CORPORATE CATHOLICISM
AND SOCIAL CHANGE
Recent American Literature
on Religion in Central Europe

ELLEN LOVELL EVANS, *The Cross and the Ballot: Catholic Political Parties in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands.* Boston: Humanities Press, 1999, pp. 301, notes, bibliography, $70.00 cloth.

WILLIAM DAVID BOWMAN, *Priest and Parish in Vienna, 1780-1880.* Boston: Humanities Press, 1999, pp. 268, notes, bibliography, index, $60.00 cloth.

RAYMOND CHIEN SUN, *Before the Enemy is within Our Walls: Catholic Workers in Cologne, 1885-1912: A Social, Cultural and Political History.* Boston: Humanities Press, 1999, pp. 339, notes, bibliography, index, $70.00 cloth.

Studies of Catholicism and its ability to adapt to what was becoming an increasingly urban society in Germany during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were, up until the late 1980s, remarkably rare. At least two biases accounted for this situation. Because of the fact that Christian Democracy—in which Catholics were highly influential—was a powerful force in postwar Germany, the historiography of Catholicism was not a purely intellectual enterprise. Ideological trenches in academia with regard to Catholicism, with progressive historians expressing hostility and Catholics such as Helmut Kohl (who wrote his dissertation on the founding of the Christian Democratic Union in the Palatinate after 1945[1]) expressing highly positive sentiments, were very deep and hard to overcome. Political arguments for or against the ruling party tended to obscure other issues.

This political bias was not the whole story. Even more common was what could be called the secularization bias. Hardly any interest was shown in religious practices and their ups and downs in the nineteenth century. As Margaret L. Anderson once bluntly pointed out, "Not the secularization of Europe in the nineteenth century, but only the secularization of scholarship in the twentieth century can account for the absence of the Catholic revival from our research agendas for so long."[2] The commonly held assumption was that religious belief

systems, like glaciers of the ice age, had somehow managed to last into the nineteenth century, where they had finally melted away slowly but steadily under the burning sun of bourgeois values. It is therefore unsurprising that German Catholicism was placed on the historiographical agenda largely as a result of efforts by non-German—in particular British and North American—scholars. Studies not only by Anderson but also by David Blackbourn, Jonathan Sperber, and Helmut Smith—have aroused new interest in what had been regarded as a negligible quantity in the history of progress and modernization.[3]

Recent historians have detected Catholic (as well as Protestant) energy particularly in the area of political mobilization. Jonathan Sperber, for example, traces the religious revival of the 1850s and 1860s to a de facto coalition between two of the most important antirevolutionary forces of the time: the Catholic Church and the Prussian state. After decades of fierce competition for the loyalty of Prussian Catholics, both institutions came together against the forces of revolution, paving the way for strengthened clerical authority and a rise in the membership of religiously oriented political associations. In this perspective, the Catholic Center Party could resonate with its Catholic constituency in the 1870s because earlier developments had paved the way for a homogeneous understanding of the social and political order, a point made earlier by Wolfgang Schieder in one of the canonical works by a modern scholar on the social and political history of Catholicism.[4]

A look at the trajectory of Catholicism in other Central European countries sheds new light on developments in Germany and the national liberal agendas that have been advanced by many earlier scholars. Ellen Lovell Evans, in a highly insightful study, analyzes the rise and persistence of political Catholicism in five European countries: Belgium, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, and Germany. Three of these countries—Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Germany—were confessionally divided. But with Belgium and Austria, Evans adds two denominationally homogeneous countries as test cases to trace the impact of the religious divide on political mobilization and the inner dynamic of Catholicism in Central Europe.

In all five countries, Catholicism has been marked by the tension between universalism and particularism, or between the ballot and the cross. Evans refers to this as

> the effort on the one hand to achieve parity and a proportionate degree of political power for Catholics, often a minority or underclass in their society, and on the other hand to maintain Catholic exclusivity and protect the values and teachings of the church from the perceived corruptive influences of the dominant liberal/secular culture. (p. 282)

Since the pursuit of political equality and cultural distinctiveness entailed trying to combine an inclusionary with an exclusionary logic, the outcome of these efforts was uncertain and unpredictable. But the five countries under investigation had one thing in common: in all of them, the drive for political parity and cultural exclusivity were carried out through a wide range of associations. From Flanders to Austria, Catholics sought to organize their teachers and other workers in occupational groups, to send their students to Catholic universities, and to rally their voters in support of Catholic parties. What made these cases different from one another were timing and the political-historical constellation.

COMMUNITIES OF POLITICAL INTEREST

Catholics shared with members of other groups a desire to achieve collective recognition, but their motives with regard to party building and political representation were heightened by feelings that, as a result of industrialization, they were being left increasingly behind. Catholics had been marginalized as a result of the territorial shakeup that took place during the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era. The religious makeup of newly created states was quite variegated, quite in contrast to the direction taken as a result of state building efforts during the preceding several centuries. In most of these new states, Catholics found themselves not only in a minority but also in a position politically, culturally, and for the most part economically disadvantageous. In Belgium and in eastern Prussia, these differences between in-groups and out-groups were reinforced by ethnic differences. These multiple layers of conflict help explain the differences in the political makeup as well as in the strength of the emotional ties that held Catholic communities together.

The situation in Austria was peculiar in a number of respects. There, a decade before the outbreak of the French Revolution, reforms by Emperor Joseph II had significantly diminished Catholic independence, diverting the moral resources of the Catholic Church into state-building efforts. As William Bowman shows in his study of the Austrian clergy, the Josephine reforms, although ultimately revoked at the national level, had a lasting impact at the local level. The local clergy and Catholic associations remained subordinate to the state bureaucracy. As a result, there was little room for a Catholic party to distinguish itself from state authority and to articulate the political and social interests of Austrian Catholics.

The timing of political mobilization can be linked to sequences of conflicts. Swiss and Belgian Catholics were clearly the leaders when it came to building political parties. The entry of Swiss Catholics into the political arena was particularly violent. They felt that in the event of a religious conflict, secession was their only option. A sense of being on the losing side vis-à-vis Calvinist liberals in an era of state building and social change led to the "Sonderbund War" of 1846-1847, in which the Catholic cantons were forcibly prevented by Calvinist ones from leaving the Swiss federation.

At the other end of the spectrum were the Belgian Catholics. They had entered into a compromise with liberals in 1828, as a result of which they broke free from the Dutch crown in the revolution of 1830. Belgian Ultramontanism took shape politically at an early point. Although the declared aim of this movement was to implement a centralist view of the Church, Ultramontanism nevertheless provided Belgian Catholics with an emancipatory ideology and speeded up the formation of political Catholicism. Here, as in France, it meant freeing the Church from its Gallican or state-oriented bishops but did not imply the adoption of Roman authoritarianism. After 1830, ultramontane liberalism became a red specter for the government of nearby Prussia, where ultramontane Catholics in the Rhineland were suspected of wanting to go down the same path. The early mobilization of Belgian Catholics presaged later conflicts. Whereas the Sonderbund War was essentially fought between the German-speaking cantons, Flemish Catholics had a sense of being ethnically marginalized by a ruling French elite. During the rest of the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth, ethnicity became the driving force in Belgian Catholicism. It made political mobilization in Belgium particularly violent and comparable only to mobilization in eastern Prussia, where political cleavages between Germans and Poles also had religious and ethnic components.[5]

In the German case, the revolution of 1848 was the catalyst for organization and mobilization. Evans cites as reasons for the belated development a mixture of motives that had already ignited similar upheavals in other countries: a "reaction of a backward agricultural and artisanal population against modernization and industrialization"; "feelings of frustration against being on the losing side in nation-building, giving up autonomy"; and the "ideological confrontation between enlightenment and revived ultramontanism" (p. 102). The economic depression before 1848 and the centralist nation-building efforts of the liberal revolutionaries of 1848 added to the ideological struggle between ultramontanism and liberalism. Just as in Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands, lay activists were pushing forward in the early stages of political mobilization.

Evans's comparative perspective challenges the conventional historiographical wisdom, according to which ultramontanism was clearly on the conservative and even reactionary side of the political spectrum. To be sure, quite modern forms of political action went along with the pursuit of antimodern objectives. It is nonetheless undeniable that this theoretically incoherent mixture could also lead to emancipatory outcomes. Swiss, Belgian, and German examples all show that ultramontanism could serve as a means of articulating widespread frustration over the course of social and economic as well as political developments, as a result of which large segments of the population were severely disadvantaged. Evans's overview confirms the suspicion that despite its extremist and authoritarian ideology, ultramontanism could serve as a protest ideology.[6] Still, this egalitarian current was particularly noticeable during the early stages of Catholic mobilization. Later, it receded as a result of

competition with the forces of socialism. Support for women's suffrage was the litmus test for commitment to full political representation, and it was a test that Catholic parties everywhere (except in Belgium) failed to pass (fearing, albeit wrongly, that it would favor socialism). The emancipatory implications of ultramontanism were also limited in another way. Ultramontanist support for corporatism was easily exploited by fascist parties in the 1930s. Next to anticommunism, antiliberal corporatist rhetoric was probably the most effective loyalty trap used by the National Socialists to gain the support of German Catholics.

CULTURAL SPECIFICITY:
BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF MEANING

For Catholics, politics was not an end in itself but instead a means of helping to safeguard a Catholic community. This functional approach was obvious during election campaigns, particularly in Germany. Here, members of the Center Party, who became increasingly involved in governmental activities before and after World War I, pursued national objectives that were intended to serve Catholic interests. But community-oriented objectives were readily apparent in many other countries too, where, for Catholics as well as socialists, community building went hand in hand with party building. Community building in the religious sphere necessarily took on forms that differed from the development of other sorts of organizations. On the individual level, it encompassed the whole personality, whereas groups that focused on secular issues were interested in quite specific parts and capacities of the individual. In contrast, for example, to political parties, in which emphasis was placed on impersonal offices and roles, communities inculcated norms and helped to internalize religious traditions, making them become part of the individual's basic priorities.

Whereas some scholars of the construction of Catholic communities have focused on popular piety and religious mentalities (e.g., Marian piety and the cult of the sacred heart),[7] William David Bowman and Raymond Chien Sun approach the subject rather differently, grounding their analyses in social structures within urban settings. They also differ in various respects from one another. Bowman focuses on the clergy, the managers of the Catholic milieu, and Sun employs the Gramscian model of "cultural hegemony." They also choose different social and historical settings. Bowman looks at Vienna between the Josephine reforms around 1780 and about 1890, when Christian socialism became the leading political force politically among Austrian Catholics. Sun treats Catholic workers in Cologne between the 1880s and World War I.

The construction of a distinct Catholic community depended first and foremost on the Catholic clergy. There has been remarkably little research on this important topic. Members of other elite groups such as teachers, leaders of

working-class parties, physicians, professors, and Protestant ministers have received their fair share of attention, but the Catholic clergy have not. Bowman helps to rectify this deficit by providing valuable insights from different angles of vision—into the national and social origins of priests, their education, the patronage system, the ways in which priests fared economically, and the ways in which they organized religious life in their parishes. His findings underscore the failure of the Austrian church to come to terms with social change. The Viennese clergy did not receive appropriate training, coming instead under the strict supervision of the imperial bureaucracy. They came overwhelmingly from the lower middle-class, working-class, or peasant backgrounds, and they thus regarded the priesthood as a career that offered an opportunity for social advancement. Geographically, they came mostly from the German heartland of the Habsburg empire. Only after long years as curates or vice chaplains were they able to get their own parishes. The local patronage system ensured that no independent initiatives were taken at the parish level. As a result, the Austrian clergy was rather inflexible, finding it difficult to adapt to the new challenges that were posed by a rapidly changing social environment. They did not possess intellectual or pastoral answers to the social question—or for that matter, to the national question. Their basic slogan was a call for social harmony under a Christian monarchy. It therefore comes as no surprise that Austrian Catholics were good supporters of anti-Semitic Christian Socialism after 1890.[8]

Austria provides thereby one of the few examples of a situation in which the clergy was probably not the decisive factor in the persistence of Catholicism. Bowman points to state influence at every stage in the formation of the clergy, from the recruitment of clergymen to the assignment of clergymen to parishes. A Christian state that was ruled by a decidedly Catholic monarch left hardly any scope for the articulation of Catholic interests. Austrian Catholicism thus lacked central features of the "social milieu" that was so crucial for the flowering of social and political Catholics in Germany. It was marked by local piety and also some impulses in the direction of broader forms of organization, but there was no coherent network of Catholic associations and certainly no unity at the political level. The Catholic community in Austria was, in Durkheimian terms, characterized more by "mechanical solidarity" than by "organic solidarity" that was to be found among German Catholics, who manifested a multitude of secondary integration efforts.[9]

The persistence of a Catholic social milieu and the relatively high degree of political mobilization among German Catholics have been analyzed mainly at the local level. Case studies of social milieus in industrial and urban areas have increasingly considered the theme of competition for supporters among religiously based, liberal or socialist groups. In these settings, the easy reproduction of traditional loyalties has been especially problematic. How, historians have asked, could a decidedly antimodern Catholicism possibly rally Catholic workers who shared a class identity with their Catholic peers?

Raymond Sun poses this question in Gramscian terms, inquiring into the origins of the "cultural hegemony" of Catholicism over workers in Cologne. Designed in the first place to explain the success of fascism among workers in Italy, this concept has been remodeled for the purpose of explaining the success of ultramontane elements in the Catholic Church in their efforts to mobilize workers in Germany. To put it another way, in both cases emphasis falls on the predominance of culturally based rather than class-based issues. According to Gramsci, in Sun's formulation, the propagation of an "order in which a certain way of life and thought is dominant, in which one concept of reality is diffused throughout society" is the primary task of intellectuals (pp. 11ff.). In the case of Catholicism, this meant not only defining common interests and advocating certain ways of life and thought but also pushing for membership in Catholic associations, electoral support of the Center Party, and attendance at mass. The basic assumption of this approach is that as a result of this activity by intellectuals, cultural concerns could be elevated above social and economic ones. There was a mixture of coercion and consent, as a consequence of which Catholic workers were pointed away from socialism.

Although about one-third of all German workers were organized in Catholic associations for workers and later in the mostly Catholic Christian trade unions, the history of the Catholic workers' movement does not point to the predominance of culture in relation to class. As had been the case during the early stages of political Catholicism, the political mobilization of Catholic workers after 1890 was multidimensional. Just as the socialist milieu cannot be reduced to concerns with class, so too in the Catholic milieu the struggle to achieve cultural identity was intermixed with desires to gain political power and experience social improvement. It must also be pointed out that although they had academic training, priests did not really function as the "intellectuals" who are thought to be required by Gramscians to implement "cultural hegemony." What made the clergy so influential with regard to maintaining the cohesiveness of the Catholic social milieu was the priests' relatively high degree of independence. The combination of their humble backgrounds and their spiritual dedication enabled priests who were active among workers to be sociable and to appear to have risen above specific self-interests. The clergy could use its spiritual capital for the purpose of criticizing entrepreneurs without fear that it would thereby lose that capital. The complexity of the priests' dual role as men who were both sociable and untouchable becomes obscured when these members of the elite sector within the Catholic milieu are portrayed as agents of interests that were extrinsic to those of the workers, on whom they were seeking to impose alien values.[10]

Sun gives a convincing account of the organizational as well as the cultural formation of a distinct Catholic workers' movement. He shows how prominent figures such as Franz Hitze spelled out a comprehensive critique of the social and economic status quo. But Sun unnecessarily places his material within the framework of an ostensible effort to achieve "cultural hegemony" that would

appear to have been rather manipulative and conspiratorial. It is not really convincing to depict the mobilization of Catholic workers as a result of a combination of their "false consciousness" and their "half-conscious complicity in their own victimization" (p. 13).[11] As research into the history of the British working class has shown, religion cannot be reduced to antisocialism. It played not only a restraining but also an enabling role in the formation of the working class. To repeat, religion helped make it possible to unite workers in a religiously based workers' movement in no small measure because it helped to facilitate the articulation of social protest and resistance.[12]

The quite different trajectories of Catholic organizations in different parts of Central Europe had one thing in common: they all accommodated the religious principle of universalism to national settings. Although the situation was complicated in Belgium, the Catholic churches in the Netherlands, Germany, and Austria all sided with their national war efforts in 1914, trying to help meet the perceived needs of their respective societies. With national solidarity put to the test under violently dramatic circumstances, war did more than any of the mobilization efforts of the nineteenth century to integrate Catholicism into Central European societies politically. World War I was also a watershed for Catholic piety. Whereas the nineteenth century had seen a defensive, depressed, and highly antimodern piety,[13] Catholic devotion after 1919—at least in Germany—was much more triumphant and self-assertive. This change reflected the fact that a period of liberal hostility to Catholicism had come to an end with the decline of liberalism. Indeed, as corporatist ideologies gained ground during the postwar years, illiberal Catholicism was one of its main beneficiaries of devotion.

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NOTES

1. Helmut Kohl, "Die Politische Entwicklung in der Pfalz und das Wiedererstehen der Parteien nach 1945" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Heidelberg, 1958).

2. Margaret L. Anderson, "The Limits of Secularization: On the Problem of the Catholic Revival in 19th Century Germany," *Historical Journal* 38 (1995), 648.

3. Margaret L. Anderson, *Windthorst: A Political Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981); David Blackbourn, *Class, Religion, and Local Politics in Wilhelmine Germany: The Centre Party in Württemberg before 1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Knopf, 1994); Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Helmut Walser Smith, *German Nationalism and Religious Conflict: Culture, Ideology, and Politics, 1870-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

4. Wolfgang Schieder, "Kirche und Revolution: Sozialgeschichtliche Aspekte der Trierer Rockwallfahrt von 1844," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 14 (1974), 419-54. An English translation has appeared as "Church and Revolution: Aspects of the Trier Pilgrimage 1844," in Clive Emsley, ed., *Conflict and Stability* (London: Open University Press, 1979), 65-95.

5. See William Hagen, *Germans, Poles, and Jews: The Nationality Conflict in the Prussian East, 1772-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

6. See Thomas Nipperdey, *Religion im Umbruch: Deutschland 1870-1918* (Munich: Beck, 1988), 27ff.

7. See the pathbreaking account by Norbert Busch, *Katholische Frömmigkeit und Moderne: Zur Sozial-und Mentalitätsgeschichte des Herz-Jesu-Kultes in Deutschland zwischen Kulturkampf und Erstem Weltkrieg* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1997).

8. See John W. Boyer, "Religion and Political Development in Central Europe around 1900: A View from Vienna," *Austrian History Yearbook* 25 (1994), 13-57.

9. For a regional and comparative account, see Siegfried Weichlein, *Sozialmilieus und Politische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik: Lebenswelt, Vereinskultur, Politik in Hessen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996).

10. See Siegfried Weichlein, "Multifunktionäre und Parteieliten in Katholizismus und Sozialdemokratie zwischen Kaiserreich und Republik," in Dieter Dowe et al., eds., *Parteien im Wandel vom Kaiserreich zur Weimarer Republik: Rekrutierung—Qualifizierung—Karrieren* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999), 183-209.

11. Sun is quoting from T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review* 90 (1985), 573.

12. See Willfried Spohn, "Religion and Working Class Formation in Imperial Germany, 1871-1914," in Geoff Eley, ed., *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870-1930* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 163-88; and Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in 19th Century Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1984).

13. See Busch, *Katholische Frömmigkeit*.