Anna Grzymala-Busse

Nations Under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy

(Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015, ISBN: 9781400866458, 421 pp., $29.95.)

Anna Grzymala-Busse's *Nations Under God* strikes at the heart of the ubiquitous "church-state divide" in modern, secular predominantly-Christian democracies asking – and providing compelling answers to – the question of why churches become "powerful political actors" in some states but not in others. The book's answer to this question centers on the ways in which churches gain "direct institutional access" in order to share sovereignty with governments. Ironically, countries with high levels of church attendance do not necessarily exhibit high levels of religious influence in the political arena. Rather, the most influential churches exist in states where nation and religion has "fused," equating the interests of the church with the national interest. This work complements well both Kalyvas' *The Rise of Christian Democracy* (1996) and Toft, Philpott, and Shah's *God's Century* (2011) in regards to understanding religion's relationship with politics, with the former covering the "how", "why", and "by whom" of the formation of Christian democratic parties, and the latter discussing the mutual dependence/independence of religious and political authorities.

Grzymala-Busse's qualitative analysis (supplemented with an appendix comprised of quantitative tests) is comprised of six cases, examined in pairs – the "Catholic Monopolies", Ireland and Italy; post-communist Poland and Croatia; and the United States and Canada, the most religiously diverse of the selected cases, spanning from the early 20th Century to today. Churches' moral authority may be manifested in the political arena through many distinct policy areas, but Grzymala-Busse focuses on five such areas – abortion, divorce, religion in schools, assisted reproductive technology, and same-sex marriage, due to the fact that Christian churches (whether Catholic or Protestant) have consistently and cross-nationally focused on these issues. The differential policy outcomes observed across cases in regards to these five areas allows one to compare the differential levels of church influence over policy outcomes.

To briefly overview the six cases – In Ireland, the Catholic Church enjoyed high levels of policy influence and moral authority, bordering on "hegemony", and to be Irish was to be Catholic, in stark contrast to the country's English neighbors. Through great involvement in the education sector, the church was able to ensure widespread public acceptance of the illegality of abortion and divorce for decades. Yet, by the time the issues of embryonic stem-cell research, IVF, and same-sex marriage came to the table in the early 21st Century, the church's moral authority had significantly eroded and such issues had begun to be debated more freely in the policy arena, with the revelations of sexual abuse among the clergy. Oddly enough, this institutional hegemony had eroded so significantly as to allow Ireland to legalize same-sex marriage in 2015. Italy, on the other hand, despite being home to the center of the Catholic world, has *not* experienced such a religious hegemony and institutionalization, due largely to the church's staunch opposition to Mussolini's fascist regime in the pre-war years as well as the fact that only 7% of students attended parochial schools (as opposed to 95% in Ireland). As such, national identity was unable to fuse with Catholicism, affording it relatively little policy influence.

In the Catholic communist states, the church, whilst being suppressed, was nonetheless gaining moral authority throughout the mid-20th Century, with that of Poland being the most significant. Under democracy in Poland, the church had such high levels of authority that even members of parliament avoided disagreement with and criticism of it, and

abortion and same-sex marriage were explicitly forbidden in the new constitution. In fact, in post-communist Poland, the church was able to utilize its built-up moral authority to *return* religion to schools and make abortion illegal where it previously had been freely available. Yet, as Poland's democracy became stronger into the 2010s, politicians began to rely less on the church, with parties becoming more autonomous. Similar to Ireland, sexual abuse allegations were a factor in this. In Croatia, Catholicism and nationalism had likewise fused, and in the aftermath of Croatia's succession from Yugoslavia, the church had become the de-facto official religion of the new state. However, despite relatively high moral authority, the church was not afforded institutional access as it had been in Poland, due in part to the ruling party's reliance on nationalist war-time rhetoric more heavily than on theological rhetoric, thus not allowing the church much institutional access.

The concluding pair of cases are the only two in which Catholic hegemony is nonexistent. Rather, Evangelicals are largely at the forefront of policy debates in the United States and Canada. Familiar to American readers, the marriage of "Judeo-Christian" and American identities makes for a high degree of fusion of religious and national identity, a feature absent in Canada. The coalition of conservative Christians and the Republican Party has strongly opposed abortion, consistently attempting to restrict its legality in the post-*Roe v. Wade* era, advocated for the teaching of creationism and abstinence-only sexual education in schools, and passed through Congress the Defense of Marriage Act, which exempts states from recognizing same-sex marriages performed in other states. In Canada, such religious-national fusion never materialized due to the extant division between French-speaking Catholic Canada and English-speaking Protestant Canada. In Canada, in contrast to the aforementioned cases, politicians actively sought to *remove* religion from schools, and despite often mirroring the trajectory of American opinion on the other four issues, the political system and the church have been almost wholly separate.

One potential shortcoming of the book is the lack of inclusion of a case or cases of strong institutional barriers to church involvement in the political system, such as in France. Would the argument still hold true in such instances? The discussion of institutionalized secularism remains rather limited; as an example, it is unclear in the case of Canada whether the country's relatively high level of secularization is the cause of comparatively low church influence or the result of it. Further, greater integration of the theory with the briefly mentioned "political economy of religion" literature may have provided for more insight into the role of the state as a suppressor of religious influence in the form of institutional barriers. Can churches gain sufficient moral authority in such countries? Is there any remedy, of sorts, to secularize a country in which there is a high degree of fusion between religious and national identity? As noted by the author, *Nations Under God* does not claim to be applicable to non-Christian democracies, yet application of this theory to such states would make for a prudent avenue for further research.

It is refreshing to examine the ways in which the church interacts with social policy in this wide range of cases, especially in light of the often-inflamed discussions of such issues here in the United States. This book is to be celebrated not only for its breadth, but also for its unique theoretical contribution to the study of religion and politics in Christian democracies in regards to the church itself as a political actor, as well as for its accessible yet eloquent prose.

Caroline Lancaster

Furman University Department of Political Science, USA

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