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Catholicism and Politics in a Fallen World: Understanding Human Imperfection as Relates to Political Institutions

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Catholicism and Politics in a Fallen World:

Understanding Human Imperfection as Relates to Political Institutions

George Doyle

An All-College Thesis

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Abstract

This thesis is composed of two primary parts, each involving discussion of Catholicism and political life. Part I critiques Thomas Aquinas' theory of government in light of his theory of nature, with an emphasis on original sin as a defining attribute of the human person. The section concludes with an argument in favor of democracy rooted in Aquinas's theory of human nature, as well as an understanding of the role of the Catholic Church in light of the claims made in this part of the thesis. Part II contains a political science study assessing factors that contribute to party identification among American Catholics. Pew Forum's *2014 Religious Landscape Study* provides a foundation with which to test theories of Catholic partisanship rooted in religiosity and practice, religious belief, political ideology, and demographic change. After reviewing the data, it appears that Mass attendance, traditionalism, departure from Catholic orthodoxy, political attitudes, and several demographic categories are accurate predictors of party identification, while other measures tested are less effective predictors. Though some religious variables appear to have an impact on identification, non-religious factors seem to have a larger effect. A short conclusion ties the two parts together, making normative claims about the practice of Catholic faith in the public sphere.

Introduction

Few disciplines are as integrally linked as theology and politics. One looks for meaning in the world, typically gathering answers to the "why?" and "what?" questions life presents. The other seeks answers to the "how?" questions, searching for ways in which to act upon discovered truth and to make sense of the realm of human interaction. Each strives in its own way to make sense of the human experience and to find ways in which the human community can be developed and improved.

From the perspective of Catholic teaching, humanity—as individuals and as a worldwide community—is created for both earthly and heavenly ends of love and lasting happiness, but clearly, we do not always reach these ends. In a world where war and conflict seem to be the norm, where so many are faced with systemic injustice, and where so many are denied what is rightly due to them, it ought to be clear to all that sin and misery are abundantly present in the world today, now over two thousand years since Jesus preached repentance and belief in the Gospel. As far as political institutions are concerned, a substantial percentage of the world's population lives in relative lack of freedom. According to Michael J. Abramowitz, President of Freedom House, world ratings of political rights and civil liberties in 2018 are at their lowest in over a decade, and for the twelfth year in a row, more countries are sliding toward authoritarianism than climbing out of it.[1]

This visible injustice requires a reckoning with the very foundation of what makes us human. What does it mean to be created in the "image of God," when human beings globally are subjected to horrible wrongs at the hands of their brothers and sisters? Not only do we see this

[1] "Democracy in Crisis," Freedom House, 2018 accessed July 4, 2019, https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018.

wrongness in the world around us, but we can feel it within our own selves. Whether it lies in some nasty vice or bad habit, or simply a failure to refrain from eating too many cookies when we know we shouldn't, we realize our own inability to live up to the standards we set and expect from ourselves. The Apostle Paul shares his own relatable struggles, writing "For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do."[2]

In this undergraduate capstone project, I wanted to engage both my academic disciplines in a single project, allowing me to explore the overlap between political science and theology while grappling with such biting questions as these. With this two-pronged thesis, I look to present Catholicism in political practice from two differing perspectives—one from a Catholic theology of political life, the other from a political study of American Catholicism. By taking this approach, I hope to combine methodologies from both disciplines, making both positive statements and normative judgments about our world today and the role of the Catholic in the global struggle. In Part I, I attempt to use a theological anthropology of original sin and the Fall, rooted in the writings of Aquinas, to contrast what is to what ought to have been, to compare the brokenness and imperfection of our world today to the exceptional state of grace we might have been born into, and to follow the direct relationship between this change in human nature and its consequences for human government. In Part II, I examine government in practice, as American Catholics wrestle with an electoral system in which no viable option is in complete conformance with the values they hold dear. I end with a brief testament to the value of hope and our call to be a bit of light in a world shrouded by darkness. Though I recognize that I cannot solve the real problems the world faces simply by writing this draft, I hope that someday I—and all of us as humans—can find both an earthly and heavenly peace, free from the terrors of sin and injustice.

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[2] Rom. 7:19, NRSV.

Part I: Politics as Seen through the Fall

James Madison writes in *Federalist Paper* No. 51, " But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature?"[3] The recognition by Madison of the link between human nature and government provides an excellent starting point for this discussion of Catholicism and politics. The Catholic tradition has a wealth of teaching about human nature from which to draw upon, and premier among these authorities is Thomas Aquinas. Central to the Catholic narrative of humankind is the duality of sin and redemption, from the entrance of sin into the world through the Fall of humanity to the restoration of grace through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of the gift of free will, coupled with the effects of original sin after the Fall, individuals and humanity as a whole not only have a capacity for sin but a propensity toward it, creating a fog over humanity's true purpose in unity with the Divine.

The lens of the human condition both before and after the Fall in relation to original sin provides significant insight into our understanding of political institutions and the way we as humans participate in them. Because of the parallel relationship between human nature and government, it becomes inevitable that in original sin humanity's imperfection is transferred to the political institutions it creates, which are twisted shadows of what could have been otherwise. In his writing, Aquinas creates an excellent depiction of prelapsarian humanity as created in the image a likeness of God, made for community with God and one another. However, after the Fall, the universal community of humankind is united not only as created in the image and likeness of God, but in the curse of original sin. Relationship between humans and God, and among humans, is possible but is in no way guaranteed. Though Aquinas adjusts his theological

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[33] Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist Papers* (Project Gutenberg, 1991), 264, https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/18.

anthropology to reflect fallen nature, his political writing does not adequately consider humanity in this way, particularly in his persisting endorsement of monarchy. In this paper, I argue that although much of Aquinas's attitude towards the purpose and nature of government remains quite relevant and contains valuable insight, his theory of government must be adjusted further to account for the tension between human nature as created good in the image and likeness of God and as flawed through original sin. In response, rather than monarchy, democracy is the highest form of government to which humans can aspire, recognizing that even this may be a struggle.

The Human Condition before the Fall

In his *Summa*, Aquinas has much to say about the origin of humankind, stemming both from Genesis and from his theory of humanity inherited from Aristotle. Today, the narratives of Creation and Adam and Eve in Paradise in Genesis 1–3 are often overlooked as historical inaccuracy due to theories of evolution or simply caricaturized as "God made man and woman, they sinned, end of story," Aquinas himself is also time-conditioned in a different sense: he is a strict literalist regarding these passages, his biology is inaccurate when compared to modern science, and his view of women is far less than appropriate for the modern reader. However, this does not render his anthropology completely invalid. Aquinas addresses the persons of Adam and Eve quite specifically in his *Treatise on Man*, but his writing on prelapsarian humans in general and their offspring as well as specific concepts throughout his writing provide a valuable and useful interpretation of human nature before the Fall in light of a non-literal reading of the first chapters of Genesis.[4]

[4] The discussion surrounding creationism and theistic evolutionism and biological polygenism and theological monergism is an interesting one, and one I do not particularly desire to get involved in here. The Church is quite clear in its insistence on theological monergism (cf. *Humani Generis*), and I as a Catholic consent to the authority of the Church in spiritual matters such as this. However, faith and reason (think science) cannot be opposite, even on an issue like this one. Pope Benedict XVI said the following, particularly beautiful collection of

Among the greatest observations one can make from these sources is a portrait of human nature, which Aquinas does well in his *Summa*. On the most fundamental level, all humans are made in the image and likeness of God.[5] While all creation bears the likeness of God for the fact that it exists, and living things because they are alive, humanity alone has the capacity for understanding and the recognition of the divine, and this is the essence of the image of God.[6] Pope Benedict XVI echoes this point, saying, "Human beings…are profoundly human when they step out of themselves and become capable of addressing God on familiar terms…they are the beings that God made capable of thinking and praying. They are most profoundly themselves when they discover their relation to their Creator."[7]

For Aquinas, in seeking God, humans are seeking their own fulfillment and their own true happiness. As Augustine so poignantly and famously writes in the first chapter of *Confessions*, "You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."[8] As God as Trinity is relational, humans

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words and it remains reasonably close to my own view of our origins:

"The clay became man at the moment in which a being for the first time was capable of forming, however dimly, the thought of "God." The first Thou that—however stammeringly—was said by human lips to God marks the moment in which the spirit arose in the world. Here the Rubicon of anthropogenesis was crossed. For it is not the use of weapons or fire, not new methods of cruelty or of useful activity, that constitute man, but rather his ability to be immediately in relation to God. This holds fast to the doctrine of the special creation of man…herein…lies the reason why the moment of anthropogenesis cannot possibly be determined by paleontology: anthropogenesis is the rise of the spirit, which cannot be excavated with a shovel. The theory of evolution does not invalidate the faith, nor does it corroborate it. But it does challenge the faith to understand itself more profoundly and thus to help man to understand himself and to become increasingly what he is: the being who is supposed to say Thou to God in eternity." Benedict XVI et al., *Creation and Evolution: A Conference with Pope Benedict XVI in Castel Gandolfo* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 15–16.

[5] Cf. Gen. 1:26.

[6] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.93.2.

[7] Joseph Ratzinger, *"In the Beginning...":A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, Ressourcement, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 47–48.

[8] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3.

as created in the image of God are oriented toward the same kind of relationship with God, in which humans find true happiness. Aquinas writes, "It is impossible for any created good to constitute man's happiness…Hence it is evident that naught can lull man's will, save the universal good. This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone."[9] For Aquinas, relationship with God is to know God intimately, as he writes that "final and perfect happiness can consist in nothing else than the vision of the Divine Essence."[10]

Unfortunately, this perfect happiness cannot be found in this life as God is not fully attainable during this life. However, humans can still reach what Aquinas calls "imperfect happiness." In striving to reach communion with God, humans can attain earthly happiness by seeking loving relationship with fellow humans as an integral part of love of God. Regarding the value of friendship, Aquinas writes,

> If we speak of the happiness of this life, the happy man needs friends, as the Philosopher says (Ethic. ix, 9), not, indeed, to make use of them, since he suffices himself; nor to delight in them, since he possesses perfect delight in the operation of virtue; but for the purpose of a good operation, viz. that he may do good to them; that he may delight in seeing them do good; and again that he may be helped by them in his good work. For in order that man may do well, whether in the works of the active life, or in those of the contemplative life, he needs the fellowship of friends.[11]

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[9] *ST* 1-2.2.8.

[10] *ST* 1-2.3.8.

[11] *ST* 1-2.4.8

Jesus remarks in the Gospel of Matthew that "where two or three or gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."[12] In saying this, Jesus demonstrates the holiness of human relationship when love of neighbor stems from love of God.

To aid in development of relationship, both with God and other people, humans are created with the capacity for virtue. Thomas Aquinas notes the traditional definition of virtue as "a good quality of the mind that enables us to live in an upright way and cannot be employed badly."[13] Virtues, then, are that which help humans to properly orient themselves towards God and neighbor, and are thus essential to the vision of happiness which Aquinas outlines. For Aquinas, virtues sort themselves into three primary categories: intellectual, which perfect the reason; theological, which concern the human person's relationship with God; and cardinal, which concern the human person's relationship with self and other. The intellectual virtues are separated into two categories. Among the speculative virtues, which "perfect the speculative intellect for the consideration of truth," are included understanding (knowledge of first principles), science (deductive knowledge), and wisdom (knowledge of the highest causes).[14] The practical intellectual virtues concern the application of truth and include art, "the right reason about works to be made,"[15] and prudence, "the right reason of things to be done."[16]

Most important for the purposes of this paper are the theological and cardinal virtues. The three primary theological virtue—faith, hope, and charity—concern the human's relationship to

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[12] Mat. 18:20, NABRE.

[13] *ST* 1-2.55.4.

[14] *ST* 1-2.57.2.

[15] *ST* 1-2.57.3.

[16] *ST* 1-2.57.4.

God. Aquinas writes, "First, as regards the intellect, man receives certain supernatural principles, which are held by means of a Divine light: these are the articles of faith, about which is faith. Secondly, the will is directed to this end, both as to that end as something attainable—and this pertains to hope—and as to a certain spiritual union, whereby the will is, so to speak, transformed into that end—and this belongs to charity."[17] These are not brought about by human effort but are infused within the human by grace. On the other hand, cardinal virtues—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—look toward earthly happiness in relationship with self and other. Prudence is the perfection of the moral reason, justice of the will, and fortitude and temperance of the appetites.[18] These virtues are attainable without grace, but with the assistance of grace, they become infused cardinal virtues, enabling people to live well on earth in view of their final destiny with God.[19]

These virtues and their connection to relationship will become the framework with which to examine the separation between the conditions of pre- and postlapsarian humanities. While humans before and after the Fall share the same essential nature as described above, what primarily distinguishes the former is the supernatural state in which the first humans were created: original justice. This condition was essentially a supernatural subjection of the body to the soul, and the soul to the will of God.[20] Importantly, original justice was characterized by fullness of relationship, both between God and humanity and among humans, made possible by grace. As Ryan writes, "Man became a friend of God, a member of God's household, an adopted

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[17] *ST* 1-2.62.3.

[18] *ST* 1-2.61.2.

[19] *ST* 1-2.63.3.

[20] *ST* 1-2.81.5; *ST* 1-2.82.3.

child of God, a partaker of the Divine Nature, an heir of God, a coheir with Christ, and qualified for the Beatific Vision; that is, destined to 'see God face to face.'"[21] This relationship between humanity and God is demonstrated in the first chapters of Genesis.[22] Friendship between God and the first people was one of transparency and accordance with nature. The first people were able to see and communicate with God clearly and were placed in the garden as co-creators with God, but did not regard themselves as equals to God. Through the grace of original justice God elevated human nature in order that humans might be able to more fully experience relationship with God.

In exploring this condition in which humanity lived before the Fall, one must focus on exactly those things which comprise it: *supernatural* and *preternatural* gifts. Both are favors from God through grace, but they differ in their interaction with human nature. Supernatural gifts are entirely of another (divine) nature, while preternatural gifts work to bring human nature beyond what it is normally capable of. Together, these constitute materially the state of original justice.

The primary supernatural gift given to the first humans —and the gift through which all others were possible—is the gift of sanctifying grace, which brought them into an otherwise impossible friendship with God and one another. Grace as a supernatural gift raises up humanity from natural creature to one capable of participation in life with God.[23] Though relationship with God was made more possible in this life in original justice, it would be still more possible in perpetuity at the end of time. Sanctifying grace enabled the first humans to share an eternity with

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[21] John A. Ryan, *Original Sin and Human Misery* (New York: Paulist Press, 1942), 11–12.

[22] Cf. Gen. 2.

[23] *ST* 1-2.110.4.

God, able to witness God's glory to a degree much greater even than would be visible in original justice, though the latter state would greatly enhance the ability of humans to cooperate with this grace while on Earth.

In original justice, by virtue of their condition through the power of grace, humans would necessarily have possessed the gift of infused virtue. As theological virtues are always infused through grace, the state of grace in which the first humans lived allowed for perfection of these virtues within them, leading them deeper in relationship with God in search of divine happiness. In original justice, charity was perfect as far as friendship with God could be perfected in this state. God was the source of true, life-giving happiness and the first humans responded accordingly with love. Faith and hope were still necessary for the first humans because even they had not seen God "in his essence," though they had certainly seen God more fully and likely had more direct knowledge of God than fallen humanity.[24] In sum, there were not yet barriers between God and humans, and grace made humans more fully capable of experiencing God.

God also gave the first humans perfection of cardinal virtue through the preternatural gifts, helping them to attain earthly happiness and live in relationship with one another. As cardinal virtues are nothing more than the rightness of the parts of the soul, possession of these virtues at least to a degree is necessary to original justice, which is foremost the rightness of the human person.[25] First, in the fullness of prudence and justice, prelapsarian humanity received freedom from ignorance, at least as it pertains to the moral law. For Aquinas, this is not so much an externally-sourced gift of knowledge as it is the capacity for full awareness of the natural law,

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[24] *ST* 2-2.5.1.

[25] *ST* 1.95.3.

which is "the participation of the eternal law in the rational creature."[26] Even children, who would not yet have perfect reason by virtue of their nature as children, "would have had sufficient knowledge to direct them to deeds of righteousness, in which men are guided by universal principles of right; and this knowledge of theirs would have been much more complete than what we have now by nature, as likewise their knowledge of other universal principles."[27] If original justice is the perfection of humanity's communion with God and neighbor, then humans, to whom it is essential to have the capacity for knowledge of the good, in original justice at the very least ought to have the moral knowledge to live in that perfect community.

As far as the human person through reason has access to moral truth and the essential purpose of the human in communion with God, she has the virtue of prudence. Of course, prudence and the acquisition of knowledge require access to reason, which is why Aquinas argues that prelapsarian humans would have perfect reason, and within that the accompanying intellectual virtues as they relate to the acquisition of knowledge not inherently held.[28] Even if the prelapsarian human would not have inherent knowledge of science or art and may be unaware of this truth, he could not be deceived regarding it and could quickly learn. Aquinas writes, "Now it is clear that as truth is the good of the intellect, so falsehood is its evil, as the Philosopher says. So that, as long as the state of innocence continued, it was impossible for the human intellect to assent to falsehood as if it were truth."[29]

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[26] *ST* 1-2.91.2.

[27] *ST* 1.101.1.

[28] *ST* 1.101.1; 1.101.2.

[29] *ST* 1.94.4.

Granting the fullness of fortitude and temperance (and justice in relation to these), the second preternatural gift was the gift of integrity, or freedom from concupiscence (which is defined as an inclination to sin[30]). In the state of original justice, "not only were the lower powers of the soul held together under the control of reason, without any disorder whatever, but also the whole body was held together in subjection to the soul."[31] The lower powers Aquinas refers to in this passage are, more specifically, the concupiscible and irascible appetites; lower because they are shared with animals and lesser than the reason and will. The concupiscible appetite is that which seeks what is sensually desirable, while the irascible is the appetite that "risks these attacks that hinder what is suitable." These lower powers of the first humans were entirely subject to reason, forming a unity between body and soul with each in its proper place. While desire for earthly goods is natural to humans and inherent to the search for earthly happiness, humans are best able to attain earthly happiness when these passions and desires are moderated by the virtues of fortitude and temperance. For example, a person in the condition of original justice would not desire more or less food, drink, or exercise then would be conducive to human flourishing. Human freedom is best executed in the absence of vice or harmful impulse, and both would have been held in check by the gift of integrity.

The picture of humanity that Aquinas gives is one that gives glory to God by showing the good in God's most beloved creation. As humans are made in the image and likeness of God, with the ability to recognize God as God, the state of original justice allowed our first parents to radiate the joy of creation as such most fully through relationship with God and with one another. Prelapsarian humanity would have had a complete unity of body and soul—a perfect

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[30] *CCC* 405.

[31] *ST* 1-2.85.5.

order within the self, and a perfect fixation on God as the true source of life. Humanity has always been called by God to relationship, but through grace this relationship was made as perfect as humanly possible.

Political Community before the Fall

Madison continues his reflection on government and human nature by saying, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary."[32] In the state of original justice, human nature is exactly that as Madison refers to as angelic—perfectly virtuous, particularly as relates to community. The question is, then, what is the role of government if humans are as perfect as humanly possible? Would government have existed if humanity had remained in the state of original justice, and if so, what would it have looked like? Aquinas disagrees with Madison in insisting that government would have existed in the state of original justice. If government is understood as a means for a people to make binding decisions for itself, it would have existed in original justice, and the form that it would take in this state would reflect the perfected nature of its members. In taking this position, Aquinas sets the foundation for a positive general assessment of political engagement which is directed toward the common good. Of course, any remarks on pre-Fall government are decidedly speculative—and surely Aquinas realizes this as well—but in taking up this issue within the limits of the state of original justice as Aquinas describes, the prelapsarian nature of humanity gives insight to what might have been the perfection of political community.

Aquinas believes that it is essential to human nature to desire community, as community is integral to the human experience, and government is essential to community life. Included in

[32] Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, 264.

the natural desire for happiness is an inclination towards life with others. The classical thinkers seem to agree on this point. Aristotle remarks that "man is by nature a political animal."[33] Augustine asserts that there is no creature more naturally social than the human person.[34] Aquinas writes in his *Summa* that "there is in man an inclination to good, according to the nature of his reason, which nature is proper to him: thus man has a natural inclination to know the truth about God, and to live in society."[35] Scripture aligns on this point as well. In one of the more commonly used references, God remarks in Genesis, "It is not good that the man should be alone."[36] If there is a natural inclination to good within humankind, and that natural inclination points towards life in community, then community life must be a good worth participating in.

Even in a single family, the smallest and most foundational unit of society, parents must make decisions for themselves and for their children. If a need to make authoritative decisions exists in a community as small as this, then certainly there is a need for decision on a larger scale as well. While some create a separation between social life and political life, Aquinas takes the opposite approach, saying that political life contributes to a positive social life. Participation in social governance is not something extraneous to human flourishing, but something integral to it. This is through the promotion of the common good, which he sees as the true purpose of government and the primary reason for its presence in prelapsarian society. Government promotes the common good in managing the individual goods of its constituents and promoting the development of virtue. Aquinas writes, "For where there are many men together and each

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[33] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1.2.

[34] Augustine, *The City of God*, 12.28.

[35] *ST* 1-2.94.2.

[36] Gen. 2:18, RSVCE.

one is looking after his own interest, the multitude would be broken up and scattered unless there were also an agency to take care of what appertains to the commonweal. In like manner, the body of a man or any other animal would disintegrate unless there were a general ruling force within the body which watches over the common good of all members."[37] In order that community might truly benefit the common good, the community must be able to make decisions for itself that are oriented towards that good, particularly in mediating between the desires of individuals seeking their own goods—not selfishly, necessarily—and properly aligning the wills of these individuals towards their neighbors in pursuit of justice.

If government is a good that emerges out of the human condition, and if the first humans were in an elevated state of original justice as intended by God, then government would be elevated accordingly with human nature. As the prelapsarian human possessed a perfect unity of body and soul perfectly oriented toward God and neighbor, so too would society have been an organic whole developed for the good of all. The preternatural gifts given to the first humans would significantly affect the nature and practice of government. Above all in the state of original justice, the first humans would have had the perfection of virtue, directing them towards their proper ends, one of which is community. Where the human is ordered as he ought to be perfect justice ought to exist, as everyone is inclined to give the other his due.

With the gift of freedom from moral ignorance, the first humans could have made the best use of the virtue of prudence in their social and political interactions with one another. Prudence, relating to both reason and its practical application, in its perfection would first enable a government in line with the will of God. Aquinas in his *Treatise on Law* specifies the nature of

[37] Aquinas, *On Kingship,* 1.5.

human law as a practical extension of the natural law. [38] No law apart from the natural law can be true law, though it shares in the nature of law as it shares the characteristics of law (legitimate authority, promulgation, etc.).[39] With freedom from ignorance of the moral law, community in original justice could ensure that human law is consistent with the moral law and adds to it only in ways meaningful and beneficial to society. Justice would be done in that each is given to according to his needs, and expected from according to her ability; unjust inequality would not exist.

Though there would be no room for inequity in prelapsarian society, Aquinas argued for the goodness of private property. In the *Summa*, he writes, "Community of goods is ascribed to the natural law, not that the natural law dictates that all things should be possessed in common and that nothing should be possessed as one's own: but because the division of possessions is not according to the natural law, but rather arose from human agreement which belongs to positive law…Hence the ownership of possessions is not contrary to the natural law, but an addition thereto devised by human reason."[40] By taking this position, as Chroust and Affeldt write, Aquinas attempts a compromise between the apocalyptic idealism of the early Church, who believed that the rejection of private property was the "result of true brotherly love," and Aristotle, who extolled private property and to whom Aquinas adhered closely.[41] By asserting that the distribution of private property is not according to natural law but human law, Aquinas admits the possibility that some distributions of wealth could be unjust, meaning that private

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[38] *ST* 1-2.91.3.

[39] *ST* 1-2.92.1.

[40] *ST* 2-2.66.2.

[41] Hermann Chroust and Robert J. Affeldt, "The Problem of Private Property According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *Marquette Law Review* 34, no. 3 (1951): 151–3.

property cannot be an absolute right. However, as he has stated that no law is law if it is unjust, this begs the question as to what constitutes an unjust legal distribution of wealth and property and at what point the right to property is forfeit due to inequity. Given the perfect orientation of the human will and mediation of human desires in the state of original justice, it seems impossible that such an unjust distribution would arise in this condition.

Freedom from ignorance would affect not only law and social structures, but the ways in which people actively participate within them. No person could unwittingly support a public action that would cause harm or injustice to another, nor could a person be deceived into backing a policy they would otherwise reject on reason. Assuming that pre-Fall humankind would not have unlimited knowledge of things beyond the moral realm, freedom of ignorance paradoxically would allow for recognition of one's own lack of knowledge in any particular area. It would enable a humility that allows a person to cede leadership and authority to those most capable of performing the proper civic responsibilities. For those in these positions of authority, exemption from ignorance would grant a different type of humility. Prudence would remind leaders not only of the divine origin of their authority, but also of the service that authority entails.

In combination with infused moral knowledge and freedom from ignorance, the gift of integrity also adds to the best possible human community. The condition of appetites subordinate to reason eliminates the possibility of any personal motive or urge to action that is contrary to what is proper. No desire for pleasure, power, or personal gain would distract a person away from striving to the best of his ability to reach his God-intended ends. Each would truly will the best for the human community and possess the fortitude necessary to act upon it, and thus no one would have any reason to conceal any hidden motives. All authority would be used for the benefit of all without regard for personal gain, and delegation of authority would be determined

for the good of all rather than the few. Each person would work on behalf of all, knowing that all are working on his behalf.

Given the way in which elevated human nature determines the characteristics of elevated government, how would human nature as such dictate the form of government? In *On Kingship*, Aquinas borrows Aristotle's different types of government, each with both a true and perverted form: rule by one (kingship and tyranny), the few (aristocracy and oligarchy) and the many (polity and democracy).[42] However, Aquinas disagrees ultimately with Aristotle's conclusions. Aristotle, finding monarchy impracticable although with the greatest potential, argues for a constitutional government—one combining the features of aristocracy and democracy. On the other hand, Aquinas holds monarchy as both the highest form of government and one that is often practical.[43] Thus, this must also be the form of government correspondent to the state of original justice. He notes that as leadership in God, nature, and the body is by a unity, the government of people by people should also be a unity, stating that monarchy's singular character gives the greatest stability and security to a society.[44] However, in his *Summa* he also extols the government of Israel under Moses, noting its concurrent monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic elements.[45]

In consideration of these forms of government in relation to the nature of elevated humanity, I concur with Aquinas in that government in original justice must be some form of monarchy by way of meritocracy. Using their preternatural gifts afforded by original justice, the

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[42] Thomas Aquinas, *On Kingship*, 1.2; cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, 3.7.

[43] Aquinas, *On Kingship*, 1.3.

[44] Aquinas, *On Kingship*, 1.3.

[45] *ST* 1-2.105.1.

many would dutifully cede their claims to authority to the one among them who is most qualified to serve the people, as the expedience of action and civil order that come from unity of leadership would be most beneficial for society, and especially as he understands the responsibility of service that comes with leadership. However, the one who assumes authority must necessarily have the humility to realize that even he alone does not have all the answers to all of the needs of the people, and so he must surround himself with those capable of advising him and must delegate some degree of authority to others who can effectively manage more local concerns. Additionally, the nature of the human person as a social and political being means that each human being has a desire to contribute and ought to assist in the greater well-being of her society, contributing where her unique abilities and talents can add to the common good. Ultimately, then, this ideal system of government looks quite a bit like the "mixed constitution" Aquinas endorses in his *Summa*: a society where all are can be, at least to a degree, active participants in governance.

In the state of original justice, humanity would have been capable of just that—a society rooted in perfect justice, aiming at what is truly good, where each person is treated according to his worth as a rational being created by God. If humanity is made in the image and likeness of God, then the perfect human community would not be far from the Kingdom of God.

The Fall of Humankind and the Dawn of Original Sin

Though such a perfect community under God would have been nice, it appears never to have materialized as such. Genesis 3 contains the familiar myth of the beginnings of human sin—the serpent persuaded the woman, who gave the fruit to the man, whose sin prompted God to cast the two of them out of Eden. Aquinas suspects that it was a tension between human nature

and God's grace, even in this state of original justice, that created the grounds for the first sin.[46] While humans were in a deep and perfect friendship with God, it was a perfection according to the human sense of perfect; the first humans never saw God "in his essence," as Aquinas believes is the teleological end of human existence. If they had, they would have been unable to turn away, their hearts finding the rest Augustine pines for in *Confessions*.[47] Whether Aquinas' interpretation is correct remains a mystery, but as is easily verifiable by the universal human experience, that perfect community that could and ought to have persisted did not. The first humans chose to sin, and in doing so shattered both the supernatural relationship of humanity to God and each other and the supernatural unity of the human person.

The notion of original sin is one of the central aspects of the Catholic understanding of human nature, but also perhaps one of the most overlooked in the modern era, post-Enlightenment. Original sin can be understood in two senses—first, as the personal sin of the first humans, and second, as the persisting effects of their sin.[48] It ought to be noted that even the condition of original sin is the result of human failure in personal sin. The first understanding of original sin so begets the second, as it was the sin of the first humans that led to the loss of original justice, and it is this latter sense of original sin that is most useful in discussing fallen nature. Contrasted with the state of original justice, original sin in this second sense describes the condition of humanity following the personal sin of the first humans. Through our corporate

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[46] John A. Hardon, S.J., "Thesis IX : Adam Lost Original Justice by Sinning Gravely. Original Sin Therefore Exists in All Men as a True Sin, Proper to Each Person and Transmitted from Adam by Propagation," in *God the Author of Nature and the Supernatural*. http://www.therealpresence.org/archives/God/God_014.htm.

[47] *ST* 1.94.1.

[48] Stéphane Harent, "Original Sin," in *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911).

connection with them, though we have not inherited personal guilt through their actions, we have inherited the consequences of their sin. Ratzinger writes,

> In the Genesis story that we are considering…sin is not spoken of in general as an abstract possibility but as a deed, as the sin of a particular person, Adam, who stands at the origin of humankind and with whom the history of sin begins. The account tells us that sin begets sin, and that therefore all the sins of history are interlinked. Theology refers to this state of affairs by the certainly misleading and imprecise term "original sin."[49]

How, then, ought we to understand original sin? Aquinas gives a definition: "Original sin denotes the privation of original justice, and besides this, the inordinate disposition of the parts of the soul. Consequently it is not a pure privation, but a corrupt habit."[50] Equating original sin to a disease, Aquinas notes two aspects to original sin: privation of original justice, that is primarily sanctifying grace, and the resulting effects on the order of the soul. Without this supernatural grace, humanity is kept away from his supernatural end, friendship with God.

This privation extends not only to this lifetime but also for the next. Humans as finite beings, though created with an eternal end in mind, have no right to enter the kingdom of heaven on their own merit. However, God, knowing that humankind had rebelled against him and loving his creation anyway, made restoration of grace possible through the death and resurrection of his Son, who became like a new, sinless first man. Aquinas argues in the *Summa* for the "fittingness" of the Incarnation as a correction for sin, but acknowledges immediately in his response that others disagree and that God certainly could have chosen to become incarnate

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[49] Ratzinger, *"In the Beginning...":A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, 71–2.

[50] *ST* 1-2.82.1.

anyway.[51] Given that Christ is the perfect representation of humanity as the "image and likeness" of God, one may find it equally as fitting that Christ become incarnate to bridge the ontological gap between God and humanity, an argument similar to the one Aquinas makes for the existence of angels.[52]

For the remission of original sin, the Church gives the sacrament of baptism as a death to the world and a resurrection and ingratiation into the life of Christ. However, while baptism may offer reconciliation with God and extend the offer of God's grace, it cannot offer the restoration of original justice. Grace is still offered to humanity, but it no longer creates the state of original justice. Because of this, original sin necessarily has consequences for all people. The human reality can never again be what it was, as humans are confined to their creatureliness and the imperfection that comes along with it. Human nature without the grace of God is a tendency to disorder, away from community with God and fellow humans. Though humans are still created as equal in the image and likeness of God, they are also equal in the state of original sin, and this tension becomes the defining characteristic of humankind.

Aquinas, following Bede, condenses the material effects of original sin into four *wounds of nature*—ignorance, malice, weakness, and concupiscence. Each of these corresponds to one of the four parts of the soul (reason, will, irascible, concupiscible) and its proper virtue (prudence, justice, temperance, or fortitude).[53] Though both prelapsarian and postlapsarian humanity share the capacity for virtue, as that is essential to human nature, they differ in that while the former was infused with all virtues, the latter is left with only the capacity to hold them. The purpose of

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[51] *ST* 3.1.3.

[52] J. Budziszewski and Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Treatise on Law* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7.

[53] *ST* 1-2.85.3.

human existence and the hope of unity with God remain the same as human nature remains fundamentally good, but the path to this unity is darkened with the loss of original justice and the specific gifts that it entailed.

The first wound of nature, ignorance, is the absence of infused knowledge. Aquinas describes ignorance as "the reason lacking its orientation toward true good."[54] If the reason is no longer perfectly oriented toward true good—primarily God—then it becomes twisted away from God and towards self. Thus, ignorance is primarily a tendency to self-deception in pride, as original sin obscures the view of God. Rather than seeing God as God, humans tend to see self as God, ignoring personal fault, inability, and vice. This is, not coincidentally, the temptation of the serpent in Genesis: "You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods…"[55] Certainly, God did know the effects of sin. The first humans and their descendants came to know evil in the sense that they experienced it themselves, and they became like Gods insofar as they wrongly exalt themselves as gods.

In practice, the ignorance of original sin manifests as a failure to see good clearly, a lack of knowledge of what is right or just, and the inability to follow through on right reason—the absence of prudence. Aquinas's reference to a need for divine law reflects at least partially on the inadequacy of human reason to reach the ends for which humanity is intended.[56] In ignorance, a person can fail to know morality in both theoretical and practical senses; good and evil often blend together. Not only can humans be ignorant, but they can be deceived into believing untruths that right reason would prove false. Here not only the ability to acquire and retain

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[54] *ST* 1-2.85.3.

[55] Gen. 3:4–5, NABRE.

[56] *ST* 1-2.91.4.

knowledge is hindered, but the ability of reason itself to decide truth from fiction and right from wrong is also limited. Irrational pride can often be at the center of this as an unwillingness to admit error, or even the possibility of error.

This tendency toward self-deception continues with the wound of malice, defined by Aquinas as the condition in which the will is "deprived of its order of good;" the absence of justice.[57] The good Aquinas is referring to here is not only God, but fellow humans. Looking back to Augustine's remark on happiness mentioned in the first subsection, he notes that it is in God alone that we find true happiness, and that within us we naturally have a desire to turn toward God in order to find our happiness. Malice, on the other hand, is a tendency to turn inwards toward self, away from the goodness of God. It is an innate obstacle to relationship, as one begins to seek personal gain rather than mutual benefit or the good of the other. A focus on self makes implementing justice difficult, as it is easy to see one's own condition as more dire or one's own needs greater in comparison to another.[58]

Thirdly is the wound of weakness, particularly regarding the irascible appetite. Once again taking from Aquinas's description, weakness is present "in so far as the irascible is deprived of its order to the arduous."[59] Weakness is a susceptibility to do what is easy rather than what is right. Even if a person has reason in knowing what the right thing is to do, he may lack the willpower to do it. In a more diluted sense, weakness can also manifest as laziness and

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[57] *ST* 1-2.91.4.

[58] Cf. Rousseau's *amour-propre*. While Rousseau himself did not believe in original sin— "There is no original perversity in the human heart" (Jean-Jacques Rousseau et al., *Letter to Beaumont, Letters Written from the Mountain, and Related Writings* (Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2013). —it may be worth drawing a parallel between his thoughts on *amour-propre* developing out of the state of nature and malice presented here as a consequence of original sin, each opposed to what humans could have been as natural man or as elevated man, respectively.

[59] *ST* 1-2.85.3.

aversion of difficulty in any way, seeking material comfort over labor. Whereas in original justice labor was seen as a good, it is now often felt as an unneeded burden. Weakness could also include inability to restrain excessive or unwarranted anger.

Finally is the wound of concupiscence. While Aquinas says that original sin is formally the deprivation of sanctifying grace, it exists materially as concupiscence, the escape of desire from reason's grasp.[60] If the state of original sin is in sum a tendency to turn toward earthly goods—food, drink, leisure, sensual pleasure, power and authority—concupiscence epitomizes this tendency. As mentioned previously, desire is not bad in itself; earthly goods are to be enjoyed in moderation under the virtue of temperance. Desire becomes harmful, however, when uncontrolled by the reason. Where before the Fall, desire for earthly goods was held in line with the will of God, afterward, desire is often capable of overpowering reason. With original justice gone, it is hard to imagine any action taken solely for the benefit of another. Even objectively good actions are often motivated by desire for appraisal or for a sense of pride. Paradoxically, in the recognition that happiness is found in willing the good of others, happiness for oneself becomes the motivation for action on behalf of others rather than their own benefit.

Aquinas is theologically accurate in detailing the intrinsic effects of original sin, with his description of original sin becoming the bedrock of Catholic teaching on the matter. However, what Aquinas does less well is addressing the personal and societal reality of original sin, and as such, inadequately assesses the depth and breadth of its consequences. In particular, Aquinas fails to capture the extent of the metaphysical tension found in the human person. This is partly a product of his writing style and his era, but also attributable at least partly to his theology. In contrast, Augustine, writing nearly a millennium earlier, provides an alternative model for the

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[60] *ST* 1-2.82.3.

effects of original sin and the nature of fallen humanity, in which he perceives more greatly the reality the personal dimension of sin and the way in which it impacts relationship.

Though Aquinas borrows much from Augustine, the two differ on the nature of (original) sin. Aquinas bases his theory of sin, like much of his writing, on reason and law: "a human act is evil through lacking conformity with its due measure…Now there are two rules of the human will: one is proximate and homogenous, viz. the human reason; the other is the first rule, viz. the eternal law, which is God's reason, so to speak."[61] Even in the *fomes* (kindling wood) of sin is there something resembling law, albeit in the sense of diversion from law and with corresponding consequence.[62] Where Aquinas sees sin primarily as disordered reason, Augustine sees sin as disordered love.[63] From the differing definitions of sin, it becomes apparent that the two differ about in which part of the soul sin ultimately originates. Aquinas argues reason, saying that pride is the "beginning of every sin;"[64] Augustine argues instead for concupiscence.

The biggest contrast between the two, however, is that while Aquinas interprets original sin more simply as the loss of the supernatural and preternatural gifts associated with original justice, Augustine interprets it as a direct degradation of human nature itself, which is responsible for a conflict between flesh and spirit.[65] It is within this framework that Augustine laments in *The City of God*, "For why is it that we remember with difficulty, and without

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[61] *ST* 1-2.71.6.

[62] *ST* 1-2.91.6.

[63] Jiwhang Lew, "Thomas Aquinas' View on the Nature of Sin : Reconsidered in A Comparison with Augustine's Idea of Sin," *CHUL HAK SA SANG - Journal of Philosophical Ideas* 21 (2005): 117.

[64] *ST* 1-2.84.2.

[65] Augustine of Hippo, *Answer to the Pelagians, III : Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian*, ed. John E. Rotelle, O.S.A., vol. 1.25, The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, (Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City Press, 1990), 539.; Jesse Couenhoven, "St. Augustine's Doctrine of Original Sin," *Augustinian Studies* 36, no. 2 (2005): 367.

difficulty forget? learn with difficulty, and without difficulty remain ignorant? are diligent with difficulty, and without difficulty are indolent? Does not this show what vitiated nature inclines and tends to by its own weight, and what succour it needs if it is to be delivered?"[66] Akin to Paul in Romans 7, even after his conversion to Christianity, Augustine could feel that there was a significant failure to do good not only within himself, but within all humanity, that could only be explained by a direct injury to what it meant to be human. Centuries after Aquinas, Martin Luther felt so broken by sin that he went entirely past Catholic theology on grace and salvation.

I am certainly not suggesting that we do the same. It has long been held by Catholic theology that humans are made in the image and likeness of God, and that creation as such imparts an inherent goodness to humanity. However, the degree to which original sin and tendency to disorder cloud this goodness is up for debate, and perhaps it may be time for a return to consideration of human sinfulness in Catholic thought in light of creation in the image of God. Humanity has the capacity for both commendable good and egregious evil. Augustine remarks, "For there is nothing so social by nature, so anti-social by sin, as man."[67] It is this attitude that proves necessary in addressing human nature, and particularly in supplementing Aquinas's thought on the subject. Some things can certainly be taken away from the more "pessimistic" Christian traditions and writers and ought to be held in tension with the more "optimistic" writings of those like Aquinas, who emphasize the human capacity for virtue even in the face of original sin and the natural tendency to disorder. A philosophy of hopeful realism seems to best encapsulate an authentically Catholic theory of human nature, embracing the human orientation toward God while acknowledging the tendency toward self.

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[66] Augustine, tr. Dods, *The City of God*, 22.22.

[67] Augustine, tr. Walsh, *The City of God*, 12.28.

Political Community after the Fall

Madison continues his thought, writing, "If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."[68] If human nature has been changed through original sin, then the proper nature of government must necessarily change to account for it. Aquinas, while addressing this change in human nature, maintains that monarchy is the superior form of government. In doing so, he fails to amend his theory to the extent needed to effectively "control government" as Madison believes necessary. While Aquinas's vision of monarchy could possibly be the form of government most consistent with prelapsarian humanity, it simply does not lend itself to cooperation with fallen human nature. In taking a "hopefully realistic" approach to politics in light of original sin, it becomes clear that democracy[69] is the best response to the fallen human condition, most directly addressing human nature as a tension between creation as good and tendency toward evil.

As a result of the Fall, government itself dramatically changes character. Most prominently, government becomes not only a means for social organization and direction to a common good, but a means to keep sinful impulses in check and create legal protection from the sinful acts of others, so much so that political theorist Max Weber notably defines the state as the human institution which maintains a "monopoly on the legitimated use of physical force" within

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[68] Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, 264.

[69] Democracy is assumed to refer to indirect democracy or republic, rather than to direct democracy as in the case of the early Athenians (what Aristotle would have been familiar with). The latter variety without any republican element is simply not feasible in a modern state an

a particular geographical area.[70] It is likely that Aquinas thought coercion would be unnecessary before the Fall, but this point is nonetheless debated among scholars.[71] Regardless what Aquinas thought on this matter, it must be the case that the coercive power of government under threat of violence necessarily originates in sin. How else could deprivation of life, liberty, or property be thought of as good except as protection from greater evil? Augustine agrees on this point, saying,

> But because God does not wholly desert those whom He condemns, nor shuts up in His anger His tender mercies, the human race is restrained by law and education, which keep guard against the ignorance that besets us, and oppose the assaults of vice, but are themselves full of labour and sorrow. For what mean those multifarious threats which are used to restrain the folly of children? What mean pedagogues, masters, the birch, the strap, the cane, the schooling which Scripture says must be given a child, 'beating him on the sides lest he wax stubborn,' and it be hardly possible or not possible at all to subdue him? Why all these punishments, save to overcome ignorance and bridle evil desires—these evils with which we come into the world?[72]

While both Augustine and Aquinas agree that there would be some form of social organization and authority before the Fall, Augustine argues that authority exercised before the Fall could not have been considered political authority, while, as mentioned previously, Aquinas believes the opposite.[73] This may appear to be semantics, however, it offers two differing theories of postlapsarian government. In arguing that political authority is coercive to such a large degree that it cannot be such authority without it, Augustine is suggesting that government is intended primarily to restrict the negative aspects of fallen nature than to promote and develop the positive aspects of human nature, largely the acquisition of virtue. Aquinas's arguments

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[70] Tony Waters, *Politics as a Vocation by Max Weber, in "Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society" edited and translated by Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters* (2015), 9–10.

[71] Paul J. Weithman, "Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin and the Function of Political Authority," *The Journal of the History of Philosophy* 30, no. 3 (1992): 364.

[72] Augustine, *The City of God*, 22.22.

[73] Weithman, "Augustine and Aquinas on Original Sin and the Function of Political Authority," 356–61.

defending political authority as means to the common good are convincing for the opposite point. If lawmaking and civic organization for the promotion of the common good are taken to be the essential function of government, then coercion becomes an aspect of government necessarily melded to the essential after the Fall, as original sin permanently impacts human nature. Though government's purpose remains the same, its effectiveness in reaching its goals diminishes and it can often fall prey to the human tendency to injustice.

For example, in *City of God*, Augustine contrasts the peace of nations with the peace of God. He argues that while the former peace as the absence of violence is not the ultimate aim of the human person, it does share to a degree in the nature of the peace of God which is a peace of the soul. Augustine writes, "He, then, who prefers what is right to what is wrong, and what is well-ordered to what is perverted, sees that the peace of unjust men is not worthy to be called peace in comparison with the peace of the just. And yet even what is perverted must of necessity be in harmony with, and in dependence on, and in some part of the order of things, for otherwise it would have no existence at all."[74] Good ends often seem to require imperfect means, and the best ends are often unattainable.

Defeatism is wholly unproductive, but undue optimism can also be problematic. In the last few decades especially, there has been a tendency within progressive theologies and movements to focus on social sin and unjust structures. Social sin is defined by John Paul II as the sin that "refers to the relationships between the various human communities. These relationships are not always in accordance with the plan of God, who intends that there be justice

[74] Augustine, *City of God*, 19.3.

in the world and freedom and peace between individuals, groups and peoples."[75] Societal institutions can very well perpetuate and reenergize injustice. However, it must not be forgotten that social sin originates through the personal sin of individuals. Institutions themselves are not moral actors, but they are acted within by persons who are. Naturally, human-created institutions such as the state can only be as good as the individuals in positions of authority within them. Gustavo Gutierrez writes,

> Sin—a breach of friendship with God and others—is according to the Bible the ultimate cause of poverty, injustice, and the oppression in which men live. In describing sin as the ultimate cause we do not in any way negate the structural reasons and the objective determinants leading to these situations. It does, however, emphasize the fact that things do not happen by chance and that behind an unjust structure there is a personal or collective will responsible—a willingness to reject God and neighbor. It suggests, likewise, that a social transformation, no matter how radical it may be, does not automatically achieve the suppression of all evils.[76]

Gutierrez goes on to explain that the liberation of the human person is truly found in community of the individual with God and with her fellow humans.[77]

In order that this may be a reality, one must address structural sin, but must also recognize that perfect society cannot exist while human nature remains inevitably flawed. For

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[75] John Paul II, "Reconciliatio et Paenitentia," (1984). http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_02121984_reconciliatio-et-paenitentia.html.

[76] Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 35.

[77] Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, 36.

example, some degree of economic inequity seems unavoidable in any post-Fall society simply due to human greed. Intemperance with wealth and a failure to recognize the need of others mean that some amass wealth without regard for the common good. While adjustment of social structures cannot entirely alleviate the problem of sin in society, it can, however, alleviate the prevailing degree of present injustice. In this case, though government may never fully eradicate distributive injustice, that does not mean that government should not take steps to bring its people out of poverty by methods such as redistribution of wealth or creation of considerable incentive for charitable giving.

On a broader scale, though government itself will never be perfectly just, the type and structure of government do matter in creating a more just society. As mentioned previously, Aquinas finds monarchy to be the form of government most conducive to human flourishing because of its likeness to God presiding over the created universe. While in original justice, kingship may have been the best form of government from the standpoint of practicality and expedience, given the wounded nature of fallen humanity, this can no longer be the case. The human tendency to self-deception, rationalization of evil, and self-aggrandizement is crucial in this consideration. Any system of government giving any individual a practically unlimited level of power is overwhelmingly subject to corruption and abuse, to the detriment of society at large. A monarchy such as the one Aquinas suggests certainly falls under this category.

If human society were able without fail to conjure up a perfect leader who could be trusted with endless authority and thrive in Aquinas' system, I would concede that Aquinas may have been right. However, this is certainly not the case. The world today suffers no shortage of brutal authoritarianism and unforgiving capitalism, of government officials and businessmen keener on lining their pocketbooks than helping the globe's seemingly infinite destitute. In

response, a well-functioning postlapsarian society must be adequately governed to keep the worst impulses of even the best people in check and to address the systemic ills caused by personal fault.

In comparison to monarchy, democracy more clearly parallels the nature of fallen humanity and works most effectively to manage these limitations while also upholding the social nature of the human person. Lutheran theologian Reinhold Niebuhr writes in the foreword to *The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness*, “Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary."[78] In this statement, we find a parallel to the intrapersonal tension created by creation in the image and likeness of God and existence in a state of original sin. In response, democracy itself is also a balance, as it affirms the human capacity to govern, but not to govern absolutely. If one believes that because of original sin no human is morally perfect, so as to rule without limitations on her authority, then monarchy no longer makes sense as a form of government. One who recognizes that he is inherently limited and morally flawed, as all humans are, ought to also recognize that his human nature does not pair well with a role affording seemingly limitless power. In contrast, a person who fails to recognize her own failure is drawn to authority as a means of acting upon her own selfish interests and apparent perfection. Plato addresses this latter notion in his *Republic* with the oft-cited “ship of state” metaphor.[79] Though he uses it as a way to justify rule by the “philosopher king,” as the sailors argue over who among the unfitting should be the captain of the ship, it demonstrates the same core issue with political authority seen so often today—that

[78] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Reinhold Niebuhr: Major Works on Religion and Politics*, ed. Elisabeth Sifton (New York, N.Y.: The Library of America, 2015), 354.

[79] Plato, *Republic*, 6.

many who seek civil authority are less concerned with their own ability to exercise good judgement then their ability to amass power or to impose upon others their own vision of the good. Given this reality, a strong democracy not only gives the public the ability to select their own leaders but ought to limit the power of these elected leaders, ideally keeping power in the hands of the many rather than the few.

However, even with democracy there remains the potential for evil if government is not adequately designed to protect against abuse of power. Fallen human nature pushes against institutional restraints in search of self-glorification via pleasure and power, contrary to God's intent for humanity. Thus, checks and balances on authority are necessary to prevent democracy from devolving into elected tyranny. This was one of the clear concerns of the Framers, mentioned in the section-opening excerpt from *Federalist No. 51*.[80] Ideally, a democracy ought to have a governing document and series of institutions with clearly defined and limited powers, where even if one organization or institution seeks to grab more than its appropriate share of authority, the envy (or right judgment) of other institutions and the enforcement of governing norms will maintain the balance of power. This is easier said than done, of course. Likely even the most proactive thinkers cannot create a document with absolutely no loopholes to be exploited. At this point, the goal is not to create the perfect system of government, but one which allows for as little abuse as possible, because some degree is unavoidable.

To this point, discussion of democracy has been essentially as risk aversion to the pitfalls of other governing methods. However, though the necessity of democracy is partially due to the sinful imperfection of humanity, its benefit is not entirely as risk-aversion. It also helps to affirm the good in the human person by promoting the essentially social nature of humanity. As

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[80]Hamilton, Jay, and Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, 264.

affirmed previously, Aquinas (using Aristotle) sees the human community as essentially political, writing that the human person is "naturally a civic and social animal," created for relationship.[81] He also maintains that government is part of the ideal community, in which laws are made for the purpose of creating good people who can live in harmony with one another.[82] After the Fall, however, government seems to be less capable of creating good people (or good citizens), though it does retain some ability through its coercive power. Further still, as Aquinas agrees, government must necessarily be limited in its scope, as it lacks the authority to moderate some areas of personal and social conduct without being heavy-handed or overly intrusive.[83] However, when government and leaders do exercise authority, these decisions often result in systemic injustice, whether intentionally or unintentionally. In response, distrust of government among the public runs high, as laws are viewed not as dictates of reason in accordance with the divine will, but as unnecessary and cumbersome restrictions on human freedom.

In this environment, democracy succeeds more than other forms of government by creating the grounds for positive civil and social engagement. Whereas a monarchy can exist independently from the people it rules, true democracy cannot operate without participation from its citizens. With power held by the public, candidates for office voluntarily emerge from the populace and are chosen by election, beholden to the will of the people by the length of their terms. These structures encourage the public to participate in government by offering them agency and handing them the keys to their own success. Of course, without mandatory voting, not everyone will choose to participate in governance, choosing instead to remain "apolitical."

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[81] *ST* 1-2. 72.4.

[82] *ST* 1-2. 92.1.

[83] *ST* 1-2.96.2.

However, among those that do participate, there is a recognition that one's own interests are best served by engagement in political life, which given the proper structures entails cooperation and compromise with other people in the search for the common good. In this way, democracy encourages the social nature of humanity by using self-interested post-Fall nature. If Aquinas argues that law can help create good citizens (if not good people) by creating the framework in which people can develop virtue, even if it may not be perfectly effective due to sinful nature, then democracy as a means of government does this better than monarchy by creating channels for positive social engagement through the direct incorporation of citizens into the process of governance. In this way, more so than any other form of government, democracy creates a set of conditions in which it is possible to restore at least partially the social relationship damaged by original sin.

Is democracy then a guarantee of justice? Certainly not—democracy is simply the highest level of functioning government which, in theory, could be exercised in perpetuity without devolving into tyranny. Even this is not as easy as it seems. The prospect of "tyranny of the majority" is one that must be taken into account, in the instance that a majority of a population would place their own interests above the common good. In a direct democracy like the one Aristotle would have experienced, uninhibited rule of the fifty-percent-plus-one could very well be devastating to those on the other side. The role of legislators in a democratic republic is to mitigate the potential consequences of such a mob rule, in the hope that they as the best of the public might exercise their prudential judgement in protection of justice. However, at some point, the majority inevitably holds the ability to choose its own legislators, at which point if the legislators lack concern for justice, the only thing preventing gross injustice is the framework of democracy itself. The human nature of those in power inevitably pushes up against the

institutions they find themselves in, and it is unclear whether any system of government—even democracy—can truly stand up to the force that is humanity itself.

Concluding Thoughts: Hope and the Role of the Church

Given this portrait of human nature and the corresponding response of government, what ought to be the individual's response to the situation in which he finds himself? Facing up to the reality of a world rife with injustice, with no reprieve in sight, is most definitely a daunting task. It can be all too easy to become hardened and calloused to the point where one no longer feels compassion for those victimized by others or society. On the other hand, even the most well-intentioned can be worn down and broken by the sheer volume of hurt they must witness if they are to remain committed to the prospect of a more just world. How are we supposed to continue the work of God, to build a more just world, knowing we'll never see it finished in our lifetimes?

The answer, though not an easy one, lies right within Aquinas' own thought. There remains no sure way to address injustice in politics (or any injustice, really) other than by the cultivation of virtue. The four wounds of original sin directly correspond to the four cardinal virtues, making human effort in this area quite necessary. In order to work with the grace of God and experience happiness as intended for humanity—or at least as close as is possible in this lifetime—humans are in desperate need of virtue. Particularly, I believe the theological virtue of hope is necessary in the life of the Christian individual who recognizes the need to engage in the world in the manner that democracy allows him to. Aquinas writes that "the object of hope is a future good, difficult but possible to obtain…Wherefore, in so far as we hope for anything as being possible to us by means of the divine assistance, our hope attains God Himself, on Whose

help it leans."[84] Through the virtue of hope, humans are properly able to see their proper teleological end—final unity with God. As we make use of this virtue, we are not yet properly in view of this end, but we are "on the way"—in *status viatoris*. The human longing for the fullness of God will never be satisfied in this life, no matter how frequently we volunteer for charity, vote in elections or protest the injustice in our midst. Though these things may be goods and bring us a degree of happiness in communion with our human brothers and sisters, we ought not confuse them with our final good—God, Godself. The virtue of hope allows one to persevere in the work of God on earth, including in political life, with faith that one day, things may be made right at the end of time and in eternal life with God.

If human institutions can only be as good as those people who create and lead them, the world will be more just if we can personally help others grow to be more virtuous. But before institutions are limited by human nature, they must be created as just as they can be, and there is clearly work to be done in making this a reality. Both of these are precisely what ought to be the Church's role within democracy. First and foremost, the Church's responsibility is the salvation of souls while and through aiding in the development of moral people. On the proper task of the Church, Navone writes, "Jesus comes primarily and directly to heal the heart and spirit of man in relation to God his Father. He comes to heal the material and social order only secondarily and indirectly, inasmuch as the healing of man at the core of his being necessarily entails the healing of the whole man and his environment."[85] The Church, in the continuation of Jesus' mission, ought to embody this same purpose.

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[84] *ST* 2-2.17.1.

[85] John J. Navone, *A Theology of Failure* (New York: Paulist Press, 1974), 36.

However, the institutional Church would be remiss if it did not also address the physical and structural concerns of the world's people. Even if the Church carries primarily a spiritual mission, it must often minister first to the physical needs of the people it longs to bring into relationship with God. In the Scriptures, it is often unclear whether those seeking Jesus' healing saw him primarily as a source of spiritual or physical restoration, but even if the latter, the encounters provided an opportunity for Jesus to reach not just bodies but souls. Seeing the good of community and civic participation, the Church ought to take marked stances in favor of not only democracy, but for the rights of the people whom it governs. James writes that faith without works is dead,[86] but so also are works without faith—neither can survive without the other. The Church can facilitate this relationship by reminding the world of the purpose for any and all works of human charity, encouraging this kind of engagement not as an extension of faith but as something integral to it. Even when faced with the depths of human imperfection and failure, even from within its own ranks, the Church ought to stand as a beacon of light in a darkened world, sharing hope of the world yet to come.

[86] Jas. 2:17.

Part II: One Faith, Many Faithful—A Study of American Catholic Voters

Introduction

Catholics make up the largest single religious group in the United States and comprise about 20 percent of registered voters. However, this does not mean that they act uniformly when it comes to voting and party preference. At least in the past few decades, the "Catholic vote" has become relatively unpredictable, with an increasingly even split between the two major political parties. Based on these observations, it would be safe to say that there are other factors besides a person's association with Catholicism that influence his or her political leanings and partisan affiliation—perhaps his or her interpretation and practice of Catholicism. What religious attitudes and practices, if any, can accurately predict party affiliation among American Catholics? Compared to research on other religious traditions, there is a surprising lack of attention on the party affiliation and political attitudes of Catholics, especially with regard to the ways in which they are linked to religious belief and practice. Unfortunately, Catholicism as a determinant of political belief seems to stay largely out of the public eye, save for discussion of homosexuality, abortion, and birth control. A greater understanding of Catholics and partisan attitudes could be quite valuable both for politicians seeking to understand their demographics and for Catholics seeking to understand themselves.

Trends in American Religiosity

The United States has always been a widely and deeply religious nation compared to much of the Western world. Results from the General Social Survey suggest that about nine out of ten Americans pray at least occasionally, three out of four pray at least once a week, and over

three out of ten describe themselves as strongly religious.[87] Religiosity also seems to follow a predictable pattern in the life cycle. Putnam notes that religiosity tends to increase as people enter their thirties as people begin to settle down and start families and again as they approach the end of their lives.[88]

Despite consistency of these religious metrics, it does appear that beginning in the 1960s, religious attendance has decreased slightly over the past few decades; generational differences do factor into this, but younger generations have lower levels of attendance than previous generations at their age.[89] If society is becoming less religious, one would expect religiosity to have a smaller impact on cultural attitudes and perhaps expect a wider cultural divide between the religious and non-religious. However, as noted above, while attendance numbers have been decreasing, religious behavior in other ways has held constant, pointing to a persisting and prominent role for religion in the American social sphere.

Partisanship and Religious Identity

Historically, scholars have held that macropartisanship is quite predictable and largely constant across election cycles. Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes note that partisanship among American voters is highly stable over time, documented both by election results and by surveys of partisan preference.[90] They find that only about twenty percent of voters have

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[87] Chaves and Anderson 2012, as cited in Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 1st Simon & Schuster hardcover ed. ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 71.

[88] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*.

[89] Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 76–7.

[90] Angus Campbell et al., "The Impact and Development of Party Identification," in *Classics in Voting Behavior*, ed. Richard G. Niemi and Herbert F. Weisberg (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1993), 224.

changed party allegiance within their lifetimes, corroborating their understanding of this stability in voter preferences.

Looking beyond the individual level of analysis, group identity has been shown to play a role in determining partisanship. In *The American Voter*, Angus Campbell discovers a significant impact of group identity among union members, blacks, Catholics, and Jews, as each of these groups is more likely to identify as Democrats than other social characteristics would predict.[91] On the other hand, Protestants have been historically more likely to be Republican. The impact of religion on partisanship generally appears to correspond with attendance and religiosity, as those with higher levels in both categories tend to skew more Republican and conservative in ideology than their less-religious and less frequently-practicing counterparts.[92]

A History of Catholic Partisanship

As Campbell notes, the "Catholic vote" used to be reliably and disproportionately Democratic.[93] In the 1960 presidential election, nationally, Catholics voted for Kennedy at a rate of 78 percent, compared to 22 percent for Nixon. Although this may be a special case (Kennedy being the first Catholic presidential candidate for a major party), for the better part of the twentieth century, the voting split among Catholics consistently landed in favor of the Democratic party. However, this is no longer the case. The shift observed among the Catholic voter base would almost necessarily require a significant number of people to shift their patterns of identification and voting, a possible exception to the findings of Campbell et al. Over the past four decades, the "Catholic vote" has increasingly become a swing vote, comprised of large

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[91] Angus Campbell, *The American Voter: An Abridgement* (New York: Wiley, 1964).

[92] Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life, "2014 U.S. Religious Landscape Study," (2014).

[93] Campbell, *The American Voter: An Abridgement*.

Democratic and Republican blocs and a smaller bloc of independents.[94] As a result, the American Catholic voter is becoming less distinct from the American voter. Streb and Frederick find that over a three decade American National Election Studies sample of individual ideological identification, the percentage breakdown of Catholic liberals, moderates, and conservatives nearly parallels the breakdown of non-Catholic voters, though a slightly larger number of Catholics have consistently identified as moderates. [95]

Theories of Catholic Partisanship

The simplest explanation for the broader rightward movement among Catholics is a change in the demographics of the American Catholic population, particularly regarding race, age, and area of residence. While near the beginning of the twentieth century, American Catholics were largely working-class Irish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants, often subject to virulent anti-Catholic discrimination, these groups began to assimilate into American society near the middle of the century. As a result, the statistically average Catholic has become more and more similar to the statistically average American. Even as early as 1961, Greer finds in a study of St. Louis, Missouri the beginning of the end of Democratic dominance and the origins of a conservative bloc of Catholic voters. He attributes this trend to "acculturation, vertical mobility, and suburbanization."[96] Half a century later, Ryan and Milazzo pick up this

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[94] J. B. Ryan and C. Milazzo, "The South, the Suburbs, and the Vatican Too: Explaining Partisan Change Among Catholics," Article, *Political Behavior* 37, no. 2 (Jun 2015), https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-014-9276-2.

[95] Matthew J. Streb and Brian Frederick, "The Myth of a Distinct Catholic Vote," in *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension between Faith and Power*, ed. Kristen E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 106.

[96] Scott Greer, "Catholic Voters and the Democratic Party," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (1961): 612, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2746297.

same hypothesis.[97] They successfully link changing patterns of partisanship to Catholic migration out of the cities and into the suburbs, while also noting the (lesser) importance of ideological alignment and the Democratic Party's position on abortion.

On the other hand, shifting racial demographics in the population of American Catholics have helped to maintain a sizeable Democratic voting bloc, though clearly not as strong as it once was.[98] As the total of Catholics approaches 50 percent Latino, given that American Latinos tend to lean quite strongly Democratic, it would not be unreasonable to expect a significant percentage of Catholics to continue to vote more progressively.

While theories relating to race and voter demographics may accurately predict some broader trends among Catholics consistent with the rest of the American population, they fail to explain why white Catholics still consistently tend to vote for Democrats more frequently than white Evangelical Christians. According to a 2015 Pew Report, 68 percent of white Evangelicals identify as a Republican or a Republican-leaning independent and 22 percent as a Democrat or Democratic-leaning independent, while the numbers for white Catholics are 50 percent and 41 percent, respectively.[99] Though demographics may be a significant part of the literature on party identification, they do not tell the entire story in this particular discrepancy.

Religious factors might offer further insight. Variables rooted in religion have been shown in previous studies to have surprising influence on both policy preference and political affiliation. One way that religion can potentially contribute to political affiliation is through

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[97] Ryan and Milazzo, "The South, the Suburbs, and the Vatican Too: Explaining Partisan Change Among Catholics."

[98] William B. Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of the Democratic Monolith* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 223.

[99] Pew Research Center, *A Deep Dive into Party Affiliation* (2015), 11–12.

particular religious beliefs and corresponding attitudes towards particular social and economic issues. Views on abortion have been seen widely a predictor of political affiliation among Catholics since *Roe v. Wade*, with those having more strongly negative views or placing more of a priority on abortion tending to associate with the Republican Party. In his seminal work on the Catholic voter, Prendergast argues that an overt shift in Republican positions on notable social concerns—primarily Catholic schools and abortion—are a major factor in the rightward shift among Catholics.[100]

However, opposition to abortion is not the only religious belief with the potential to shade political affiliation and issue positions. Kellstedt and Guth find a variety of religious factors to influence partisanship among Catholics, including religious traditionalism, views on religion in politics, and influence from clergy, among others.[101] Interestingly and in contrast to what Prendergast and others might suggest, orthodox belief among Catholics tends to correlate in this study with Democratic self-identification. Analysis of General Social Survey data by Kilburn and Fogarty links orthodoxy of belief to reduced support for torture on suspected terrorists.[102] Another study done by Perl and McClintock links orthodoxy of belief to opposition to capital punishment, which makes sense given the Church's position on the issue and focus on a consistent life ethic.[103]

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[100] Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of the Democratic Monolith*, 222–4.

[101] Lyman A. Kellstedt and James L. Guth, "Catholic Partisanship and the Presidential Vote in 2012: Testing Alternative Theories," Article, *Forum (2194-6183)* 11, no. 4 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2014-0006.

[102] H. Whitt Kilburn and Brian J. Fogarty, "American Religious Traditions, Orthodoxy, and Commitment in Public Opinion toward Torture," *Politics & Religion* 8, no. 1 (2015), https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048314000777.

[103] Paul Perl and Jamie S. McClintock, "The Catholic "Consistent Life Ethic" and Attitudes toward Capital Punishment and Welfare Reform," *Sociology of Religion* 62, no. 3 (2001), https://doi.org/10.2307/3712351.

Several studies also find a correlation between Catholic belief and economic issues. The aforementioned Perl and McClintock study relates Catholic belief with opposition to a "child cap" on welfare eligibility.[104] Scheve and Stasavage successfully connect belief in God's control with preference for a lower degree of social insurance, on the premise that religion and social welfare are both palliatives for difficult financial circumstances. [105] Interestingly, Be'ery and Bloom find the opposite result, namely that belief in God's control increases support for state welfare not only among American Catholics, but among American and Israeli Jews as well.[106] This result affirms their hypothesis that if people believe that God is in control, they are more likely to believe that other people are not responsible for their own circumstances and rightly deserve aid. Particular religious beliefs such as the inerrancy of Scripture have been demonstrated by Sherkat to be an increasingly accurate predictor of lower trust in science.[107] On a different level of analysis, Jaeger finds that a larger percentage of Catholics within a region correlates positively with net support for economic redistribution.[108]

Certainly, then, if religious belief can affect political attitudes, religious practice may also have an effect. Practice, more often than belief, is used as a measure of religiosity—actions generally speak louder than words. The aforementioned Kellstedt and Guth study notes a

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[104] Perl and McClintock, "The Catholic "Consistent Life Ethic" and Attitudes toward Capital Punishment and Welfare Reform."

[105] Kenneth Scheve and David Stasavage, "Religion and Preferences for Social Insurance," *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 1, no. 3 (2006).

[106] Be'ery Gilad and Bloom Pazit Ben-Nun, "God and the Welfare State - Substitutes or Complements? An Experimental Test of the Effect of Belief in God's Control," *PLoS ONE* 10, no. 6 (2015), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0128858.

[107] Darren E. Sherkat, "Religion, Politics, and Americans' Confidence in Science," *Politics & Religion* 10, no. 1 (2017), https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048316000535.

[108] Mads Meier Jaeger, "Religion and Aggregate Support for Redistribution," *Acta Sociologica* 62, no. 3 (2019).

significant positive correlation between Mass attendance and Republican affiliation. [109] While those who attend Mass more tend to vote Republican, they also tend to vote more frequently than their less-practicing counterparts. Smith and Walker find that unlike members of most Protestant denominations, among whom the most religious vote less frequently than the highly religious, Catholics vote at progressively higher rates with higher religiosity. [110]

These two studies seem consistent with the bulk of scholarship on this matter. However, other studies seem to show that religiosity and Mass attendance do not seem to be exclusively linked to conservative Republican policy. On the issue of capital punishment, Bias, Goldberg, and Hannum arrive at a similar conclusion to Perl and McClintock but using different variables, finding a correlation between religiosity as measured by Mass attendance and opposition to the death penalty. [111]

Religiosity and religious practice can also have interesting effects among subgroups of Catholics. Valenzuela found in a study of Latino voters that although Catholic Latinos were slightly more likely to support Bush in 2004 than Latinos without any religious affiliation, with higher Mass attendance they were significantly more likely to be supportive of social welfare programs and amnesty for undocumented immigrants. [112] Both of these are traditionally positions associated with the Democratic party. While most previous research finds correlation between

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[109] Kellstedt and Guth, "Catholic Partisanship and the Presidential Vote in 2012: Testing Alternative Theories."

[110] L. E. Smith and L. D. Walker, "Belonging, Believing, and Group Behavior: Religiosity and Voting in American Presidential Elections," *Political Research Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (Jun 2013), https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912912443873.

[111] Thomas K. Bias, Abraham Goldberg, and Tara Hannum, "Catholics and the Death Penalty: Religion as a Filter for Political Beliefs," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Research on Religion* 7 (2011).

[112] Ali Adam Valenzuela, "Tending the Flock: Latino Religious Commitments and Political Preferences," Article, *Political Research Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912914543835.

religiosity and Republican affiliation, these latter examples seem to suggest that this link might not be as strong in all cases or among certain subsets of Catholics.

Case Selection and Methodology Rationale

In order to properly examine the impact of religious beliefs and practices on party affiliation, a cross-sectional approach is most useful. This is necessary to obtain a sample most reflective of the broader population of American Catholics and to avoid reliance on a few anecdotal accounts, though that kind of study may provide a different level of insight. Therefore, analysis of survey data is perhaps the most effective way to implement this approach.

In addressing the specific needs of this research question, is necessary to have access to a dataset that has adequate measure of both religious variables and political views. The 2014 Pew Forum *U.S. Religious Landscape Study* lends itself quite well to a study of this nature. It uses a questionnaire that successfully sets the stage for in-depth examination of Catholicism and its influence and political attitudes, providing multiple variables with which to test each hypothesis, some of which have rarely been used in other studies. It also has an excellent sample size, allowing for more detailed statistical analysis and dissection of the Catholic population.

Krupnikov and Klar find that people who would typically identify as partisans increasingly identify as independents due to their frustration with party politics.[113] Because of this trend, independent leaners share more in common with weak partisans than they do with pure independents. Given this, it makes more sense to include these groups with their respective parties than to keep them bundled together as independents.

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[113] Samara Klar and Yanna Krupnikov, *Independent Politics: How American Disdain for Parties Leads to Political Inaction* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

For this study, I separate variables into four categories: religiosity and religious behavior, religious attitudes, political attitudes, and demographics. The first category contains a subjective response on the importance of religion, as well as various measures of religious practice, including frequency of church attendance, prayer, and scripture reading.

The second category contains two subsections, the first of which is a checklist of religious beliefs including guidance in morality, certainty of belief in God, belief in Heaven and Hell, and thoughts on the Bible as the word of God. In this category I also include belief in evolution, though this expands beyond religion to trust in science. The second subsection contains attitudes towards religion, and particularly the institutional Church. This includes measures of traditionalism and views of the Catholic Church as rule-focused, concerned with money and power, too involved in politics.

The third category, political attitudes, contains viewpoints on several different political issues, including the legality of abortion and marriage equality, government aid to the poor, size of government, and environmental laws. I hesitate to include abortion and same-sex marriage here, since both of these are often viewed as major moral issues in the Catholic Church, but the survey does not contain questions regarding their immorality—only legality—justifying their inclusion in this third category.

The fourth category of variables contains a small set of basic demographics—reported sex, race/ethnicity, age, education level, and annual income.

To examine the data, I use binary logistic regression, assigning “Republican/Lean Republican” a value of 0 and “Democratic/Lean Democratic” a value of 1. Since all variables are categorical and not continuous, analysis requires use of a reference variable. For groups two through four I use the last response in each category, generally “Don’t know/other.” For category

one, I use the first category, the highest frequency of participation, since there were so few respondents who said they did not know their level of religious practice.

Hypotheses

Based on previous research, I hypothesize that measures of religiosity and religious behavior among Catholics will correlate positively with support for the Republican party. Other religious measures available in the *U.S. Religious Landscape Study* remain largely unevaluated, such as frequency of personal prayer, so it is more difficult to make an accurate prediction of results, but it would be unsurprising to see other measures of religiosity have a similar effect on partisan identification.

I also expect that various tenets or attitudes will show correlation with various parties. Catholic doctrine is not condensable into either main party platform, so orthodoxy on these positions or an increased emphasis on upholding these values will likely swing voters towards the ideologically similar party. For example, I would expect traditionalism to correlate with Republican identification. However, for beliefs that do not as easily align themselves with one party platform, I would expect a correlation between orthodoxy and legalism in faith and conservatism in politics.

While more of a control than an actual experimental variable, I would expect political attitudes to be strong predictors of party identification. Because of ideological sorting among parties, Republicans and Democrats are likely going to hold mostly consistent views among themselves.

Finally, I hypothesize that race and other demographics will be a reasonably accurate predictor of party identification. While White Catholics will likely be more divided, I expect to find a sizeable majority of Latino Catholics identifying as Democrats or Democratic-leaning

independents. Similarly, I predict that Republican identification will correlate positively with income and age, and identification as male. All of these variables are fairly well documented as showing correlation, so a deviant result here would be quite unexpected. What may be of more interest is whether there any factors that predict variation within larger demographical categories.

Data and Evaluation of Hypotheses

Consistent with the findings of Greer and Ryan and Milazzo, the macropartisan behavior of Catholics appears to match the general population almost exactly.[114] Catholics are split 37.5 percent Republican/Lean Republican, 43.8 percent Democratic/Lean Democratic, and 18.8 percent No Lean/Other, while national percentages are 37.2 percent, 44.4 percent, and 18.4 percent, respectively. Looking solely at party identification, it appears that identification with Catholicism has little large-scale impact. While Catholics are slightly more likely to identify as Democrats than Republicans, the American population as a whole is also more likely to identify in this way.

Religiosity and Religious Behavior

I hypothesized that religiosity and religious behavior would be more closely associated with Republican identification and the data supports my hypothesis to a degree. However, out of all the measures of religious behavior, the only one with any real degree of significance is the measure of church attendance (see table 1). Catholics who attend religious services more than once a week are far more likely to be Republican. From here, the probability of Democratic

[114] Greer, "Catholic Voters and the Democratic Party."; Ryan and Milazzo, "The South, the Suburbs, and the Vatican Too: Explaining Partisan Change Among Catholics."

identification increases moderately with decreased attendance until it peaks at attendance of “a few times a year”—likely “Christmas and Easter” Catholics. The last few levels of attendance lean still lean more Democratic than the overall distribution of Catholics. This result is consistent with previous research using this metric, showing a direct relationship between church attendance and Republican identification.

Table 1

Religiosity and Religious Behavior

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Importance of Religion			5.543	4	.236	
- Somewhat important	-.072	.068	1.115	1	.291	.931
- Not too important	-.126	.118	1.137	1	.286	.881
- Not at all important	.217	.210	1.066	1	.302	1.242
Church Attendance			29.942	6	.000	
- Once a week	.310	.102	9.289	1	.002	1.364
- Once or twice a month	.472	.114	17.160	1	.000	1.603
- A few times a year	.602	.116	26.995	1	.000	1.826
- Seldom	.451	.125	12.923	1	.000	1.569
- Never	.381	.156	5.999	1	.014	1.464
Frequency of Prayer			14.517	7	.043	
- Once a day	.195	.072	7.430	1	.006	1.215
- A few times a week	.068	.085	.634	1	.426	1.070
- Once a week	.290	.143	4.092	1	.043	1.336
- A few times a month	-.053	.120	.196	1	.658	.948
- Seldom	.231	.112	4.284	1	.038	1.260
- Never	.101	.183	.308	1	.579	1.107
Frequency of Scripture Reading			5.562	5	.351	
- Once or twice a month	-.141	.096	2.182	1	.140	.868
- Several times a year	-.194	.100	3.756	1	.053	.824
- Seldom	-.115	.085	1.839	1	.175	.892
- Never	-.141	.085	2.760	1	.097	.868
Constant	-.210	.091	5.338	1	.021	.811

Comparison of categorical variables based on highest frequencies/ratings, explaining their absence from this table.

In contrast, religiosity offers little insight. Survey participants who responded that religion is “very important” in their lives—nearly two-thirds of Catholics—are split by party almost exactly the same as Catholics as a whole. No levels of religiosity are statistically significant in determining party identification.

Frequency of prayer also is rather helpful. Most Catholics pray relatively frequently, with most at least once a day. Interestingly, those who pray more than once a day are very likely to identify as Republicans, but those who pray only once a day are significantly more likely to identify as Democrats. Other than at these frequencies, results are only significant at “once a week,” which skews Democratic, and at “a few times a month,” which skews Republican. This variance in behavior and variance in significance make it difficult to see any meaningful correlation.

Frequency of scripture reading yields no significant results and no substantive conclusions can be drawn from this metric of religious behavior.

My hypothesis appears to be supported, but to a lesser degree than I had anticipated. Only one measure skewed significantly toward Republican identification.

Religious Belief

Religious Attitudes

In general, it appears that departure from orthodoxy is slightly linked with Democratic identification, while less can be said for those that maintain orthodoxy. When looking for guidance on right and wrong, the majority of Catholics look primarily to religious teaching or common sense, though neither response carries any significant influence on party identification. Among the 10 percent of Catholics who responded with “scientific information,” Democrats more than doubled Republicans, and probability of identification skewed moderately Democratic

at a significance of less than 0.1 (see table 2). While these results cannot accurately predict Republican identification, trust in science for guidance on morality seems to be a reasonably successful predictor of Democratic partisanship.

Certainty of belief in God does not have any statistically significant results, but any response than less than “fairly certain” appears to skew Democratic simply by frequency, while absolute certainty leans slightly Republican.

Regarding belief in Heaven and Hell, Republicans are overrepresented among those with orthodox beliefs. Surprisingly, only about two-thirds of Catholics in total believe in Heaven and Hell, but this group is split evenly between Democrats and Republicans. Orthodox belief slightly increases the likelihood of Republican identification at a significance of 0.1. Other responses offer no meaningful levels of significance.

Belief in the Bible as the word of God presents an interesting set of statistically significant results. While a majority of Catholics believe that the Bible is in some form the word of God, more Democrats than Republicans believe that the Bible ought to be taken literally, word for word. This result is likely linked to the black Evangelical churches, who hold to biblical literalism. Accordingly, a small majority of people who think that the Bible is the word of God but not everything should be taken literally are Republicans. Though not significant, a majority of Catholics who believe that the Bible is not the word of God identify as Democrats. While these findings at first glance appear to be a slight hiccup in my orthodoxy hypothesis, the Catholic tradition recognizes that there are different genres of writing in the Bible and that not everything is to be interpreted literally, meaning that Republicans do largely fall under Catholic belief.

Table 2

Religious Belief/Attitudes

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Guidance on morality			14.858	4	.005	
- Religious teaching	.119	.198	.360	1	.549	1.126
- Philosophy	.020	.212	.009	1	.926	1.020
- Common sense	.030	.195	.023	1	.879	1.030
- Science	.409	.214	3.644	1	.056	1.506
Certainty of belief in God			9.137	4	.058	
- Absolutely certain	-.192	.272	.496	1	.481	.825
- Fairly certain	-.105	.276	.145	1	.703	.900
- Not too certain	.276	.314	.776	1	.378	1.318
- Not at all certain	.026	.391	.004	1	.947	1.026
Belief in Heaven and Hell			20.016	3	.000	
- Belief in Both	-.166	.100	2.734	1	.098	.847
- Belief in Heaven and not Hell	.099	.108	.846	1	.358	1.104
- Belief in Hell and not Heaven	.432	.261	2.736	1	.098	1.541
Bible as the Word of God			46.199	4	.000	
- Bible is the literal word of God	.253	.121	4.359	1	.037	1.288
- Word of God, not everything literal	-.231	.115	4.050	1	.044	.794
- Word of God, other	.250	.210	1.414	1	.234	1.284
- Not the word of God	-.035	.119	.085	1	.771	.966
Evolution			22.584	4	.000	
- Evolution by natural processes	.493	.160	9.469	1	.002	1.637
- Evolution guided by God	.188	.158	1.427	1	.232	1.207
- Evolution, don't know/refused	.198	.203	.946	1	.331	1.219
- No evolution	.242	.158	2.363	1	.124	1.274
Traditionalism			77.560	4	.000	
- Church should preserve beliefs	-.736	.168	19.265	1	.000	.479
- Church should adjust beliefs	-.342	.167	4.160	1	.041	.711
- Church should adopt modern beliefs	-.060	.176	.118	1	.731	.941
- Other	-.028	.381	.006	1	.940	.972
Church focuses too much on rules			53.049	2	.000	
- Agree	.165	.162	1.042	1	.307	1.179
- Disagree	-.284	.161	3.103	1	.078	.753
Church too concerned with power			.180	2	.914	
- Agree	-.019	.167	.013	1	.909	.981
- Disagree	-.043	.166	.068	1	.794	.958
Church too involved with politics			32.515	2	.000	
- Agree	.089	.159	.315	1	.575	1.093
- Disagree	-.265	.156	2.871	1	.090	.767
Constant	.644	.393	2.688	1	.101	1.904

Belief in human evolution is less surprising. A significant majority of Catholics agree with evolution in some form. As expected, Catholics who believe that humans evolved due solely to natural processes are slightly more likely to identify as Democrats. Neither belief in guided evolution nor strict creationism demonstrate any significant correlation, but frequencies skew slightly Republican and slightly Democratic, respectively. After further examination, this belief also appears to be linked with lower levels of education.

Religious attitudes as a whole appear to have little significant effect on partisan identification, and in the cases where they do, effect is small and predictable. The only exception this rule was biblical literalism, which to my surprise was linked to Democratic affiliation. Additionally, links to Democratic identification were more visible than correlation with Republican ID, always in departure from Catholic orthodoxy. These results are consistent with my hypothesis.

Attitudes about Religion

The second subcategory of variables under religious belief includes attitudes towards religion, and specifically the institutional church. The first of these is traditionalism in the Church. A strong correlation exists between the notion that the Church should maintain traditional beliefs and practices and Republican identification, manifesting in an equally strong effect. While a large percentage of those who want the Church to “preserve its traditional beliefs and practices” are Republicans, there is still a sizeable percentage of Democrats who would rather the Church hang on to its tradition. Unsurprisingly, a majority of those who want the Church to “adopt modern beliefs and practices” are Democrats, but this relationship shows no statistical significance.

Several measures link trust in institutional religion with Republican identification. A majority of Catholics who believe that churches focus too much on rules identify as Democrats, while a sizeable plurality who disagree with this premise identify as Republicans. The latter relationship is significant at 0.078, while the former is not significant. While there is no significant relationship among those who agree that the Church is too involved in politics, there is a significant correlation between Republican identification and disagreement with this statement. Given that more recent studies shows Pope Francis to have a substantially lower approval rating among Republicans,[115] this relationship may have changed over the four years between studies. No significant relationship is present among views about churches and money and power.

Political Attitudes

On the whole, political attitudes are often quite predictive of party identification, and particularly among Republicans. The first of these attitudes, thoughts on abortion legality, fits expectations in some ways but not in others. Among those who believe that abortion should be legal in all cases, Democrats more than double Republicans, but there does not appear to be any statistical significance. On the other hand, there appears to be a strong correlation between the belief that abortion should be illegal and Republican identification (see table 3). Despite this, among those who believe abortion should be illegal in all cases, Democrats still account for a third of respondents in this category. While the abortion issue does appear to be a predictor of party identification, it is not as clear-cut as one might expect.

[115] Pew Research Center, *Confidence in Pope Francis Down Sharply in U.S.* (2018).

Table 3

Political Attitudes

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Legality of Abortion			98.225	4	.000	
- Legal in all cases	.163	.176	.856	1	.355	1.177
- Legal in most cases	.030	.166	.033	1	.856	1.030
- Illegal in most cases	-.558	.166	11.284	1	.001	.572
- Illegal in all cases	-.577	.173	11.167	1	.001	.562
Legality of Same-Sex Marriage			24.379	4	.000	
- Strongly Favor	.089	.135	.433	1	.510	1.093
- Favor	-.132	.125	1.121	1	.290	.876
- Oppose	-.263	.130	4.071	1	.044	.769
- Strongly Oppose	-.423	.143	8.717	1	.003	.655
Government Aid to the Poor			269.311	3	.000	
- More harm than good	-.240	.244	.967	1	.325	.786
- More good than harm	.808	.245	10.874	1	.001	2.244
- Neither/Both equally	.689	.292	5.568	1	.018	1.991
Size of government			443.886	3	.000	
- Smaller govt., fewer services	-1.526	.210	52.699	1	.000	.217
- Bigger govt., more services	-.206	.211	.952	1	.329	.814
- Depends	-.210	.290	.527	1	.468	.810
Environmental Laws			141.006	3	.000	
- Strict laws are harmful	-.635	.200	10.081	1	.001	.530
- Strict laws are worth the cost	.128	.199	.410	1	.522	1.136
- Neither/Both equally	-.243	.304	.639	1	.424	.784
Constant	1.331	.336	15.731	1	.000	3.786

Other political attitudes are fairly straightforward. Though a modest majority of Catholics are in favor of marriage equality, responses are significantly divided by party. A solid majority of those who favor marriage equality are Democrats, while most of those who oppose it are Republicans. Again, the former relationship is insignificant, while the latter is quite significant. Opposition to marriage equality, then, is a solid predictor of Republican identification.

Government aid to the poor is also point of separation among parties. Party identifiers largely gravitate towards the position on this issue most closely held by their party. Out of those

who believe government aid does more harm than good, a statistically significant majority identify as Republican. Democrats outnumber Republicans in for the opposite response, but this relationship lacks significance. A similar result is seen regarding opinion on the scope of government. Belief in small government is a very strong predictor of Republican identification.

Environmental laws and regulations also predict party identification. Among those who believe that strict regulations are harmful, Republicans nearly double Democrats, showing a moderately large effect and a high degree of significance. No significant relationship is visible in other responses.

It appears that political attitudes are a far more consistent and accurate predictor of partisan identification than either religious practice or belief, at least for minority (typically conservative) opinions. The data supports initial hypotheses and is consistent with previous research.

Demographics

As predicted, some demographic categories are quite predictive of party identification. Males are moderately more likely than females to identify as Republican at a high degree of significance (see table 4). Identification with a minority race or ethnicity has an extremely high impact on party identification. While a small sample size in this survey, Black non-Hispanic Catholics predictably are overwhelmingly likely to identify as Democratic; regression finds this large effect highly significant. Hispanic Catholics also lean significantly Democratic. In contrast, white non-Hispanic Catholics lean slightly Republican by frequency, but there is no significance to this relationship.

Income also appears to have a reasonable effect on party identification. In 2013 dollars, those who have a family income of $40,000 or less are disproportionately Democratic, while

those making more than $40,000 are disproportionately Republican. Values for under $40,000 are significant, while those between $40,000 and $150,000 show no significance. Those earning $150,000 yearly significantly skew Republican.

Table 4

Demographics

Variable	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Sex - Male	-.327	.057	33.118	1	.000	.721
Race-Ethnicity			298.039	4	.000	
- White non-Hispanic	-.048	.275	.030	1	.862	.953
- Black non-Hispanic	2.392	.374	40.891	1	.000	10.938
- Hispanic	1.070	.280	14.568	1	.000	2.917
- Other	.696	.300	5.396	1	.020	2.006
Age Range			49.035	15	.000	
- 24 or younger	.100	.277	.130	1	.719	1.105
- 25-29	.325	.286	1.293	1	.255	1.384
- 30-34	.339	.283	1.435	1	.231	1.403
- 35-39	.430	.280	2.353	1	.125	1.537
- 40-44	.441	.276	2.550	1	.110	1.554
- 45-49	.390	.271	2.068	1	.150	1.477
- 50-54	.472	.271	3.039	1	.081	1.603
- 55-59	.725	.271	7.148	1	.008	2.065
- 60-64	.780	.273	8.163	1	.004	2.182
- 65-69	.805	.278	8.378	1	.004	2.236
- 70-74	.660	.282	5.454	1	.020	1.934
- 75-79	.368	.294	1.572	1	.210	1.445
- 80-84	.798	.303	6.964	1	.008	2.222
- 85-89	.860	.335	6.585	1	.010	2.363
- 90 or older	.779	.397	3.859	1	.049	2.180
Education			19.124	8	.014	
- Less than high school	-.174	.557	.098	1	.754	.840
- High school incomplete	.130	.558	.054	1	.816	1.139
- High school graduate	-.128	.545	.055	1	.814	.880
- Some college, no degree	-.130	.547	.056	1	.813	.879
- Two-year associate degree	-.117	.550	.045	1	.832	.890
- Four-year college degree	-.282	.548	.264	1	.607	.754
- Postgrad, no degree	.294	.592	.247	1	.619	1.342
- Postgrad or professional	.088	.551	.026	1	.873	1.092

Table 4 (Continued)

Income			33.651	9	.000	
- Less than $10,000	.324	.138	5.509	1	.019	1.383
- 10 to under $20,000	.379	.121	9.894	1	.002	1.461
- 20 to under $30,000	.278	.120	5.403	1	.020	1.321
- 30 to under $40,000	.208	.123	2.860	1	.091	1.231
- 40 to under $50,000	-.022	.127	.030	1	.863	.978
- 50 to under $75,000	.015	.112	.017	1	.897	1.015
- 75 to under $100,000	.188	.117	2.577	1	.108	1.207
- 100 to under $150,000	-.052	.123	.180	1	.671	.949
- $150,000 or more	-.259	.132	3.863	1	.049	.771
Constant	.403	.798	.255	1	.614	1.496

Other variables are less telling. In looking at frequency breakdown by education, one would expect education to be a predictor of identification. Democrats are overrepresented among those with education less than a college degree, while Republicans are overrepresented among those with higher levels of education. In particular, there is a huge spike of Republican identification among those with four-year degree—nearly 50 percent of all respondents at this level. Surprisingly, none of these values show any meaningful degree of statistical significance.

Age was also much less of a predictor than I had anticipated, but where it was, the results were unexpected. Only half of the age ranges offered any significance, all of them above age 55, but surprisingly they all skewed Democratic. This result makes sense if older Democratic identifiers are remnants of a reliably Democratic bloc.

Where these results are significant, they support my hypothesis. Race and income are often excellent predictors of identification and age is occasionally significant, though education surprisingly displays no significance in my model.

Conclusions and Areas for Future Research

After reviewing the data, none of my four hypotheses can be rejected entirely, as each category of variables included at least one with a noticeable and statistically significant effect.

Mass attendance seems to be linked with Republican identification, consistent with previous literature, while other measures in this category provide no meaningful results. Likewise, traditionalism and departure from Catholic orthodoxy (surprisingly including biblical literalism) are generally predictive of Republican and Democratic identification, respectively. However, as predicted, neither category of religious variables had as large or consistent impact on party identification as political values or demographics, especially race and ethnicity. Both of these categories were often very predictive of party identification, consistent with my hypotheses.

This study presents several avenues for further research. Most obvious is that this data used in this study was collected five years previous to the time of writing. Replication of this study with the next iteration of the Religious Landscape Study could help to further support these results or to offer additional insight into patterns and trends in American Catholicism. A second area for development is a dive into regional influence. The rural/urban divide in America may also have effects within Catholicism. Third, my study found the effects of education on party affiliation to be statistically insignificant, despite visible disparities in party split at each level of education. A follow-up study may either support this insignificance or challenge it.

Moving outside the methodology used here, case studies of individual Catholics or parishes and their own practice of Catholicism may also provide valuable insight. First-hand, personal accounts of political socialization and the challenges faced by faithful Catholics in selecting between imperfect candidates and imperfect platforms would complement the cross-sectional approach taken by this study.

Final Thoughts

In the practice of democracy, people bring to the ballot box the sum of their own experiences—their hopes, dreams, worries, and fears. For the faithful Catholic, Church teaching should be a strong consideration in the electoral process, both as a motivator for participation and as a determiner of values. The above study demonstrates some relation between religious belief and practice and corresponding party identification, but it also shows the breadth of opinions held by people all claiming the same faith. The human person through reason and revelation has access to the truth of God, but in going beyond what is known in this way in the creation of what we think of as law, there is certainly room for legitimate disagreement in policy preference upon the foundation of Church teaching.

In order that the American public could work through these disagreements in search of the common good, the Framers envisioned a democratic republic, governed by the people on behalf of the people. At the present, this vision is in jeopardy as American democracy (and democracy around the world) seems to be pulling itself apart by the seams. Human tendency to division and isolation has become the dominant force in mainstream culture and political institutions. Polarization in the last few decades especially has left Americans on both sides of the divide angry and hurt. A system in which only two political parties can legitimately be electorally viable naturally tends toward division as ours has. Even internally among American Catholics, there seem to be two main camps—those focused respectively on personal morality and piety and those focused on social justice—in which politics often seem to drive theology, and not the other way around. The former tends to forget their relationship with their neighbor, while the latter tends to forget their relationship with God and with themselves.

In response, now more than ever, I think the America is in desperate need of a truly and wholly Catholic practice of faith in the public sphere—one that refrains from turning faith into

merely ideology. Reinhold Niebuhr writes in *Moral Man and Immoral Society* that while the love that religion espouses can be a force for good, religion cannot be an agent of dramatic social change because it tends toward body-spirit dualism and a focus on God to the exclusion of neighbor and community, as well as a defeatism regarding the moral character of the world as is espoused in Augustine's *City of God.*[116] There is no doubt that Niebuhr's statements certainly reflect the actions of many Christians today, but if there were any faith that could be an exception to his rule it would be Catholicism, which insists that all morality is social and professes a belief in the unity and dignity of the human person, body and soul. For the Catholic, though relationship with God may be considered *prior* to relationship with humanity, relationship with God cannot exist *apart* from relationship with humanity. Though Catholics may conscientiously disagree about which political party best represents the faith of the Church, or how best to implement these views through public policy, all of us are called to the same, unconditional love of neighbor. Though it may not erase all injustice, if we can love God and one another in the model of Christ, maybe—just maybe—we can catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God on earth.

[116] Niebuhr, *Reinhold Niebuhr: Major Works on Religion and Politics*.;

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