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The Catholic Bishops Conferences of the United States and France

Engaging Immigration as a Public Issue

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The secularization paradigm in the social sciences led many scholars to presume that religious organizations no longer had a public role in society. The author argues that one pressing public issue today, immigration, has become a strategic site on which the Catholic church has reasserted its prophetic voice in society, in particular calling for more humane treatment of undocumented immigrants and greater intercultural dialogue. The author compares evidence from the Catholic Bishops Conferences in the United States and France to show how the Catholic church is defining its role as a public religion in modern democratic states.

Keywords: *immigration; religion; Catholic church; secularization*

Although the religious diversity among today's immigrants to Western countries has raised questions about how these religions will affect democracy, few have asked how well-established religious institutions in the West grapple with immigration as a public issue—in particular with regard to concerns about undocumented immigrants, refugees, and family reunification policies. Both in the past and the present, when social scientists have studied religion and immigration, they have most often focused on local congregations (Ebaugh & Chaftez, 2000; Fitzpatrick, 1996; Gordon, 1964; Herberg, 1955; Levitt, 1998; Menjívar, 2001, 2003; Thomas & Znaniecki, 1927). In this article, I explore how a supranational religious institution—the Catholic church—engages immigration in the public sphere in two countries—the United States and France—with similar immigration trends but very different perceptions of the role of religion in the public sphere. I argue that immigration, one of the most pressing contemporary social issues in many Western countries, has become a strategic issue on which the Catholic church asserts its prophetic voice in

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the modern public sphere. I also demonstrate how different national understandings of secularism shape the church's participation in the public sphere.

The evidence in this article comes from research I carried out as part of my doctoral dissertation in sociology from 2001 to 2003, in which I compared the role of the Catholic church in the adaptation of Haitian immigrants in Miami, Montreal, and Paris (Mooney, 2005). In this present work, I address only national-level Catholic organizations in the United States and France, in particular the Bishops Conferences. Comparing the National Catholic Bishops Conferences of France and the United States is theoretically compelling because although the Catholic church has a single set of teachings, how particular institutions and actors implement these teachings often varies across time and space. In this article, I draw on interviews with leaders of the National Catholic Bishops Conferences of France and the United States, leaders of Catholic Charities in the two countries, as well as written documents by these organizations to examine how the Catholic church engages immigration as a public issue. Although I do not have evidence to assess the direct policy impact of the church's public engagement with immigration, this article provides a deeper understanding of how the Catholic church has strengthened its national-level structures to respond to pressing social and political concerns and attempted to shape public discourse by exercising its prophetic voice.

Immigration in the Public Sphere

Despite the fact that newcomers to many Western countries may face similar hurdles in their assimilation, the comparative research on immigration focuses mostly on how states set immigration and refugee policy and grant citizenship to newcomers (Adelman, 1991; Brubaker, 1992). Social scientists who have studied immigration as a public issue have focused mostly on immigration and citizenship policies to the detriment of analyzing public discourse about immigration. Political theorist Jean Cohen (1999) defined the public sphere as that space in which both governmental and nongovernmental actors interact to define national values and policies, although many theorists leave religious organizations out of discussions about the public sphere. Immigration touches many spheres of public life and policy, and religious organizations such as the Catholic church have many immigrants among their members. Thus, immigration and immigrant assimilation become a strategic issue on which different actors try to promote their vision of the good society. Despite the fact that the two countries I examine—the United States and France—have long histories of successful immigrant assimilation, scholars and the press in each of these countries are asking whether today's immigrants from countries as diverse as Sri Lanka, Vietnam, Congo, and Haiti will assimilate as well as previous waves of immigrants.

Both the high levels of immigration and the many doubts about immigrant assimilation have given rise to greater research and public debates on immigrant assimilation. The United States and France have some of the highest levels of foreign-born

population in the West, and they both facilitate citizenship acquisition for immigrants and their descendants. Immigration to France peaked at the end of World War II, but in response to an economic downturn, France closed its borders to labor migrants in 1973. Nonetheless, new immigrants continue to arrive in France through family reunification provisions or seeking asylum (Weil, 1995). Thus, at the time of its most recent national census, 1999, France's foreign-born population had remained stable for the past 25 years at 7.4% (Borrel & Beoldieu, 2000). Like France, immigration to the United States also increased after World War II, but unlike France, in the 1990s, the United States had its highest levels of immigration since the beginning of the 20th century, with about 1 million new immigrants entering annually (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). In 2000, the Census Bureau counted that 1 of every 10 residents of the United States was foreign born (Malone, Baluja, Costanzo, & Davis, 2003).

Although providing the foreign born and their children access to citizenship should facilitate their assimilation, in both France and the United States, concerns about immigrants' lack of assimilation has generated public debate. Debates about immigrant assimilation and government policies toward immigrants focus on not only economic mobility or immigrants' impact on native workers but also acculturation—the adoption of the host society's culture. For example, in the United States, despite a common belief in the melting pot—the idea that immigrants mix with natives and produce a hybrid culture (Gordon, 1964; Herberg, 1955)—some have argued that newer immigrant groups, in particular Hispanics, do not want to assimilate, at least in terms of identity and culture (Huntington, 2004). In France, although Republicanism emphasizes equal rights for all before the state, Republican ideology encourages immigrants to adopt French culture and values (Lamont, 2000). Since the 1980s, French academics and politicians have been debating whether Muslim immigrants have, or even can, assimilate to French culture. Despite some calls for recognition of cultural differences, the French government has reasserted the Republican model of integration based on a unified national identity (Guiraudon, 1996; Long & l'Haute Conseil pour l'Intégration, 1993; Wihtol de Wenden, 1994). In addition, the French government has taken a strong hand in regulating promoting immigrants' cultural assimilation, such as by outlawing the Muslim head scarf in public schools because it purportedly violates the French principle of *laicité*, or secularism.

The Catholic Church and Immigration

Although Catholicism has historically been strongest in Europe, today, Catholicism is growing fastest in the developing world of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, the same regions of the world from which many new migrants to the West originate. As the largest religious institution in the world with 1 billion members, it is hardly surprising that the Catholic church is concerned about the movement of people to new lands, as many immigrants—both today and in the past—are Catholic. However,

France and the United States differ because France has been a Catholic country since the 4th century, whereas the United States was founded as a Protestant nation. Today, the majority of French are baptized Catholic, approximately 80%; but the levels of practice are lower than in the United States, where only 25% of the population is Catholic but is more likely to be practicing (Jones, 2002).

Much research on immigration and religion focuses on new religions, but few have studied the institutional responses of religious organizations to new immigrants and public debates about immigration policy and assimilation. In this article, I study one of the largest religious groups in the United States and the overwhelming majority religion in France—the Catholic church. Although the Catholic church has a universal set of teachings, the bishop of each diocese is responsible for developing internal policies and public initiatives to apply its teachings. Thus, how the church carries out its pastoral and spiritual programs will vary across national contexts.

One of the reasons for the relative scarcity of research on how religious organizations have responded to immigration could be the secularization paradigm. Secularization theory points to greater functional differentiation between religious institutions and the government and a decline in the prevalence of religious beliefs (Smith, 2003). Secularization theory, which has been a paradigm in much of social science research since the 1960s, led many scholars to assume that religious institutions had ceded their place in the public sphere. However, countries such as the United States and France display slightly different levels of the two common measures of secularization: (a) the differentiation of function between religious institutions and the government (in issues such as education as well as providing symbols for a common identity) and (b) a decline in individual religious beliefs and attendance (as measured by belief in God and regular attendance at religious functions). Despite their decline in prominence, religious institutions still exist in countries that can correctly be defined as more secular than 100 years ago; however, we should still ask how religious institutions engage the public sphere in modern secular states.

The degree to which secularization affects the public role of religious institutions will likely vary according to the degree of statism in particular a nation. In countries with a high level of statism, the state gains its legitimacy as a representative of civil society, not vice versa. In countries with a low degree of statism, national identity rests more on voluntary and private associations rather than state agencies. As a result, researchers have found that the higher the degree of statism, the lower the degree of voluntarism (Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001).

Among Western countries, the United States generally has a low degree of statism. Founded on principles of religious freedom and a liberal economy (in the classical meaning of limited government intervention), throughout its history, the United States has been characterized by a vibrant civil society composed of numerous and diverse voluntary associations, including religious groups (Tocqueville, 1838/1994). This contrasts with France where, as mentioned above, the state represents civil society, not vice versa. In fact, until 1901, voluntary associations were prohibited in France. Today,

the statist French Republican ideology discourages the formation of voluntary associations (Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001; Wihtol de Wenden, 1994).

Unlike many countries of Europe, the United States never had an official established church; thus, the functional differentiation of church and state in the United States has not followed the same course as in France. Until the French Revolution of 1789, the Catholic church provided most social services and Catholic religious identity was a basis for French national identity. During the more than 200 years since the Revolution, the French state has continuously expanded its role in social services and culture (Archambault, 2001; Esping-Andersen, 1990). In the United States, as the federal welfare state expanded starting in the 1960s, religious institutions became less directly responsible for providing a social safety net. However, to a greater extent than in France, in the United States, many religious institutions partner with the government to provide welfare and education. As we will see, the Catholic church's role in direct service provision to immigrants strengthens its prophetic voice when speaking on immigration policy and assimilation.

The Catholic Church and Secularization

Despite the reality of secularization, religious institutions have not remained inactive in the face of the march of modernization and secularization. Although initially the Catholic church was hesitant to accept certain aspects of modernism and secularism, during the 20th century, several church documents and councils, in particular Vatican II, sought to define the role of the church in the modern world (Casanova, 1994, 2001). One of the major documents produced by Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* (Pope Paul VI, 1964b), precisely addresses the place of the church in the modern world. Since Vatican II, following the church's declaration on religious freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae* (Pope Paul VI, 1964a), the church has promoted the doctrine of religious freedom—understood to mean that the state should neither coerce people into religious practice nor prevent it. In effect, the church's declaration on religious freedom meant that the church no longer sought to be an "established" church.

Although in many ways the church has accepted the differentiation of function between religious institutions and the state, giving up its large role in education and health in places such as France and Quebec, the church never abdicated its public voice in society. Rather, since Vatican II, church leaders have sought to reshape the church as a member of civil society, or what José Casanova (1994) has described as defining their role as a public religion in the modern world. Even in countries where religious practice has dropped precipitously since the 1960s, the Catholic church continues to exercise its prophetic role, calling out social injustices and informing the consciences of many leaders of welfare and service agencies (Archambault, 2001; Hervieu-Léger, 1996). Although in this article I cannot evaluate the effectiveness of the church's engagement in civil society, I demonstrate that immigration has been a key social issue on which the church seeks to claim a prophetic voice in society.

National Catholic Bishops Conferences

Although there are many ways we could study the church's public role related to immigration, I focus on the National Catholic Bishops Conferences of the United States and France because these conferences were formed in part to foster the church's public role in democratic states. In addition, as each bishop is responsible for implementing church teachings in his diocese, bishops have more authority than the heads of other national or international Catholic organizations that may work with immigrants, such as the Knights of Columbus or Caritas International. However, because many issues that affect one diocese are often common questions across dioceses, Catholic bishops in different parts of the world have long been meeting to discuss internal and public issues of common concern. Furthermore, the emergence of democratic, modern nation-states in the past 200 years has led to a greater formalization of bishops meetings into Bishops Conferences. In fact, in the United States, where in the 18th and much of the 19th century Catholicism was originally seen as secretive and undemocratic, meetings of bishops to deliberate were in part intended to demonstrate to a skeptical public that the church could function in a religiously pluralist society and democracy. Because it began as a minority church in the United States, the conciliar tradition among bishops has been stronger and arguably more effective than more traditional lands of Catholicism in Europe. In fact, in part because of the American bishops' success through their Bishops Conference, Vatican II vindicated the American conciliar tradition and held it up as a model for other national hierarchies of bishops (Dolan, 2005).

Despite the very different histories of the Catholic church in France and the United States, one similarity that emerges is that leaders of the National Catholic Bishops Conferences of both the United States and France affirm that immigration was one major issue that led to greater collaboration among bishops of the post–World War II era and remains a top social concern today. The bishops desired greater collaboration both because the arrival of new immigrants presented challenges to the church's own structures and because they desired a greater voice in influencing public policies that affect immigrants and refugees. As we see in more detail in the following sections, a review of documents published by each Bishops Conference reveals a similar concern for immigrants who may be the most vulnerable because they lack formal legal recognition—asylum seekers and the undocumented.

However, despite these similarities, varying traditions of secularism and statism have shaped different ways of engaging the public sphere. In the United States, Catholic agencies have a greater role in direct service provision to immigrants and refugees, which strengthens the Bishops Conferences' voice in the public sphere. Because of the French tradition of laicité and statism, Catholic agencies in France provide a relatively smaller portion of social services. The remainder of this article expands on the similarities and differences in how the American and French Bishops Conferences engage immigration issues in the public sphere.

Immigration and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Although the Catholic church does not directly exercise political power, my central argument is that to understand the public role of the church in the modern world, we have to look at how organizations such as Bishops Conferences attempt to exercise a prophetic role on pressing social issues of the day, such as immigration. Since the 18th century, Catholic bishops in the United States have been meeting to discuss both internal and public issues. In the 20th century, immigration has been one of the major issues that has shaped the Bishops Conference's organizational structure. According to leaders of the Bishops Conference, after World War II, the bishops decided that their efforts working with immigrants and refugees in their own dioceses could be better served by creating a central organization to support local church organizations and to lobby the government. Furthermore, in the 1960s, when the U.S. government was expanding its role in social services, the Bishops Conference also expanded its social outreach programs, in part by bringing what previously had been a separate organization run by Catholic laypeople—the United States Catholic Welfare Conference—under its wing.

The Bishops Conference's location in Washington, D.C., allows church leaders to interact regularly with federal agencies and lawmakers who regulate immigration. In addition, the Bishops Conference holds two annual meetings: The first is generally held in a large archdiocese such as Denver or St. Paul/Minneapolis, and the second is always held in Washington, D.C. Although cities such as Los Angeles or St. Louis may claim to have a much stronger Catholic history and culture than Washington, D.C., there is no doubt that the center of gravity of the Catholic church's political work is located in Washington, D.C. (Dolan, 2005).

To better coordinate its efforts on immigration, in the 1960s, the Bishops Conference established the national office of Migration and Refugee Services (MRS), which in turn has three divisions: (a) migration policy, (b) refugee resettlement, and (c) pastoral (spiritual) care. According to the MRS (1997) mission statement, it serves as a central coordinating body for the church's national and diocesan centers that work with immigrants. The MRS serves two purposes. First, the MRS has offices in dioceses throughout the country that support immigrant and refugee settlement, such as by helping them apply for legal status or social benefits. Local MRS offices administer government funds to help refugees find housing and support for the first few months after their arrival. The national MRS office serves as an intrachurch network for these local groups, providing advice and resources for specific challenges they face. Second, the national MRS staff, about 10 lay Catholics, uses the information it gains from these ground-level groups to inform the bishops' public statements on immigrant and refugee issues. Thus, the church's history as a social service provider to the poor and immigrants—which has not disappeared even as the federal government has increased its welfare spending—strengthens its lobbying voice in Washington. Although the

Bishops Conference is not the only organization in Washington that participates in the public sphere on questions of immigration, it is unique because of its extensive connections to grassroots organizations that resettle immigrants.

In preparing their public statements, the bishops consider both church teachings and the priorities and problems that emerge from their local communities. The content of the bishops' statements respond to issues bishops encounter in their administration of Catholic parishes, refugee resettlement programs, and social service centers such as Catholic Charities. The policy section of the MRS (1999) is particularly concerned with

- upholding family reunification laws;
- creating channels for legal immigration;
- targeted amnesty (legalization) of migrants already in the United States;
- refugee admissions and resettlement;
- social policy: education, social safety net, workers' protection;
- promoting measures to reduce the need for migration;
- encouraging the highly skilled to remain or return to their countries; and
- timely access to citizenship status for migrants.

The MRS's (2000) statement on the care of migrants, *Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity*, illustrates the church's concern for both immigration policy and how public discourse discusses immigration. This statement issued three "calls" to Catholics: a call to conversion; a call to communion; and a call to solidarity. The call to conversion is necessary because Catholics may sometimes forget their own immigrant heritage, treat newcomers with fear, or put up institutional obstacles to welcoming them in the church. The call to communion lays out the Catholic church's belief in the cultural pluralism of America and rejects nativism in American society and in the church. The call to solidarity emphasizes the church's role in advocating for justice, such as due process for immigrants, legalization opportunities, social services, and medical attention. The repetitive use of the word *call* demonstrates that the church considers itself to have a prophetic role in society by bringing attention to the needs of the marginalized.

The MRS's statements emphasize that responding to their call should produce concrete actions, both within church communities and by providing social services. Concretely, the MRS (1997) defines its mission as to

> increase pastoral awareness, cultural sensitivity, and the dynamics of outreach, welcome, and support throughout its network [for immigrants]. Inherent in its mission is to promote the development of mutual respect and incorporation of the gifts and talents offered by diverse cultures. (p. 2)

In this statement, the first step in reaching out to immigrants is increasing awareness of both their economic and their cultural needs. This awareness includes educating

people that cultural diversity should not be perceived as a threat but as a potential asset for the church and society as a whole.

Another way the bishops express a prophetic voice is by reminding the Catholic faithful that their duties as Christians may often go beyond their duties as citizens and that all members of society are ultimately responsible to an authority higher than the state. Furthermore, the bishops argue in these documents, even those members of society who are outside of the political state, such as undocumented immigrants, have certain rights as human beings. For example, one Bishops Conference statement that addresses undocumented migration states that even if the church does not encourage undocumented migration, nonetheless, regardless of an individual's legal status, all people have the right to pastoral care, education, and social services (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1988). In this statement, the Bishops Conference explicitly linked its ideas about human rights with its pastoral and social programs that support immigrants and refugees, thus, reminding members of the church and society at large that words should be met by actions.

Documents on migration published by the Bishops Conference often contain more explicit religious language, such as specific passages from the Old and New Testament, the church's social teachings, and writings of Pope John Paul II. Throughout the bishops' statements and MRS documents, one of the most common biblical passages quoted is Matthew 25:35: "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me." The bishops link this passage to their work on behalf of immigrants and refugees by reminding all Catholics that the Gospel calls them to welcome the stranger as if he or she was Christ himself (MRS, 1997).

In summary, although secularization has changed how religious institutions participate in society, religious institutions, in particular the Catholic church since Vatican II, have developed new forms of engaging civil society. The Bishops Conference statements can influence the public sphere either directly by influencing government officials and policies—which I have called the prophetic role—or indirectly by influencing the actions of Catholic faithful by shaping their conscience and their forms of engagement with society. In its statements on immigration, the Bishops Conference uses both sacred scripture, the church's own body of social teachings, and reason to argue for the human rights of all immigrants. Although the church does not directly determine or execute policy, it exercises a prophetic role by critiquing state action, calling on principles that emanate from concepts of human rights that exist prior to the state.

The France Episcopal Committee and Immigration

As the previous section shows, in the United States, where the majority of the Catholic population can trace its roots back to 19th- or 20th-century immigrants, both the structure and the concerns of the United States Conference of Catholic

Bishops respond to the needs of immigrants. Although in the United States, we could say that the history of a vibrant civil society in which religious institutions play a key role in the public sphere has facilitated the Catholic church's growth from a minority church to an accepted public voice, at first glance, the story appears to be reversed in France. The French Revolution of 1789 largely removed the Catholic church from its public role in education and health and instituted a centralized state that asserted a monopoly over public concerns. To this day, the ideology of French Republicanism, which emanated from the Revolution, emphasizes strong loyalty to the state without the mediation of particularistic identities, such as religious or ethnic groups (Lamont, 2000; Wihtol de Wenden, 1994).

Quite unlike the United States, where the Catholic church was clearly part of a vibrant voluntary sector, in France, all independent nonprofits, including religious nonprofits, were illegal until 1901 and foreigners were prevented from forming associations until 1981. In the United States, civil society organizations, including religious institutions, are seen as an important part of democracy because of their role of inspiring and shaping civic behavior, whereas the French state has a more secular and statist view of society that emphasizes unity based on a common culture that the government protects and promotes (Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). However, since the 1980s, the Republican model of immigrant assimilation, which emphasizes citizenship and cultural assimilation, has been severely challenged, leading the French government and public figures to question the meaning of secularization and to cooperate with civil society organizations (Body-Gendrot, 2000; Kastoryano, 2002). Thus, despite the fact that French and Americans have very different ways of thinking about how immigrants fit into society, immigrant assimilation represents one of the most pressing social concerns in both countries. In this hotly debated arena of public discourse, the Catholic church, which many thought had abdicated its public role in France, has reasserted its right to critique public policy and its desire to shape the conscience of private citizens with regard to the treatment of immigrants.

Similar to the United States, many Catholic organizations in France that work with immigrants were formed after World War II, when millions of refugees from the war and its ensuing economic destruction moved into France. Catholic Charities offices in France have an extensive grassroots network, covering the entire territory of France; however, unlike in the United States, Catholic Charities in France serves as an intermediary between individuals and the state. For example, Catholic Charities in France receives more than 1 million immigrant clients annually, most of whom are undocumented (Sécours Catholique, 2002). Because of their precarious legal status, these undocumented migrants—many of whom are not Catholic or Christian—prefer to approach the church rather than the state. Catholic Charities provides links to local Catholic parishes that can help support immigrants or asylum seekers for a short amount of time. For more sustained support, Catholic Charities helps immigrants find out for what types of government benefits they are eligible.

Similar to the United States, Catholic Charities works in close coordination with the bishops of France. In France, the equivalent of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the French Episcopal Committee, has different secretariats in charge of internal church affairs and social issues, one of which is called the National Service for the Pastoral Care of Migrants. Like the MRS in the United States, lay Catholic staff of the Pastoral Care of Migrants advises the more than 100 bishops of France on their charitable and public work with immigrants. Thus, the National Service for the Pastoral Care of Migrants, which is located in Paris along with all the Episcopal Committee's offices, serves as the center of numerous different Catholic services and networks in France that work with immigrants, such as Catholic Charities, dioceses, and local parishes.

In its written documents on immigration, the French Episcopal Committee has emphasized that welcoming immigrants includes not only providing for their material welfare but also generating a personal encounter that will create solidarity and community:

> We are all called to form a single humanity. To learn how to enter into true fraternity, Christians who come from different cultural horizons turn together toward the person of Christ. They let themselves be instructed by His life and his Word. In all his behavior, Jesus shows us that nothing can exempt us from encountering the other. (French Episcopal Committee on Migration, 1997, p. 56)

Using examples from the Bible, the French Episcopal Committee has pointed out the many times and ways that God calls us to welcome the stranger. For example, the books of Genesis and Exodus illustrate how Israel, the people of God, were forced to migrate multiple times in searching for the "promised land" (French Episcopal Committee on Migration, 1995, pp. 38-39).

Similar to the United States, these documents by the Catholic bishops of France also explicitly aim at influencing the collective conscience of all people in France, in particular in combating unfair immigration policies or social policies. Although the church does not directly determine policy, its writings aim at influencing the actions of citizens in the public realm. The Episcopal Committee emphasizes that immigration problems cannot be solved only by administrative or police functions, for which the state must be responsible. Immigration necessarily leads to encountering the stranger, which the church calls a "spiritual encounter" that reveals who God is and calls Christians to conversion (French Episcopal Committee on Migration, 1995). Christians are called to witness to society that it is possible to "*vivre ensemble*" (live together). The French Episcopal Committee has gone on to say that both church authorities and ordinary Christians should make public statements about the human rights of all migrants and asylum seekers, affirming that

> Christians, individually or in groups: associations, movements, parishes . . . cannot refuse to take a stand if people are being mistreated or abandoned to their own insufficient means.

> The Church has a mission to support them. This mission extends to all Christians. (French Episcopal Committee on Migration, 1997, p. 98)

Similar to the U.S. bishops, the French bishops clearly link their teachings on human rights to calls to action from the faithful, both in politics and in their own local neighborhood affairs.

Documents on immigration published by the French Episcopal Committee repeatedly encourage Christians to become active in associations in their neighborhood that work on the pressing issues related to immigration, including the undocumented, the second generation, and unemployment. According to Father Jean-François Berjonneau, S.J. (1997), the former head of the Catholic church's Office of Pastoral Care of Migrants in France, promoting this intercultural dialogue and civic engagement at the local level is the most critical role the Catholic church can play in immigration.

One element of the French Episcopal Conference's writings on immigration that is distinct compared to the American bishops is the amount of attention paid to overcoming "fears of the other." These fears include the fear of cultural and religious differences and the fear of unemployment or economic uncertainty. Although one might expect the Catholic church to be in "competition" with Islam, in fact, the Catholic church in France aims to be a leader in promoting interreligious dialogue and understanding, such as by lending significant material and organizational resources to Muslim immigrants (Galembert, 1995) and forming a Service for Relations With Islam to promote dialogue with Muslims. The church's declarations on the modern world and religious freedom, discussed above, allow the church to proclaim that Muslims also have a place in civil society and to call on its own faithful to build cross-cultural bridges.

Questions about the assimilation of immigrants—in particular Muslims—have given the church in France an opportunity to assert its views of the meaning of secularization. Drawing on the Vatican's declaration of religious freedom, the French Episcopal Committee on Migration (1995) has pointed out that although the church accepts laicité, understood as the differentiation of function between church and state, laicité "also obliges the state to guarantee the freedom of worship. This is equally valid for Islam. Muslims have the right to religious expression and to have places of worship that allow them to exercise this right" (p. 31). In this statement, the bishops have also called on the media not to "degrade the image of Islam . . . [but to] diffuse a more just, positive, and complete image of this religion in its multiple aspects" (French Episcopal Committee on Migration, 1995, p. 31). By promoting a public space for Islam in France, the Catholic church challenges the perception of many French that Islam is not compatible with democracy and seeks to broaden the public sphere of France to include different religious traditions.

These documents show clearly that the Catholic church is not only concerned about the immigration of Catholics or the impact of immigration on Catholic parishes. The Catholic church in France is using the issue of immigration—which

has generated divisive policies in France—to reassert its place as a witness in society and to call all people in France to live in communion, regardless of their mode of entry, legal status, or socioeconomic position. The Catholic church uses its biblical roots and revelation to develop ethics for treating migrants—both by individuals and by society—and presents these ethics to all of society, regardless of whether they accept the church's religious authority and even if they are Muslim. As the French sociologist of religion Danielle Hervieu-Léger (1996, p. 296) wrote, the Catholic church reasserts itself as "an expert in humanity"; in their writings, Catholic leaders argue that neither liberalism nor communism but only the Gospel provide total answers to today's societal questions. In the church's understanding of civil society and politics, the state has a clear responsibility for the political system, but the state does not define the meaning of *humanity*. In its statements on immigration, the French Episcopal Conference accepts the state as the primary party responsible for public good and social order, but the church reserves the right to critique state policies and political ideologies (Hervieu-Léger, 1996, pp. 249-250). Although the church in Europe was at first reluctant to accept democracy and saw its influence reduced by the modern democratic state, Vatican II has given the Catholic bishops guidelines for a new form of engaging the public sphere in democracies. Because the church is now outside of direct political power, in some ways, it is in a better position to exercise a prophetic voice than when the Catholic church in France was closely tied to the monarchy.

Conclusion

For countries of the West, immigration has caused major cultural and demographic changes in the past half century. In recent years, political debates about the assimilation of immigrants have reached the forefront of politics in both the United States and France. This article demonstrates that despite very different historical roles of the Catholic church in French and American society, the challenges of immigrant assimilation have led the church to engage immigration as a public issue. In both cases, the Bishops Conferences have created more centralized structures, including specific offices dedicated to the care of migrants. Documents published by the bishops and the committees responsible for monitoring migration issues call on all of society to welcome the most vulnerable migrants, in particular the undocumented, refugees, and asylum seekers. In both countries, the bishops encourage all members of society not to be afraid of cultural differences, although in France the bishops have paid greater attention specifically to Christian-Muslim relations. The greatest difference in the two cases is that because of a greater level of statism in France, the Catholic church is a greater service provider to immigrants in the United States than in France.

Studying how the Bishops Conferences of France and the United States have engaged immigration as a public issue demonstrates one way that in particular since Vatican II, the Catholic church has been seeking to reassert its role in the public sphere. Because many immigrants to France and the United States are Catholic and

many of the church's social programs, such as Catholic Charities, serve immigrants of all backgrounds, one of the priority social issues for both the French and United States Catholic Bishops Conferences has been immigration. In particular since the end of World War II, the Catholic bishops of France and the United States have increased their coordination on questions of immigration. This demonstrates that despite a common belief that the Catholic church's hierarchical structures result in rigidity, the church's structures can be one element that supports its engagement with the public sphere.

One common issue of public concern in the United States and France—the human rights of all immigrants regardless of their legal status—has been a central area where the church has asserted its prophetic role, proclaiming the human rights of all migrants and calling on Catholics and all people of good will to respect those rights. This prophetic voice, as expressed through statements of the Bishops Conferences, represents a new formulation of what arguably has been a central role of religion in society to proclaim injustices. Immigration has been one of the central issues on which the Catholic church in the United States and France has attempted to reassert its public voice in modern democratic states.

In the cases examined in this article, the Catholic church uses the Gospel and its own social teachings to develop guidelines about immigrant rights and immigrant integration. These teachings are not intended to remain at the level of discourse but should inspire a daily encounter among people. Thus, the bishops attempt to interpret church teachings and apply them to concrete social issues. Although bishops do not set public policy, they can influence public policy through their lobbying of political officials and by shaping the conscience of citizens. To a lesser extent in France than in the United States, the bishops can also influence the public sphere by directly providing social services.

Because much has already been written on how local-level religious organizations support immigrant assimilation, this article focuses on national-level Catholic organizations. Future research on religion and immigration could examine how national-level religious organizations actually affect the assimilation of particular groups of immigrants. Despite the church's formal discourse of welcoming immigrants and promoting intercultural dialogue, at the ground level, the extent to which bishops' statements affect local congregations remains to be seen.

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