U H D W H Q V W K H L U S R Z H U D Q G S R V L W L R Q ´

### Anti-Clericalism in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

[25] , Q R U G H U W R X Q G H U V W D Q G W K H & K X U F K ¶ V D W W L W X G H V W R Z D U G  
and the early years of the twentieth, when democracy was gaining increasing acceptance in the West, it would  
be useful to consider the nature of K H ³ G H P R F U D F ´ W K D W Z D V E H L Q J R I I H U G 6 H Y  
embarked on campaigns of strident anti-D H U L F D O L V P ) R U H [ D E S C H I C A L I S M C O L L A U W K H V O R J  
O ¶ H Q Q H F D H U L F D O L V P L V W K H H Q H P \ a series of punitive measures against L W L F L D C  
the Church from 1879 to 1905 (Kalyvas 1996: 22). The Jesuits were forcibly dissolved, their colleges  
given to secular priests or laymen, and members of other orders were expelled from their respective  
organizations. Religious congregations were forbidden to teach in public elementary schools. All religious  
orders had to have the approval of parliament to operate; eventually most applications were denied, which  
resulted in the closing of over 10,000 schools run by nuns. By 1904 religious congregations were not allowed  
to offer any educational services of any kind, and their property was to be confiscated and sold. The next year  
the Church lost its official status and its state subsidies (Kalyvas 1996: 22).

[26] The anticlerical republican left, which ruled France from 1879 to 1914, undertook these measures  
S U L P D U L O \ W R H O L P L Q D W H W K H & K X U F K ¶ V L Q I O X H Q F H L Q H G X F D W L  
should be to the secular republic. The liberality of the day, which was inspired by the Revolution, was  
that in the age of progress Catholicism should be rooted out in order to give science and reason full sway in  
improving the human condition. The anticlericals found female piety to be particularly bothersome in this  
regard. Jules Ferry, the author of an 1879 anti-D H U L F D O E L O O V W D W H G H P S K D W L F D O O \ V  
Z R P H Q I U R P 5 H O L J L R Q ´ T X R W H G L Q 5 K R G H V

[27] Anti- & D W K R O L F V W R U P F O R X G V D O V R T E D G E R M A N Y , W H E N L I B E R A L S F E A R E D T H A T F N ¶ V Q  
bringing Bavaria into the national fold would lead to a resurgence of Catholic power and influence. The  
ensuing Kulturkampf produced a series of attacks by the German state on the Catholic Church that was even  
harsher than the blows received in France. The measures included censoring sermons and Church documents,  
attempts to control the appointment of clergy, the closing of churches, and the forcible dissolution of every

religious order except one (Kalyvas 1996: 213). Those who refused to comply with the new laws, including priests and bishops, were expelled from their positions, put in jail, or sent out of the country; it is estimated that about 1800 priests were removed from their posts (Cornwell: 194). The expulsions were so extensive that

E\ R Q O \ W K U H H R I W Z H O Y H 3 U X V V L D Q G L R F H V H V K D G D E L V K R S  
(Kalyvas 1996: 213).





the right to rule is not necessarily . . . bound up with any special mode of government may take this or that form, provided only that it be of a nature of the government, rulers must ever bear in mind that God is the paramount ruler of the world, and must set Him before themselves as their exemplar and law in the administration of the State (part 4).

[37] /HR ;,,, H[KRUWHG &DWKROLFV WR EH DFWLYH LQ PXQLFLSDO DQG public matters would be as wrong as to have no concern for, or to bestow no labor upon, the common good . . .  
' SDUW &DWKROLFV <sup>3</sup>KROG DORRI >IURP SROLWLFV@ ' KH ZURV guarantee for the welfare of the State will the more readily seize the reins of government. This would tend also to the injury of the Christian religion, forasmuch as those would come into power who are badly disposed  
WRZDUG WKH &KXUFK DQG WKR VH ZKR DUH ZLOOLQJ WR EHIULHQG &DWKROLFV <sup>3</sup>KDYH MXVW UHDV RQV IRU WDNHQ the Passions Q WKH F not nor should they assume the responsibility of approving what is blameworthy in the actual methods of government, but seek to turn these very methods, as far as is possible, to the genuine and true public good, and to use their best endeavors at the same time to infuse, as it were, into all the veins of the State the healthy sap  
DQG EORRG RI &KULVWLDQ ZLVGRP DQG YLUWXH ' SDUW \$ )  
<sup>3</sup>7DNH WKH VZRUG 7KH HODYFWR WKO VZRG GILZRP FKKHOEDG ' 5KRGHV

[38] Catholics were free to disagree with the Holy See on matters of civil government. Leo XIII stated:

. . . in matters merely political, as, for instance, the best form of government, and this or that of administration, a difference of opinion is lawful. Those, therefore, whose piety is in other respects known, and whose minds are ready to accept in all obedience the decrees of the apostolic see, cannot in justice be accounted as bad men because they disagree as to the subjects We have mentioned . . . (1885: part 48).

[39] 2QFH DJDLQ WKH SRVLWLRQV WDNHQ E\ WKH &KXUFK DUH QRW F also provide another illustration of how democratic attitudes may arise from conflict and the creation of democratic institutions.

7KH &KXUFK ¶V 'HVLUH IRU 'RPLQDWLRQ LQ 6SLULWXDO 0DW

[40] Although the Church was not opposed in principle to democratic institutions in the society, its first choice of government prior to Vatican II was one in which it enjoyed the status of a state church. In some circumstances this involved a preference for a religious monopoly. To give but one historical example, in Mexico in 1821 independence movement leaders Colonel Agustín de Iturbide and Vincente Guerrero drew up the Plan de Iguala which, among other things, offered to grant the Catholic Church a monopoly over religious  
DIIDLUV DQG WR PDLQWDLQ WKH Eclesiastic Independence of Mexico. The Church KWV DQG S endorsed the Plan DQG VKRUWO\ WKHUHDIWHU <sup>3</sup>SULHVWV XUJHG FRRSHUDW

fruits if, in addition to liberty, she enjoyed the favor of the laws and the patronage of the public authority (part 6; quoted in Weigel: 22).

[42] The Church had a method of dealing with such matters that provides a textbook example of the ratification of the Reichskonkordat. The Reichskonkordat was a treaty between the Vatican and the German Reich, which were necessary in situations where it was difficult or impossible to realize the thesis (see Murray 1993a: 100). The Church was to be the one and only state church, and no public expression of Catholic religious ideas was to be tolerated. However, the hypothesis was that where Catholics were in the minority, or where for any other reason implementing the thesis would be disruptive of the public peace, no effort was to be made to implement Catholic preeminence. The thesis approach made explicit a maxim that other parties to democratic compromise often leave unsaid: where domination would be very costly or impossible, choose power sharing. Leo XIII wrote in 1881 that there should be a balance of power rather than culture. The Church, like any other organization, preferred dominance, but came to embrace democracy in situations where dominance was not feasible.

### Catholicism and Democracy in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s

[43] Not long after liberal and clericalism had receded in Europe, another challenge emerged: totalitarianism. Since some adherents of the cultural theory claim that there is or was an affinity between Catholicism and totalitarian doctrines such as fascism, it would be useful to assess this claim by considering one of the more controversial actions taken by the Vatican: the signing of the Reichskonkordat with the Nazi government in July 1933. Reaching an agreement with the Holy See lent some luster to the newly Nazi government, which was already gaining international attention for its human rights abuses. One might be tempted, following the cultural theory, to interpret the signing of the agreement as evidence of an affinity between Catholicism and Nazism. However, other interpretations are possible, especially in light of their context which the agreement arose.

[44] The Reichskonkordat was a concordat, the Nazis also agreed to protect and pay for Catholic education and to allow parents of Catholic children to demand confessional schools in areas where they had not existed so long as the number of Catholic children was sufficiently large. Some Catholics believed that such measures were necessary to prevent another Kulturkampf since before the signing of the accord the Nazis had wrought no small amount of terror on Catholics and their institutions, including detaining and intimidating priests, raiding offices of the materials, and firing civil servants who were members of the Catholic parties (Lewy: 28).

[45] The agreement also involved the Code of Canon Law that the Vatican had enacted in 1917. The Code gave the Holy See control over the appointment of bishops and other prelates, and ensured that it had the final word in matters of Church law. The main architect, Eugenio Pacelli (later Pius XII), believed that its implementation was necessary to ensure the purpose of the Church (84-85).

[46] The Reichskonkordat, a move that spelled the demise of the Zentrum (Rhodes 1973: 100).

RU D & KULVWLDQ <RX FDQQRW EH ERWK´ 7KDW +LWOHU ZDQWH  
that in his view there was no affinity between Nazism and Catholicism.

[47] The Zentrum and other Catholic organizations had vehemently opposed Hitler and his party before the concordat was signed. In 1931, Catholic journalist Walter Dirks described the Catholic relationship with +LWOHU¶V PRYHPHQW DV RQH RI ³RSHQ ZDUtts Dismiss, and the W HG LQ & RUC  
Catholic press urged the faithful to oppose the National Socialists and to support the Catholic parties; in many



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