Approaches to Engagement: American Catholicism in the Public Sphere

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Abstract

Using history and contemporary sociology, this paper seeks to understand the relationship of the Catholic Church and the public square in the present-day United States of America, critically examining the ways by which American Catholic bishops, public officials, and laypeople seek to influence national dialogue on prominent contemporary political and social issues. It employs sociologist of religion José Casanova’s thesis about the resurgence of religions into the public square as its cornerstone, complementing his theory with the work of other scholars, including Peter Berger and Charles Taylor, who offer their own visions of the Church’s relationship with society, as well as with the changing beliefs and practices of the American Catholic laity. The task of understanding the relationship of the American Church and the public square is a multifaceted consideration of how the Church defines itself both internally and in relation to the broader American milieu. Unlike national churches in Europe or the Americas, American Catholicism has always been a pluralistic, diverse agglomeration approaching unity not by episcopal fiat but by compromise and necessity, with the intention of protecting itself from the Protestant majority or more recently, the secular square; this paper traces this history to the present day, ultimately offering a vision for engagement that honors Catholicism’s theological integrity, diversity of membership, and relevance to modern American society.
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I: Introduction: The Conundrum of Catholicism and Modernity

To search for a unified Catholic position on any political, religious, or social issue in the modern era is to undertake an impossible project: to begin, does one consult the Catechism of the Catholic Church, the pastoral letters of one’s local bishop, or perhaps even the Vatican’s newly-created Twitter page? But what of the plethora of dissenting voices on every continent, from liberation theologians South America to state-sanctioned bishops in the People’s Republic of China, who claim to speak on behalf of the “true message” of the two thousand year-old religious tradition of the Roman Catholic Church? Global Catholicism is a diverse body known for its cacophony of voices addressing innumerable local, regional, and world issues, and as it were, the so-called universal Church is not the monolithic bloc that some might imagine it to be.

The Roman Catholic Church confronts challenges unique to each culture and nation that it inhabits on the globe, including for the purposes of this essay, the United States of America. As the home of the fourth-largest population of Catholics in the world, behind Brazil, Mexico, and the Philippines, the American Church faces challenges that are both similar to worldwide conundrums and many that are unique to its own context.\(^1\) A relatively young body by global comparison, the Catholic Church in the United States of America functions as a minority faith in a largely Protestant Christian country,\(^2\) even though it comprises the single largest religious denomination by membership. Its history in the United States is largely a tale of how it has conducted itself in relation to the (historically nativist) Protestant majority and to the constitutional “wall of separation” that divorces it from the secular state.

Using history and contemporary sociology, this paper seeks to understand the relationship of the Catholic Church and the public square in the present-day United States, critically examining the ways in which American Catholic bishops, public officials, and laypeople seek to
influence national dialogue on prominent political and social issues. It employs sociologist of religion José Casanova’s thesis about the resurgence of religions into the public square as its cornerstone, complementing his theory with the work of other scholars, including Peter Berger and Charles Taylor, who offer their own understandings of the Church’s engagement with broader Western culture, as well as with the changing opinions and practices of the American Catholic laity. The task of understanding the relationship of the American Church and the public square is a multifaceted consideration of how the Church defines itself both internally and in relation to the broader American milieu. Unlike national churches in Europe or the Americas, American Catholicism has always been a pluralistic, diverse agglomeration approaching unity not by episcopal fiat but by compromise and necessity, with the intention of protecting itself from the Protestant majority or more recently, the secular square.

At first a scattered collection of English, French, and Spanish Catholics during colonial times, the American Church changed profoundly with the immigrant waves of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These gave rise to ethno-religious ghettos of Irish, Italian, German, Polish, and other Catholic European groups, which eventually coalesced into a multiethnic Catholic confederacy in the early twentieth century. As these immigrants assimilated into the majority-Protestant culture, their children and grandchildren moved outside of their respective ethno-religious communities, fusing their Catholicism with American notions of denominationalism and freedom of religion, much to the chagrin of American and Vatican Church leadership.

The competing visions of American Catholicism’s engagement with the public sphere today are very similar to those of contemporary Protestant Christians, and in many cases, the divide in the modern day is not between Catholics and Protestants but rather between those from both groups – and other religions – who see either an expanded role for religion in the public
square or those who would prefer religion to be a more private, individual matter. In his 1994 book *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Casanova describes a similar movement in American evangelical Protestantism as in many corners of American Catholicism to influence public dialogue, a strain that this paper will describe with the example of the 2012 presidential campaign of Republican Senator Rick Santorum, a self-described “true conservative” and devout Catholic from the state of Pennsylvania.³ Of the many groups to rally around Senator Santorum are evangelical Christians, Tea Party members, and cultural conservatives who see an expanded role for religion in the public square. At the same time that he has built this constituency, Senator Santorum has lost the support of his fellow-Catholics, including frequent churchgoers in the Midwest and Rust Belt, who do not share his same convictions.⁴

However, Senator Santorum’s brand of Catholicism is not the only one to reach a level of prominence in national culture; many Roman Catholic public officials from the Democratic Party, such as former Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi, Vice President Joseph Biden, and New York Governor Mario Cuomo, have articulated competing viewpoints on the national stage. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) is itself an outspoken contributor on national issues, as are Catholic academics working the United States, such as Robert P. George of Princeton University, Daniel Groody of the University of Notre Dame, and Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. This paper will examine many of these scholars’ visions of American Catholicism and synthesize them into a model, similar to Casanova’s, that will aid in understanding the nature of American Catholicism’s engagement with the public sphere. It will conclude with a consideration of how effective these groups’ and individuals’ attempts have been and will outline a vision of future engagement for the Church
that would both honor the diversity of viewpoints among the faithful and hold true to central principles that speak to the heart of both Catholicism and the American republic.

In *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Casanova notes the renewal of worldwide religious activism with five specific examples: Catholicism in Brazil, Catholicism in Poland, Catholicism in Spain, Catholicism in the United States, and evangelical Protestantism in the United States. While his other four examples provide interesting contrasts with the American Catholic example, they are not central to the thesis of this paper and thus will not be discussed in depth. This paper will present three of Casanova’s principal arguments regarding American Catholicism and then offer a critique of each: first is his description of three distinct periods in American Catholic history, the republican, immigrant, and public religion phases; second is his expository commentary on what constitutes a public religion; and last is his focus on bishops’ authority as the main vehicle of American Catholic opinion in the public square. It concludes by claiming that while his is models are useful for understanding the historical and present context of American Catholicism, they ultimately fail to account for the diversity of the faith tradition and the dramatic decentralization of power that has occurred since the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council and during the postwar period. Heeding his call for further research into the opinions and practices of the laity, this paper will present sociological data from twenty-first century lay Catholics in order to provide a more holistic portrait of the diverse religion.

While Casanova does describe dissenting opinions from American Catholic leaders such as former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo⁵ as well as survey data from laymen,⁶ he does not synthesize these views into a portrait of modern American Catholicism that properly accounts for the diverse influence of public officials and the laity. Indeed, his conclusion at the end of the chapter on American Catholicism in *Public Religions in the Modern World* indirectly
calls for further consideration of these heterodox approaches to public engagement from political and social leaders, a call which this paper heeds. For example, since the publication of Casanova’s volume, New York Governor Mario Cuomo, a devout Catholic like his father, signed into law a bill legalizing same-sex marriage that he personally crafted and guided to passage in the state assembly. In doing so, he made arguments (similar to those of his father) separating his own private conscience from his public duty to serve all New Yorkers, effectively rebutting the American bishops’ warnings against passage of same-sex marriage laws. Such examples call for expansion and revision of Casanova’s theory, incorporating his own vision of pluralistic American Catholicism with the reality as it is being played out in the newsrooms, legislatures, pulpits, and living rooms of modern American Catholics.
II: Context: An Overview of American Catholic History

In *Public Religions in the Modern World* (and in a precursor essay entitled “Roman and Catholic and American”), Casanova traces the history of the Catholic Church in the United States through three stages of socio-historical evolution, with each stage reflecting the unique challenges the Church faced at that time in American history. By Casanova’s account, the American Church was (1) originally established as a minority religion in a Protestant-dominated society, where Catholicism was at first a matter of individual faith; it then (2) gained national prominence and internal organization as thousands of Irish, Italian, Polish, and other European Catholic immigrants arrived on American shores in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; and finally (3) found itself facing a host of challenges as a rapidly Americanizing religious tradition, reasserting itself into national political and social dialogue at the conclusion of the twentieth century. Interestingly, it seems that the first stage and the third stage of this historical trajectory most closely approximate one another, as both witnessed movements towards privatizing personal Catholic faith in a society found to be intolerant of devout religiosity in the public sphere, while the middle stage displayed a more segregationist approach to the faith, as bishops constructed Catholic ethno-religious ghettos throughout the North and Midwest and only entered into the public realm to defend their flocks. 8

The Republican Phase: 1607-1840

The first stage Casanova calls the “republican” phase of American Catholicism, a term that he borrows from colonial and revolution-era American lexicon. The story opens with the earliest French and Spanish explorers, who brought their faith to the interior of the continent with missionary orders such as Dominicans and Franciscans. As these Catholic nations populated...
areas such as the Southwest, the Great Lakes, the Mississippi River basin, Florida, and Louisiana, the Catholic tradition flourished, and even as the English (and later Americans) took control over parts of the same territory, the faith endured, even if political control frequently oscillated between various European powers. Rather than pursue national office on the basis of religious identity, however, these early American Catholics tended to downplay their affiliation, which at the time was viewed with extreme suspicion from the Protestant majority.9

Similarly, Catholics in the English colonies tended to keep their faith private, even in open societies such as Pennsylvania and Maryland. Maryland colony, founded by English Catholics as a bastion of religious tolerance in the New World, was never a Roman Catholic-majority settlement, and the Act of Toleration, a jewel of the colony, was routinely suspended or ignored. In this difficult environment, upper-class Catholics maintained very low-key religiosity, often drawing from experience back in England, itself quite hostile to the dreaded specter of “popery” and accusations of primitivism inherent to the Catholic faith. Gradually, bourgeois Catholic settlers began to intermarry with their Protestant compatriots, renouncing their faith in the process, but due to the taboo on the Catholic religion at the time, few Church leaders spoke out against this phenomenon.10

In the absence of strong episcopal authority, American Catholics in the republican period found themselves fighting for their own survival and self-governance, quite a remarkable challenge for a Church so intent on maintaining the primacy of Rome over its various worldwide flocks. Into this milieu stepped the firebrand bishop John England, an Irish import to the Catholic diocese of Charleston, South Carolina, who provided a quasi-post-modern take on the relationship of Catholicism to American society in an 1826 speech to Congress:

There is no conflict between the Catholic Church and America. I could not utter one syllable that would belie, however remotely, either the Church or the
Republic, and when I assert, as I now solemnly do, that the principles of the Church are in thorough harmony with the interests of the Republic, I know in the depths of my soul that I speak the truth.\textsuperscript{11}

Ireland appealed to the patriotism of American Catholics, intent on cultivating both civic pride and religious devotion in his diocese. It is not impossible to imagine contemporary politicians borrowing from his rhetoric, and indeed, John F. Kennedy in 1960 and Mitt Romney in 2008 both gave speeches that echoed Ireland’s, proclaiming their admiration for American democratic principles while also stressing the private importance of their religious convictions. The looming specter of the pope as the dictator of each devout Catholic’s public and private lives existed in the colonial period, just as it would for Catholics seeking national political office in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.\textsuperscript{12}

The Immigrant Phase: 1840-1945

According to Casanova, following the republican period of American Catholicism was the immigrant stage, a varied, much-debated period of both Catholic and United States history, colored by stories of ethno-religious ghettos across the Northeast, Midwest, and Great Lakes regions. At the heart of the sociological question was how a minority religion would conduct itself in an overwhelmingly Protestant country, which had been quite hostile to deviant faiths in the past. While the Bill of Rights and other founding documents guaranteed free exercise of religion, the reality in the nineteenth century was that Catholics were limited in their actual ability to worship openly because of the specter of American nativism, targeted at the time against Irish, Italian, and Eastern European immigrants.\textsuperscript{13}

Beginning with the potato famine in the 1840s, thousands of impoverished Irish began to arrive on the east coast of the United States, settling in cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. What they brought was a foreign faith, low socioeconomic status, rampant
illiteracy, large families, and a longstanding rivalry with the English, whose descendants formed the upper classes of American society at the time. Protestant Americans often viewed these new arrivals with skepticism and disdain, but rather than attempting to assimilate them into broader American society, they pursued both overt and underhanded discrimination against Irish Catholics in employment and education. One famous example of this phenomenon was an assault on a Catholic girls’ shelter outside of Boston, Massachusetts, when the father of Harriet Beecher Stowe, himself a prominent Protestant pastor, and his congregation mounted an attack on the compound, ostensibly to protect the young women allegedly trapped within its confines under the iron rule of “sex-starved” nuns. This and other affronts against followers of the Roman Catholic religion prompted bishops to fight back with political grit and social unrest.  

Archbishop John Hughes is the best example of the phenomenon of paternalistic, protective American Catholic officials of the time. His New York City see became ground zero for the culture wars of the nineteenth century, beginning with the construction of the now-iconic Saint Patrick’s Cathedral on lower Manhattan Island. Protestant civic leaders fought back against the initiative to move the Catholic cathedral from uptown into the business and retail district of Madison Avenue, considered by many to be the cradle of American prosperity and national culture. When it was completed, the press, including the New York Times, ridiculed Saint Patrick’s for being distasteful, ugly, and decidedly “un-American.” At first uncompleted and without its second steeple, the cathedral nevertheless came to represent the American Catholic struggle for recognition and even physical space in a hostile environment. It became a rallying cry for the tenement-dwellers of the city, who were impoverished, unemployed, and ripe to fight for greater economic opportunity and political representation.
Into this environment stepped Archbishop Hughes, who in response to a city official’s threat against his flock, threatened to turn New York City into “another Moscow” if anti-Catholic incitement spread into the heart of his diocese.\textsuperscript{16} Other cities, including Boston, Philadelphia, and Louisville (the seat of the second-oldest Catholic diocese in the country) had already seen their fair share of religious and race-based violence, and with the threat bearing down upon New York, Hughes flexed his political muscle. Alongside his colleagues in Boston, Philadelphia, and the industrial cities of the Northeast and Great Lakes, he began organizing Catholics into political machines, countering corrupt Protestant politicians of the Gilded Age with his own well-organized groups of loyal voters. He made an important issue out of education, a legacy that continues to the present day and has had a profound effect on the development of Catholic schools nationwide.\textsuperscript{17}

Among immigrant Catholics’ many concerns was the version of the Bible used in New York City public schools, which in accordance with the norms of the time, was the King James Version, a Protestant staple and product of the English royal court. Hughes and his allies demanded that Catholic schoolchildren be given the option to use the Church’s version, and when that prospect became less possible due to political pressures from the Protestant majority, the bishop responded by offering his own political ticket in municipal elections with the intention of changing the policy. While the candidates from the Catholic party failed, they did not do so with a whimper; the number of immigrant votes was substantial enough that city officials took notice and came to respect the diocese’s power and control over its large Catholic population. Having failed at imposing his will upon New York City’s public schools, Hughes turned his attention to operating his own parallel school system with the aim of providing a state-sanctioned
education in a Catholic environment. He succeeded, advocating that before parish churches be built, the “schoolhouse” ought to come “first.”

Hughes’ actions were not met with unanimous acclaim from Catholic leaders nationwide. Rather, they opened up a schism within the Church that reached the highest levels of the Vatican before the matter was settled. On one side, Hughes and his allies were advocating for the ghettoization of American Catholics, even arguing on the extreme end for separate courts for the faithful, on the grounds that nominally secular American trials were unsuitable for Catholic immigrant groups. He was countered by Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul, Minnesota, and his allies, who fought against the segregation of Catholic schoolchildren from their Protestant peers. In the view of the opposition, the youth of Church were not in danger of losing their faith in public courts, schools, and spaces, and to exclude them in such a way would be to do a great disservice on their behalf. Ultimately, the opposition failed, as the Vatican, at the behest of canny political maneuvering from the Hughes camp, rubber-stamped the “schoolhouse first, church second” model that had emerged in New York and other areas. Eager to bolster Catholic culture in the New World, the pope himself advocated for the Roman Catholic schoolhouse.

The Public Phase: 1945-present

If the immigrant phase was the golden age of Catholic bishops, then the beginning of the “public” phase of the American Church was the high water mark for parish organizations. During the preceding decades, from the 1840s until the Second World War, American bishops exerted enormous influence over their flocks as well as regional and municipal politics wherever they were to be found. During and immediately following World War II, the rapidly Americanizing laity came to demand more and different initiatives from their leaders; indeed,
this was the period of intense Catholic social movements, led by Dorothy Day, the National Catholic War Council, and early radio personalities who expressed their opinions free of bishops’ censorship.20

Perhaps most remarkable for broader American culture during this time was the prominence of well-respected Catholic figures in national print, radio, television, and film. As immigrant populations moved into the American mainstream, they came to demand that morality in the public sphere be regulated from above, including from their own bishops or at least those affiliated with Church leadership. The Motion Picture Association of America was founded and controlled in large part by Catholic laymen in conjunction with religious leaders from various Christian denominations, while Catholic priests appeared in movies such as The Bells of St. Mary’s as heroic, hyper-masculine figures who commanded respect for their steely asceticism and paternal morality. All parts of American society tuned in to watch telegenic American Catholic bishops preach a sort of American civil religion in weekly talk shows.21

During the same time, Catholics actively served in the armed forces and on behalf of other patriotic causes, including war councils and in fraternal organizations such as the Knights of Columbus, which stressed their commitment to the survival of democracy and the republic. On the left, Catholics led the drive to unionize and organize workers against the oligarchs of the era, with figures such as Dorothy Day and her Catholic Worker Movement leading nationwide debate on such issues. While not hegemonic in their influence on national culture, Catholics were nevertheless rapidly assimilating into the military, civic organizations, and labor market, offering a simultaneously religious and civic morality to their non-Catholic peers.22

After the Second World War, Catholics took part in the well-known social movements of the time, including the suburbanization of American society. As Christians became a more
homogeneous group within the United States, national culture came to accept Jews into the fold as well, leading to the iconic essay “Protestant, Catholic, and Jew” by Will Herberg, which outlined normalized American religious affiliations of the midcentury. President Dwight D. Eisenhower echoed the sentiment that Judeo-Christian values had been infused into the midcentury American milieu, declaring, “Our government has no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is.”

With the victory of John F. Kennedy in the 1960 presidential election, it seemed that the Roman religion had finally found its comfortable place in society: a strong presence in the private lives of Americans and a steady place to go on Sunday morning but an otherwise irrelevant part of one’s secular identity.

In many ways, John F. Kennedy and Bishop John England shared the same vision for the American Church: a Catholic could practice privately at home and in his or her parish but could then step into the public square as an American and not necessarily as a Catholic. In crafting his theory of the resurgence of religion in the public square, Casanova provides the Kennedy example as a vision of American Catholicism that most bishops rejected beginning in the 1970s, instead pushing back into the public consciousness over debates about sexual morality. Inspired by the Supreme Court case that legalized abortion, Roe vs. Wade, and by the Second Vatican Council’s policy of aggiornamento, or “bringing up to date,” which encouraged both private religious conscience and public religious witness, American bishops became more vocal on a number of issues, most notably contraception, abortion, and issues related to the family.

Since the 1994 publication of Public Religions in the Modern World, the Church has found itself confronting a host of new issues in the United States, most prominently the same-sex marriage debate, the struggle over stem cell research funding, and increased acceptance of euthanasia. As Casanova foresaw, the Church has continued to speak out in relation to these
public issues, and also as he predicted, the laity has by and large not gone along with their bishops’ leadership on these issues. The next chapters will examine these predictions made by Casanova and critically examine his concluding note regarding the American Catholic Church: “Only by retreating again to a private sectarian refuge and abandoning its claims to be a public religion in the modern world can the church escape the unintended consequences of having entered the modern public square.”24
III: Cornerstone: José Casanova: American Catholicism as a Public Religion

At the heart of Casanova’s theory of public religions in the modern world is what he calls the “deprivatization of religion,” a process that he traces back to the 1970s and 1980s as a movement by religious leaders around the globe to resist secular culture’s attempts to confine religious sentiment to the individual or private group setting. Since the publication of his theory, which began in segments in the late 1980s and culminated with his 1994 volume, he has conceded the Euro-centrism of his work but otherwise has not provided a follow-up study on the reactions of Catholic public officials and laymen to the aggressive attempts of their bishops to shape public debate.²⁵ This chapter accepts the basic premises of his theory by outlining its fundamentals and critiquing his decision to downplay non-episcopal voices in the Church, from the ethno-religious ghettos of Italian Harlem to twenty-first century American Catholic youth.

Defining a Public Religion

Casanova defines “the public square” as “three areas of the polity… the state, political society, and civil society” that the American Catholic Church attempts to influence.²⁶ According to Casanova, the first area is of little consequence in the American context because the First Amendment to the United States Constitution erects the so-called “wall of separation” between church and state, prohibiting the establishment of religion or attempts to curb the practice thereof.²⁷ Despite attempts to label the United States as a “Christian nation,” the country was not founded on explicitly Christian principles; to the contrary, the founders of the nation were mindful of the bloodshed that religious dissent could provoke in the populace. Forming the new nation a century after the Thirty Years’ War and the Peace of Westphalia, the founders crafted a document that sought at the same time to neither exalt nor suppress the practice of any religion.²⁸
Casanova’s scholarship on state-sponsored Catholicism can be traced to his preoccupation with the Church on a global scale; indeed, in *Public Religions in the Modern World*, four out of five “analytical examples” of his theory are regional varieties of Catholicism (the fifth being American evangelical Protestantism). Of his examples, Catholicism in Spain stands out as being the only so-called caesaropapist example, that is, manifesting the close or literal marriage of church and state authority. In that case, the excesses of the Church in Spain, particularly during the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, caused a strong anticlerical backlash during the Spanish Civil War and after the fall of the fascist regime. Casanova also critiques state-sponsored Catholicism in France during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, arguing from France and Spain’s examples that nations with state-backed churches tend to experience higher levels of anticlericalism and lower levels of religiosity.\(^{29}\)

By contrast, the United States, Poland, and Brazil, the three other case studies that Casanova provides, have never experienced periods of caesaropapism and thus can claim higher levels of religiosity among their contemporary citizenry. Observers of American religion, from Alexis de Tocqueville in the nineteenth century to Max Weber in the twentieth, have commented on the strong religious convictions of Americans, the latter writing of the “still impressively strong church-mindedness” among Yankees at the beginning of the twentieth century.\(^{30}\) To be sure, American Catholicism has never been a public religion in the “state polity” sense, instead asserting its power through involvement in political and civil society.

Casanova defines a church’s involvement in “political society” as the “[mobilization] of [its] institutional resources for political competition either through political parties, social movements, or lobbying agencies.”\(^{31}\) This particular brand of American Catholicism has been in existence since the immigrant phase of its history, beginning the mid-nineteenth century, when
Archbishop John Hughes of New York City began to exert paternalistic control over the recently-arrived masses of impoverished Irish immigrants. The Church, then, influenced politics even before the later formation of Catholic political machines and parties, which became forces to be reckoned with during the first few decades of the twentieth century.32

Casanova mentions the formation of Irish political parties in his various historical accounts of American Catholicism but omits the details of Italian political machines in the city in the 1930s and 1940s. In addition to these machines – which rallied behind left wing and populist politicians in New York – were colorful personalities such as Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, who was viewed as a beloved protector of the poor and disenfranchised families of Italian Harlem on upper Manhattan Island.33 Casanova is correct in identifying Democratic political machines as central to Catholic culture and political involvement during the “immigrant” phase of American Catholicism, but he neglects to trace the legacy of this history to the end of the twentieth century. While politicians such as Rick Santorum and Joe Biden may not campaign to Rust Belt Catholics with overtly religious rhetoric, they exude the same appeal as LaGuardia when they relate their own stories of humble Catholic upbringings.

Of course, the comparison between the right-wing social conservative populism of Santorum and the left-wing economic populism of Biden warrants a deeper study than can be offered in this paper. It is not in the purview of this thesis to examine the political differences between these two men’s philosophy and campaigns, but it is topical to note that they both started their careers as champions of working-class values in heavily Catholic areas of eastern Pennsylvania, a state whose style of populism often mirrors that of next door’s New York. Biden especially follows in LaGuardia’s rhetorical footsteps, and his inclusion on the 2008
Democratic ticket is widely believed to have been Barack Obama’s attempt to balance the ticket with a visible symbol of white, working class swing voters who are overwhelming Catholic. While American Catholicism has evolved past the era of political machines that stuffed the ballot box on behalf of Catholic political parties and Democratic tickets, it has not shed its unique brand of populism that is significantly different from that of the rural populists of the preceding century. Unlike the nativist Know-Nothings or the largely Protestant-backed movement to adopt the silver standard, Catholic populists searched for economic equality and social justice, themes not lost on the modern day Democratic Party and its Catholic politicians, including Biden and former Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. American Catholic historical scholarship would be remiss to not note this strain of Catholic involvement in the political culture of the United States, as this brand of populism has endured from the immigrant phase to the public phase. This chapter will later outline an example of a tight-knit Catholic immigrant society – in Peter Berger’s terms, a sacred canopy – that gave rise to populist paternalistic politicians who endure in national memory as emblematic of the period.

Catholic social movements also represent a crucial part of American Catholic history, and Casanova undersells the importance of figures such as Dorothy Day to pre-1970s “public Catholicism.” While the Church spurned left-wing social movements that Day and others pioneered in the mid-twentieth century, organizations such as the Catholic Workers’ Party developed outside of the official purview of the conference of bishops and represent another example of the public involvement of American Catholics before the culture wars. Casanova would be correct in arguing that this effort does not represent the Church itself engaging public discourse – these were, after all, dissenting parties – but it would fallacious to argue that Day and others do not count as Catholic attempts to influence public debate. Drawing from theology and
not pure Marxism or secular thought, these left-wing campaigners rivaled LaGuardia and other Catholic figures of the era by portraying themselves as Roman Catholic reformers.

As Casanova defines it, “political involvement” on the part of the Church consists of the two aforementioned categories, political parties and social movements, as well as lobbying groups, which are a particularly modern phenomenon. Out of the three, lobbyists are perhaps the most tied to the historical period defined as the “public phase,” and the enlargement of lobbyist-dominated K Street’s personnel and power in Washington, DC, is a modern example of this phenomenon. While the Church itself has no formal lobbying group apart from its existing ecclesiastical framework in the form of the Vatican embassy and the various prelates who occupy both the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and their various regional sees, conservative Catholicism has fused with conservative Protestantism in lobbying on behalf of causes that the global and domestic Catholic leadership have made their causes célèbres, including abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, and stem cell research. At the same time, leftist Catholic groups have fused with other liberal organizations to campaign on behalf of other causes, including opposition to capital punishment and support of protections for domestic abuse victims worldwide. In the next chapter, the division between conservative and liberal Catholics and Catholic groups will be examined in greater detail, but for the purposes of understanding Casanova’s definition of “public religions,” it is crucial to recognize how young formal Catholic lobbying is to the political class – and how diverse its alliances can be.

Disembedding of Sacred Canopies: Peter Berger and Italian Harlem

At the same time that Catholic social movement leaders were speaking out on behalf of issues that the bishops disapproved, other members of the Catholic laity in the mid-twentieth
In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were many immigrant Catholic groups in the United States that were resisting the authority of American bishops (a group dominated by Irish Catholics), including members of the Polish and Italian immigrant communities. These two groups are particularly well-known for resisting the diktats of their bishops, instead giving rise to public figures who fought on behalf of their representative ethno-religious causes. In his historical accounts of American Catholicism, Casanova undersells their importance, and in order to remedy this omission, this section describes one of the most famous and powerful of these ghettos, the community of Italians that populated a large section of the Harlem neighborhood in New York City. Its culture is notable for giving rise to populist politicians such as Fiorello LaGuardia, resisting the authority of American-born bishops, and exerting tight control over the religious and social lives of its members. The all-powerful matriarchs and patriarchs of its prominent families simultaneously frustrated episcopal authorities and alienated future generations of Italian Catholics who went on to form the multicultural nature of the contemporary Church.

Few immigrant Catholic groups stand out for their cultural and religious vibrancy as do the mezzogiorni, or southern Italians, who arrived in New York City in the last decades of the nineteenth and first few decades of the twentieth century. Importing their village, regional, and national customs from the Old World, these Catholics formed a tight-knit community in the East Harlem area of upper Manhattan Island, a place that became famous for the taste of its dark coffee, the smell of its pungent tomatoes, and the theatrical flare of family and tenement life in its streets. This section intends to explain the significance and power of the Italian domus, or highly unified and disciplined Italian family, in relation to the theory of Peter Berger’s “sacred canopy,” which accounts for the tight-knit, segregated nature of many immigrant European Catholic groups. As the twentieth century pressed on, the mezzogiorno culture began to fray,
fusing its values with the American mainstream, as its young people adopted the courting and cultural practices of mainstream American Catholicism and the reality of New York City life.\textsuperscript{38}

Berger’s theory is of particular interest due to the uprooted nature of immigrant popular religion in the context of Italian Harlem; that is, those who made their home in the community had the challenge of carrying their culture from Europe to North America while maintaining the integrity of its traditions and institutions. In Berger’s language, this meant ensuring that the internalization of the community’s values in its American-born youth continue in a setting far removed from its Mediterranean origins, where small, densely populated villages of generally homogenous populations had thrived for centuries.\textsuperscript{39} In Italy, each locality had its own deity and dialect, while in the United States, this homogenous mono-culture was no more: situated in a bustling, diverse metropolis, East Harlem’s Italians had to fight for their culture’s survival, a process that meant adapting and strengthening the domus and its associated gender roles to a more hostile – that is, increasingly secular – environment.

According to anthropologist of religion Daniel P. Orsi, the principal elements of Italian Harlem during the first decades of the twentieth century were the annual procession that honored its patroness, Virgin of 115th Street, and how important her symbolism was to the so-called domus to Italian-American culture. The domus, which lay at the center of mezzorgiono life is defined as “at once a building and a family, the unifying principle that linked man and his possessions… a formidable reservoir of power and counter-power which could hold out… against the external powers surrounding it.”\textsuperscript{40} Essentially, it consisted of both the physical home of the Italian family – often in an apartment or tenement house in East Harlem – as well as the numerous family members (and even allies or friends) who were submitted to its totalitarian power. Its self-sustaining model was supported and perpetrated by the mothers, fathers, sons,
and daughters who fell under its jurisdiction: no one could enter or exit the *domus* without a great deal of fanfare, and these exits often were the result of the deviant use of sexuality: for young women, a ruined reputation meant expulsion (or worse), whereas for young men, wanton sexual encounters and affairs with non-Italian women placed one at certain risk of particularly harsh opprobrium from one’s elders and neighbors.\(^{41}\)

The brand of Catholicism that one found in East Harlem was an import from the “old country” of southern Italy and not the rigidly governed, ecclesiastical body of Irish, German, or even Polish immigrant imagination. It was a way of life—a sacred canopy—rooted in family, traditions, and popular religious practices such as the feast, or *festa*, of the Madonna of 115th Street. Mass attendance was infrequent, Catholic schools were underfunded (as well as poorly attended), and anticlerical suspicion was rampant in the *mezzorgiono* community; however, baptisms, weddings, and funerals were central to its members because these events fell under the purview of the all-powerful *domus* and contributed to the importance of family life.\(^{42}\)

It is easy to see how the “*domus*-centered society” of Italian Harlem fits into the socio-religious model of the “sacred canopy” as described by Peter Berger; as a cultural system, the culture was peerless in providing structure, strict rules (*nomos*), and meaning to its adherents, as well as particularly apt for describing the rituals surrounding the Madonna of 115th Street, whose annual festivals functioned as a means by which to reinforce the internalized *nomos* of the *domus*-centered society. The Italian family was arranged in such a way as to give specific gender roles to each member of the extended clan, from the nominally powerful father to the iron-fisted mother to the spoiled sons and reticent daughters. In the celebrations in the days leading up to and following the feast day of the Madonna, young women were expected to decorate and prepare the sanctuary, altar, and festival adornments in their private church guilds,
reinforcing their domesticity and limiting their forays into the public sphere. By contrast, young men were given the task of readying the streets, ensuring that they were scrubbed clean for the festivalgoers, and of bearing the weight of the Madonna during the parade proper. Most importantly for the power structure of the domus, older women were charged with providing offerings from the family, including acts of penance, that older men had to perform. These husbands and sons were to be found following the Madonna, crawling on the pavement, performing penances and physically arduous tasks on behalf of the family.

The sacred canopy of Italian Harlem did not simply offer religion to its immigrant population; rather, meaning was immanent, woven into the very fabric of daily domestic life, governing the private and public lives of the men, women, and children who struggled to maintain the integrity of their southern Italian culture in the concrete jungle of northern Manhattan. Rebelling or rebuking the objective truths of the domus carried severe consequences for the guilty party, casting him or her into mainstream American culture with no family or community support. This punishment was intended to bring about anomie and served as a warning to the American-born youth who might attempt to exist outside the traditional culture.

Even though the domus-centered society of Italian Harlem eventually disintegrated as its youth stepped outside of the sacred canopy in search of economic and romantic opportunities, the memories of the all-powerful Italian mother and exaggerated patriarchy of the Italian father live on in the veneration of the Madonna of 115th street, whose shrine and annual feast day are still important events for New Yorkers and Italian Catholics across the United States (and the world). More important, though, is the negative reaction that many young Italians had to the iron rule of their mothers within the sacred canopy of Italian Harlem, which spurred them to reject the culture in favor of pursuing lives in the secular American milieu. This phenomenon was not
only found in *mezzorgiono* culture but rather was endemic among Catholic youth in the postwar period. Disaffected with the *nomos* of their parents, they moved into broader American culture and “privatized” their faith in the way that Casanova describes in *Public Religions in the Modern World*. The Church reasserted itself into the public sphere during the 1970s and 1980s in order to fight this process of “privatization,” but in response, contemporary Catholic youth have become disaffected in many of the same ways of their parents and grandparents, a phenomenon that will be discussed in the next chapter on diversity in modern American Catholicism.

Casanova’s work on the historical arc of the Church in the United States does not account for the intensely segregationist ghetto of Italian Harlem, whose push for separate homes and community rituals went beyond what Archbishop Hughes and others imagined for New York City Catholics. At times, Church officials such as Hughes were as much the enemy to Polish and Italian Catholics as prominent Italian boss politicians were central to the propagation of the *domus* and sacred canopy. In order to best understand how Catholics during the public phase of the faith rejected the tight control of bishops during the immigrant phase, one must contemplate the authoritarian control that ethno-religious ghettos exerted on the faithful. Once American Catholics moved into the suburbs and began to attend college and university, the values that made Catholicism a bishops’ Church ceded ground to secular ideas, especially among the Baby Boomer and Millennial generations of United States Catholics.44

Later chapters will explore how American Catholic youth, divorced from their ancestors’ sacred canopies, are redefining their faith in terms of Protestant and secular ideas rather than by the doctrines supported by their forebears. In addition to underselling the strength of non-Irish immigrant segregationist approaches to American Catholicism, Casanova also overlooks the importance of youth culture to contemporary Catholics, a crucial element to understanding not
only the current state of the Catholic Church but also its future as a denomination in a pluralistic American religious market.

Reliance on Bishops’ Authority

In his chapter on Catholicism in the United States in *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Casanova devotes a significant portion of his commentary to American bishops’ letters and public statements, accounting for the dissent of the laity only briefly at the end of the chapter. While one cannot expect him in the space of a single chapter to account for ecclesiastical dissent on the part of millions of American Catholics, it is notable that the thrust of his argument regarding Catholic involvement in the public square consists mainly of episcopal authority and only partially on the dissent of a handful of prominent Catholic politicians, including former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo. This decision shows the reader how Casanova understands Catholicism’s involvement in the public square: it is a central, concerted effort by the highest-ranking officials of the Church in the United States and not the devolved, democratic agglomeration of church officials, public figures, and the laity that it has become.

Casanova’s position is not without merit, as the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church, unlike many Protestant denominations, is not a democratically elected body, but rather governed by a hierarchy based in Rome and that understands its legitimacy as descended from two thousand years of church history stemming from Saint Peter. At the heart of this fact is another complication for understanding who speaks for Catholics in America: how much power does the Vatican exercise over church-state relations in the United States? Casanova, as an internationalist and scholar of religion as manifested throughout the Western world, places a
great deal of emphasis on the authority of Rome in the United States, especially as related to the
aggiornamiento of the Second Vatican Council.

The history of the relationship between the leadership in the Vatican and its episcopal
counterparts in the American Church is a fascinating study and one central to understanding the
nature of Roman Catholicism both in North America and on the worldwide scale. As the
relatively young immigrant church was developing in the late nineteenth century, a series of
controversies, later dubbed the “Americanist” debates, arose over the interaction of Catholicism
and the public sphere, which at the time was dominated by Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. In
an attempt to protect the integrity of Catholic beliefs from the Protestant majority, Archbishop
Hughes of New York advocated the creation of a public school system in the city that would
effectively segregate Catholic children from their Jewish and Protestant peers. This
phenomenon, first discussed in the preceding chapter on United States Catholic history, must be
examined in terms of the various power struggles that define the American Church, including
those between Rome, American bishops, and the laity of the immigrant period.

Largely run by Irish nuns and priests, these schools were not universally welcomed in all
Catholic communities – the mezzorgiono sacred canopy in Italian Harlem being a particularly
famous hotbed of truancy – but were very well-attended in the big cities of the Northeast and
Great Lakes regions, where most of Catholic immigrants took up residence. Some ethnic
groups, such as the Polish, later went to great lengths to segregate themselves even further from
even their fellow-Catholics, establishing a highly traditional Polish subculture within an already
insular, multiethnic American Catholic community. Within these schools – both Irish- and
Polish-run – Catholic youth were shielded from the heretical King James Bible used in
Protestant-run public institutions, instead learning from the official American Catholic Bible, at times in the native language of the community’s particular ethnic group.\textsuperscript{47}

As previously recounted, not all Catholics were willing to support this model, however. Among the most prominent of the detractors was Bishop John Ireland, who advocated a Catholic studies program that would supplement the instruction that Catholic children were receiving in the public schools. Essentially the precursor to the American interpretation of the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine movement (commonly known as CCD and created for the education of schoolchildren), the goal of these programs was to integrate Catholic youth into mainstream American culture while still maintaining their Catholic identity and beliefs. The Vatican, upon the urging of Archbishop John Hughes and others, ultimately rejected this plan, in a broad application of papal powers in what had otherwise been a largely self-governing American church.\textsuperscript{48} Archbishop Hughes, in connection with the Vatican, had essentially created a revolutionary new means of administering a national Catholic church, leading many voices in Rome to exalt the American model as preferable to the old caesaropapist regimes of Europe.

Beyond Vatican politics, the Americanist debate highlighted many of the issues dominating the relationship of Catholicism and the American public sphere at the time, challenges that Casanova describes in terms of American civil religion: (1) as a minority faith in a predominantly Protestant country, Catholicism functioned as a sect, but (2) given constitutional protections was able to thrive as a denomination in pluralistic religious marketplace while (3) maintaining its identity as a multiethnic but unified national church that (4) promoted intense allegiance to both American Catholicism and to the secular ideal of American citizenship.\textsuperscript{49} As Roman Catholicism in the late nineteenth century was closing itself off to the cultural forces of Protestant America by founding its own rival schools, hospitals, and care facilities, it was also
encouraging its members of all ethnic backgrounds to involve themselves in voting and other civic duties. In some places, such as New York City, this meant supporting the boss and his machine politics, but this was not always the case; indeed, the precursor to the modern United States Conference of Catholic Bishops began as a relief council during the First World War.50

Just as the sacred canopy of Italian Harlem began to fray in the mid-twentieth century, so did the bishops’ authority over laymen across the nation. While Catholic leaders such as the controversial Father Charles Coughlin and men’s groups such as the Knights of Columbus were vociferous in their support of patriotic efforts in World War II and immediately after, the Catholic laity began to pull away from the parish-centered model of American Catholicism that had dominated the so-called immigrant phase. As Casanova notes, the voices of American bishops began to lose the authority that they once had, as millions of Catholics moved from urban, ethnically bounded sacred canopies to the suburbs, adopting a lifestyle more analogous to their Americanized suburban neighbors than to the tight-knit, traditional communities of their parents and grandparents.

In Weberian terms, this was the devolution and democratization of Catholic social charisma into the hands of individual nuclear families across the country away from the pluralistic (but nationally unified) church that reigned during the immigrant phase. In this new environment, young Catholics began to attend college in greater numbers, enrolling not in Catholic universities like Fordham and Loyola but in state institutions and even elite colleges such as Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. Increasingly outside of the auspices of their parents, grandparents, and church leaders, Baby Boomer Catholics insisted upon greater autonomy in their own moral decision-making and personal choices, including family planning.51
Essentially, the period from the end of the Second World War until the 1970s and 1980s represented an effort on the part of lay Catholics to push away from the authority of their bishops, priests, and community churches, who, complicit with the national culture at the time, saw religion’s role as a matter of private faith rather than a public, political, or social identity. While this phenomenon was not ubiquitous – indeed, highly orthodox Polish Catholics even broke away to form their own national ethnic church – it was increasingly widespread and gained considerable momentum.\textsuperscript{52} The following chapter on Catholic diversity will discuss the democratization of the Church alongside the social movements of American Catholic laity, who have challenged their religion’s stance on hot-button political and social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage, before offering a synthesis of warring viewpoints within today’s American Catholic Church, epitomized in the church-state visions of Democrat John F. Kennedy and Republican Rick Santorum.

\textbf{Casanova Reconsidered}

The fundamentals of Casanova’s theory are strong, particularly his decision to connect the historical arc of American Catholicism from the eighteenth century to the twentieth, as it permits the reader to understand the nature of “public religion” in the context of American Catholic history, from colonial Annapolis to the sacred canopies of New York to post-Vatican II suburban Catholicism. In addition, his wide scholarship on church-state relations throughout the West is a boon to his approaches on American Catholicism, as it shows – especially in contrast with national churches in France and Spain – just how unique and even revolutionary the United States’ bishops approach to protecting and propagating the faith has been. While he is wise to
apply historical and international context to his scholarship, it is not without its weaknesses, particularly when applied to the decentralized, democratized American Church.

Casanova is very internationalist in his approaches to sketching out his “public religions” theory, but unlike the Church in other countries, the American Catholic Church has not completely capitulated to bishops’ authority in the latter part of the twentieth century. In addition, the debates currently raging within the Catholic Church over how to address broader American society are not new or revolutionary, as evidenced by the Americanist controversy. In contrast with Europe, the American Church has remained largely resilient in influencing public opinion during the “third phase” of public American Catholicism in post-war America. Church membership has held steady, and Americans remain largely respectful of religious authority and spokespeople in the public arena when compared to Europe.  

Casanova’s theory does hold more water on the legal (rather than social perceptions) side of the debate, as Roe vs. Wade, Griswold vs. Connecticut, Lawrence vs. Texas demonstrate with their victories for secular advocates before the Supreme Court. While none directly address the Catholic Church proper, all are related to the role of religion in public life. American courts are moving to increase secular protections and rights at the expense of religious voices, a move against which the Church strongly objects. While in Europe Pope Benedict XVI has criticized political leaders for leaving out references to Christianity in the European Constitution and the Lisbon Treaty, the Church has remained very respectful of the American Constitution, an effort exemplified by the civic initiatives that emerged during the public phase of United States Catholicism. Casanova’s theory works particularly well in the European context, where Benedict XVI has assumed the role of the champion of the faith in a secular continent; by contrast, as Time reported in a 2006 cover story covering Benedict’s visit to the United States,
the pope harbors great admiration for the United States’ model of religion and religiosity, encouraged by the strength of private devotion and the willingness on the part of Church authorities to interject when they feel the faith is under attack.55

While this paper does not seek to debunk Casanova’s theory, it does seek to enrich it by arguing that American Catholicism has not become a public religion by bishops’ fiat alone; rather, the entirety of the faithful, from archbishops to laymen, must be examined so as to appreciate the innumerable boundaries of religion and public life. Casanova calls for further study of divergent faith convictions and practices among the laity and predicts that so long as the Church continues to assert itself into public dialogue, it will have difficulties in uniting the laity behind episcopal authority. There is no one true identity for American Catholicism, and there never has been: as the ethno-religious sacred canopies began to dissolve in the mid-twentieth century, the balance of power – in Weberian terms, charisma – shifted away from the religio-political episcopal leaders to the hands of the broader laity. The next two chapters explore this phenomenon.
IV: Membership: A Changing and Diverse American Catholic Laity

Hot-button political issues such as same-sex marriage, euthanasia, stem cell research, and abortion have been fomenters of dissent within the American Catholic flock since the 1994 publication of Public Religions in the Modern World. The Catholic Church, led by the episcopal authority of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), has chosen to assert its spiritual leadership by arguing on behalf of political issues it views are crucial to protecting the integrity of the family and society both in the United States and around the world. The bishops’ argument, stemming from natural theology, Scriptural interpretation, and the history of the tradition, is that the family, with a married couple of one man and one woman at its head, is the fundamental building block and foundation of Western, American, and indeed any “Christian” society. Its views on marriage, reproduction, and what it deems “the culture of life” have become central to its public involvement. This chapter paints a portrait of American Catholic laity with sociologist Christian Smith’s work on American youths’ changing attitude toward religious practice; sociological data surveys that illustrate the opinions of lay Catholics on prominent national issues; liberal Notre Dame theologian Peter Groody’s work on social justice and immigration issues; and the resurgence of Catholic social conservatism during the 2012 Republican presidential nomination race.

Catholic Youth and Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

Sociologist Christian Smith has undertaken a series of groundbreaking research studies over the past decade to understand the changing religious landscape of young Americans, including both teenagers and emerging adults, whom he defines as ages 13-17 and 18-29, respectively. Though his emphasis is not on Roman Catholicism alone, his work offers a number
of crucial details about young Catholics, providing important clues about how in sync their opinions are with the policies and directives of the Church leadership. He charges that most young Catholics subscribe to what he calls Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), a feel-good civic religion pervading contemporary youth culture, and claims that many young Catholics are more liberal, disengaged, and uninterested in their faith than many of their religious peers in the United States, particularly when compared with evangelical Christian youth; by his measure, youth in mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions are experiencing unprecedented laxity in subscribing to their respective religions’ doctrines.\textsuperscript{57} In Berger’s terminology, this means the sacred canopy of ethno-religious Catholicism has devolved so radically that vast majorities of Catholic youth are rejecting not only the basic beliefs of their faith, but also its traditional practices, demanding separate youth masses and social opportunities that differ significantly from the traditional rites of their parents.

According to Smith, most teenagers in the United States subscribe to a nascent civil religion, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, which he describes in an enumerated list:

\begin{itemize}
  \item[(1)] A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth;
  \item[(2)] God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions;
  \item[(3)] the central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself;
  \item[(4)] God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem;
  \item[(5)] good people go to heaven when they die.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{itemize}

This emergent belief system, endemic in youth nationwide, is particularly acute among young American Catholics and mainline Protestants, the former of whom suffer from poorly organized youth groups, widespread lack of knowledge of religious doctrine, and a generally low enthusiasm for identifying themselves as Roman Catholics.\textsuperscript{59} Smith opines this spiritual movement to be insidious to both national civic morality was well as modern Christianity, a conclusion that could be easily be imagined as coming from American Catholic leaders.\textsuperscript{60} As
many conservative priests and bishops fight for pre-Vatican II Latin masses, young Catholics are demanding a cultural evolution both in the spirit of the mass and in parish youth culture in order to more closely approximate Protestant church-style worship services and youth groups.

The demand for youth masses and youth groups based on the Protestant model are proving to be significant challenges for many Catholic Churches, which are in many cases run by increasingly conservative and traditionalist pastors and bishops who frown upon the revivalist nature of the Protestant groups. Smith notes this tension, manifested at times by a local pastor’s desire for a male-only altar server staff, an action that calls to mind the pre-Vatican II era, contrasting it against more progressive youth who are inclined to support Young Life-style ministries and charismatic conventions, but in a Catholic context. This movement is clearly a cultural import from American Protestantism, which since the Second Great Awakening has made revivalist and charismatic ministries an integral part of its church practices.\(^{61}\)

In terms of the *domus* from Italian Harlem’s sacred canopy, Catholic youth’s rejection of the American Church, already a racially and ethnically ambiguous agglomeration, amounts to a complete disembedding of the religious and cultural forces that defined previous generations’ lives. Where Italian mothers in the first few decades of the twentieth century were terrified of their children dating and marrying outside of the tight-knit *mezzorgiono* community, modern Catholic youth are demanding not only the incorporation of Protestant church practices into their own parishes, but also the premises of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. This infusion of the public civil religion into the highly centralized Catholic model is causing a great deal of chagrin among more conservative members of the Church, particularly bishops, who see the very foundations of Catholic culture and belief being shaken by these movements.
In the interviews that Smith conducted with young Catholics, he discovered that their knowledge of basic Church doctrine to be poor; indeed, he notes similar ignorance among Protestant youth, both mainline and evangelical, in their poverty of knowledge regarding basic theological concepts. While Catholic youth of previous decades were sent to the schoolhouse by Archbishop Hughes’ orders at the same time that they entered the Church, young Catholics in the first decade of the twenty-first century are increasingly enrolled in secular public schools, leading to not only the closing of many Catholic schools but also to non-Catholic majorities in others, mostly in the inner city. Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (CCD) programs are, by Smith’s measure, ineffective in teaching the basic doctrines of Catholicism to its youth, the majority of which have not effectively continued Catholic youth education after the death of the mid-twentieth century’s schoolhouse-church model.

Another casualty of the era of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is the special status of American Catholicism as a national branch of a universal church, one set apart as different by its long history, traditions, and claims to be the universal faith. Instead of viewing Catholicism as the one, true, holy Church, many young Americans – including young Catholics – see it as one denomination among many in the pluralistic market of American religions. By the theory of American civil religion, this means that the Catholic Church has lost its sense of being a universal church, instead acquiescing to becoming one equal option among many others for religious devotion in the twenty-first century. While Church doctrine and officials still reject this viewpoint, it is nonetheless endemic among American Catholic youth from ages 13-29.

While one may argue that youth from any era attempt to rebel from the beliefs and practices from their parents, many scholars, from Smith to philosopher Charles Taylor, have noted the redefinition of youth culture from a deviant period of liminality to a celebrated period
of young Americans’ (and Westerners’) lives. In the sacred canopies of Italian Harlem or
Polish Chicago, young men and women were held to strict standards in courtship, religious
observance, and family involvement; by contrast, the many freedoms associated with youth are
now considered the entitlement of American teenagers. In this context, it is difficult to dismiss
modern youth movements as frivolous, especially when adults take them so seriously.

The Diverse Voices of American Catholicism

At the same time young Catholics have been demanding more Protestant-style services
and youth organizations, many theologians in the United States have translated the Church’s left-
wing political positions into a strong, nationally unified liberal Catholic movement. There are
now lay Catholic groups that support left-wing causes that the Church as long-championed,
including workers’ rights and opposition to the death penalty, as well as liberal social issues that
defy the Catholic Church’s global and national positions, including support for same-sex
marriage and abortion rights. It should be emphasized from the start that a Catholic can adopt
one or many of these positions without necessarily supporting the rest – for example, he or she
could conceivably be both pro-life and pro-marriage equality – but that the idea that all devoutly
religious Catholics must necessarily be right-wing is inherently fallacious and likely a product of
the prevailing American notion that “conservative” means “religious” and “liberal” means
“godless.” A later section contrasting John F. Kennedy and Rick Santorum will show just how
radically different Catholics’ beliefs can be during the same the “public” period of American
Catholicism.

American Catholic leadership is odds with the views of the laity on many issues, but one
contemporary hot-button issue on which the two groups differ radically is same-sex marriage. In
a 2011 Pew research survey, 43% of self-described American Catholics expressed support for the rights of same-sex couples to access civil marriage; when the language was adjusted to include both civil marriage and civil unions, support jumped to 74%. At the same time, Catholic bishops were decrying efforts to legalize such unions – whether civil marriage, civil union, or domestic partnership – as antithetical to health of society and the family.

Of the eight states (and Washington, DC) that have approved same-sex marriage as of March 2012, five of them have done so under the leadership of a Roman Catholic governor. The idea that Catholic public servants would break from their Church’s official teachings is not revolutionary in the United States – John F. Kennedy’s 1960 speech to Protestant ministers in Houston made clear that he had no qualms about doing so – but the rate at which Catholic governors, senators, and congressmen have embraced political efforts that directly challenge their faith’s leaders on hot-button political issues, both liberal and conservative, has increased considerably. Public officials’ rejection of religious teaching in the public sphere is not confined to one party; at the same time that Democrats Mario Cuomo, Nancy Pelosi, and Joe Biden have embraced marriage equality for same-sex couples, Roman Catholic Republicans such as Rick Santorum and John Boehner have expressed full support for the death penalty and harsh crackdowns on undocumented immigrants.

While the Church has been vociferous in its support of the rights of the vulnerable, including illegal immigrants, it has taken a particularly strong and public stand against the advancement of same-sex marriage and adoption. Catholic Charities has ceased to operate its adoption services in Massachusetts and Washington, DC, where same-sex marriage is legal, as well as in Illinois, where civil unions were recently signed into law (by a Catholic Democratic governor). These conflicts over religion and politics have led many states that seek to approve
same-sex marriage to include provisions in their laws that protect religious organizations, including schools, hospitals, churches, and even wedding planners, from having a conflict of conscience over whether to serve same-sex couples. Yet as the contraception debate of 2011-2012 has indicated, churches still feel as though they are under attack by the state (and by their rhetoric, the forces of secularism) in matters regarding family, reproduction, and sexuality.

Not all Catholics feel that there is a necessary dichotomy between supporting same-sex civil rights and being a person of faith; indeed, the existence of Dignity USA, a Catholic group that supports same-sex relationships as acceptable within Christian doctrine, has grown in membership since its founding in 1969. In many ways, Dignity USA is similar to other advocacy groups that dissent from official Church teaching – many others support the right to women’s ordination, abortion, and a complete return to the Latin mass – and falls under the long history of the Catholic Church embracing and even institutionalizing dissent within its ranks. Even in parishes where such dissenting organizations do not exist de jure, there are de facto churches that serve majority-gay populations, including Most Holy Redeemer parish in San Francisco, California, whose pastor Father Tom Hayes walked a fine line in the 1990s between blessing gay unions and expressing support for the relationships of his parishioners. Hayes considered it a duty of his vocation to minister to his homosexual parishioners afflicted with HIV/AIDS, meeting with their partners and giving last rites to the dying. While the Catechism of Catholic Church supports the compassion that Father Hayes has expressed for his flock, it does not condone the relationships that he has spoken of in favorable terms; the Church’s official policy is to recognize the existence of homosexual tendencies but to call those who experience them to the practice of celibacy.
The issue over same-sex relationships is not confined to the political issue of civil marriage or to the ministry of those afflicted with HIV/AIDS; it also extends to the center of the Catholic tradition, the mystery of the Eucharist. By Catholic doctrine, one cannot receive the Eucharist under a state of sin, which includes the practice of same-sex physical intimacy. In February 2012, this issue rose to the forefront of national news, when a priest in a Maryland suburb of Washington, DC, denied communion to a Catholic lesbian at her mother’s funeral because he discovered the facts of the woman’s relationship shortly before the mass began. While the priest was acting within the bounds of the Church, outcry from the public caused the Diocese of Washington to place the Moscow, Russia, based priest on administrative leave in order to decide how to manage the situation. The incident represents another complex interaction of religion and public sphere in which supporters of both sides align themselves according to their convictions, prompting outcry and conflict within the Church.

The issue of denying communion to Catholics with heterodox beliefs has reached the level of public consciousness was increasing frequency, perhaps most prominently in 2004 when the conservative bishop of Lincoln, Nebraska, an American diocese known for being particularly strong in its orthodoxy, suggested denying communion to Catholic politicians who supported access to abortion, including then-Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry. As in Maryland, Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz’s words provoked strong reactions among Catholics and non-Catholics alike, causing many to once again refer to John Kennedy’s 1960 speech that advocated a complete separation of religious conviction and public policy. In the following chapter, that address will be discussed at length, as well as modern reactions to the issue.

In addition to the issue of acceptance for same-sex couples within the Catholic Church, other prominent divisions exist between ecclesiastical authority and the laity on abortion, the
death penalty, and immigration. The same 2011 Pew research survey that registered high support within the Catholic laity for same-sex civil marriage also showed majority support for a woman’s access to a legal abortion, as well as a complex pattern of support for economic equality and immigration rights. With 47% of Catholics nationwide indicating their party affiliation as Democratic and 33% as Republican, one might expect the Roman Catholic electorate to lean left, but this is not the case on every issue. Just as the Church does not neatly fit into one category or another, neither does the laity: the 1986 American episcopal letter Economic Justice for All is generally more appealing to Democrats than Republicans, as was the Church’s registered opposition to the 2003 Iraq War. The right has recently elevated the debate over federally mandated contraception funding as cause célèbre on behalf of religious liberty but discards official Catholic condemnation of Arizona State Bill 1070 just as easily. It is therefore wisest to refrain from assigning the American Catholic Church a political label, as its positions, while consistent with its own theology, are not in lockstep with any particular modern political party or movement. While bishops have won kudos from the right for their outspoken opposition to New York State’s legalization of same-sex marriage and the Affordable Care and Patient Prevention Act’s contraception mandate, they are shunned when speaking on behalf of many economic and civil justice issues.

While Archbishop Dolan has become a darling of the right, the political left has adopted other Catholic voices for their own causes, whether by their own volition or not. Catholic theologian Daniel Groody of the University of Notre Dame, an institution known in the public consciousness for its contentious relationship with the Obama administration on abortion, has become an outspoken critic of human rights violations as they relate to immigration issues in the United States. In his essay Una Teología de la Frontera, Groody argues for the application of
the Catholic principles about a culture of life to be integrated into American policy towards Latin American migrants, arguing that Catholic teaching supports the protection of the most vulnerable in society. His support for a more active state and larger social safety net is directly targeted at public policy, and his work has won him recognition from churchmen nationwide.  

Groody’s arguments fit within Casanova’s vision of a more aggressive public Catholicism on a worldwide scale, a vision Casanova outlines in his own essay entitled “Human Rights, Globalization, and the Catholic Church.” Casanova sees Catholic teaching influencing the shaping of human rights arguments worldwide from the point of view of the culture of life and lobbying on behalf of the weakest and most vulnerable in society. In the American context, the immigration issue is the Church’s foremost social justice issue, and Groody’s work contributes an American-born Caucasian Catholic’s voice to this debate.

Diversity and the Future of the Church

As Smith’s work on the Catholic youth of the United States shows, future of the American Catholic Church will undoubtedly be influenced by the divergent views of its youngest members, especially regarding the nature of worship and the laity’s unwillingness to support many of the leadership’s positions. As more young Catholics delay marriage, extend their young adulthood, and adopt the attitudes of secular culture toward prominent political and religious issues of the day, American bishops will have to reconcile their own positions with those of their flock. The Catholic Church in the United States has enjoyed the support of its laity through periods of contention before, as during the Americanist controversy, but if it still hopes to maintain high levels of mass attendance and parish involvement, then it will have to evolve to meet the needs of its increasingly secular American laity – or risk alienating them completely.
The Church’s embrace of political issues across the left-right spectrum shows that it can still maintain strong membership among the political and ruling classes of the country, even when prominent individuals disagree with the Church’s teachings. Much like the debate over youth involvement in the faith, American Catholicism will have to decide its own course over subsequent decades as to whether it continues to speak on behalf of issues it supports while tolerating dissent within its ranks – or whether it decides to exorcise those voices which do not tow the official line. The final two chapters examine these conflicts on a national scale and offer a vision for engagement that attempts to account for Roman authority, national episcopal sovereignty, and the reality that an increasing amount of power has been devolved to the laity.
V: Conflict: John F. Kennedy and Rick Santorum

American Catholicism and National Politics

In the two-hundred twenty-three year history of the Constitution of the United States of America, only three Roman Catholics have won the nomination of a major political party to the presidency: Democrats Al Smith in 1928, John F. Kennedy in 1960, and John Kerry in 2004. Of these, only Kennedy eventually won the presidency, but all three had to address the public’s perception of their Roman Catholicism during their campaigns. Smith faced a considerably more hostile electorate than did Kennedy or Kerry, and widespread nativism is often considered one of the factors that led to his loss to Republican Herbert Hoover. He was ultimately forced to publicly address his Catholicism but refused to do so with a speech or statement intended to put the issue to rest at once and for all. That task would fall to Kennedy over thirty years later as he faced persistent charges of being susceptible to the puppetry of the Vatican while president. 75

To address the notion that he could not make independent judgments about governing without the approval of the Vatican and to assure voters that his political convictions were truly his own, Kennedy decided to address Protestant ministers in Houston, Texas, in September of 1960, delivering a speech that advocated for the separation of public service and personal belief, responding to the ministers’ concerns about the intersection of the Catholic Church and the American state. Echoing the words of Bishop John England two hundred years prior, Kennedy stated that he would serve the nation not as an agent of the Vatican but rather as an American citizen, calling upon his service as a senator from Massachusetts as an example of how he had served in public life without bowing to (nonexistent) diktats from Rome. Saying that his faith had shaped his upbringing, his character, and his conscience, Kennedy nevertheless rejected the
notion that his faith would inspire policy decisions, stating flatly, “My Catholic faith will not inspire my decisions in the White House.”76

Considered a turning point in the campaign and a model for future presidential candidates’ addresses, including Mitt Romney’s speech on his Mormonism during the 2008 Republican presidential primary, Kennedy’s speech was well-received and in many ways epitomized the pervading spirit of American Catholicism at the time: divorced from the ethno-religious ghettos of the immigrant phase of the Church, Catholics in the United States were pushing for integration into broader American culture, maintaining their religious affiliation with attendance at Sunday mass and involvement in parish life but otherwise trending towards sending their children to public schools and universities and by insisting on involvement in their communities as generic people of faith, not specifically as Catholics. As noted previously, this movement was not ubiquitous, but its inertia had certainly begun.

Kennedy’s victory in November and subsequent two and a half years as president were considered symbolic not only of the new wave of American Catholicism but also as a rebirth of the American spirit in general; the fact that a young Roman Catholic who was educated at Harvard and raised in Boston’s high society was able to embody this movement cannot be discounted, for such an advancement would certainly not have been possible during the republican or immigrant phases of American Catholicism. At the same time, during the 1960s and 1970s, American bishops and religious personnel continued their involvement in the public sphere, just like their predecessors had done with the New Deal and wartime patriotic causes, but with a particular focus on social justice issues such as the civil rights movement, and ultimately, the sexual revolution.
During the latter half of the 1970s, however, following the Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision that struck down abortion bans in all fifty states, the American Church began an aggressive new campaign to reassert itself into public life. At the same time, lay Catholics supported the action, and as American culture changed, so did American Catholics’ opinions, divorcing the laity from their parents’ more conservative convictions regarding marriage, children, and sexuality. Inspired in part by a negative reaction to the 1968 papal encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, the laity in the West, including the United States, began to outright violate official church teachings so that forty years after its publication, fully 98% of Catholic women were using contraception in their marriage, in complete violation of the Church’s earlier mandate. The general trend of the laity during the Kennedy era was to keep one’s own religious convictions private and to openly question the need for the Church to speak out in the public square, a conflict that became gradually more pronounced into the twenty-first century.

As Casanova’s work has shown, Church leadership began to push back at the “privatization of faith” during the 1970s and 1980s, inspiring many lay Catholics to join the chorus as well, both in support and opposition. In the contemporary context, both Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York City and Republican Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania have voiced their disapproval of Kennedy’s position, the latter engaging in particularly strong rhetoric, saying that listening to the president’s 1960 speech made him want to “throw up.” Indeed, Santorum previously described English Saint Thomas More as a role model for public service, citing his martyrdom under the reign of Henry VIII as a courageous mode of Catholic service.

Santorum’s words have not amounted to a call to arms for American Catholics; by contrast, they have been shown to alienate much of the Catholic electorate, which is as diverse politically as the broader American one. During the 2012 Republican primary campaign,
Santorum has repeatedly lost the Catholic vote in historical strongholds in the Great Lakes and the Midwest,\textsuperscript{81} ceding those voters to Mitt Romney, whose own rhetoric about his Mormon faith closely matches that of Kennedy’s speech.\textsuperscript{82} Rather, Santorum has appealed to voters of all religious backgrounds who supported an expanded role for religion in the public sphere, in particular self-identified evangelical Christians, who have backed him over similarly minded Protestant candidates such as Michelle Bachman and Rick Perry.

Senator Santorum’s rhetoric and record of support indicate that his positions on the relationship of religion and the public square find greatest resonance with social conservatives, broadly defined, and not with Roman Catholics in particular. This social phenomenon reveals the diverse nature of the Catholic laity as well as the support of American bishops. In a March 2012 interview published in the \textit{Wall Street Journal}, Archbishop Dolan defended his right to speak out on behalf of the Church’s policies in the public square. Supporting similar sentiments as those of Santorum, Dolan called Kennedy’s 1960 speech “worrisome,” and appealed to the uniqueness of the Catholic Church vis-a-vis other faiths in the United States, saying, “a severe cleavage between one’s moral convictions and the judgments one is called upon to make… It’s bothersome to us as Catholics, because that’s the kind of apologia that we expect of no other religion.”\textsuperscript{83} This appeal to set Roman Catholicism apart from other religions in the American marketplace would have been most at home in the immigrant phase of the American Church, when protection of Catholic culture and belief in the sacred canopies of ethno-religious ghettos trumped the private faith that Bishop Ireland and President Kennedy both espoused; at the same time, the idea that Archbishop Dolan is able to influence domestic policy is a notion that belongs firmly in the “public” phase of American Catholicism.
Kennedy, Santorum, and “Public Apologia”

While Catholic bishops represent the official voice of the Church on both a global and domestic scale, they are not the only means by which Catholic opinions reach the public consciousness. It is worth noting that American bishops do not necessarily have to assume a reactionary theological stance in order to protect Catholic doctrine; indeed, the revolutionary positions of Father John Courtney Murray, S.J., a prominent American theologian of the mid-twentieth century, and the Second Vatican Council reserve the right to a person’s individual conscience in selecting his or her religious affiliation, an idea that has translated successfully into modern American Catholicism. Father Murray nonetheless decried so-called cafeteria Catholicism that picks and chooses which parts of the faith to support and which parts to reject. He also was a vociferous advocate of the right of religious officials to speak their minds in the public sphere, ahead of Casanova’s public religions theory by over twenty years, reaching such prominence that Time declared him the “most consequential Catholic intellectual of the era” in a 1960 cover story. The concept of American bishops, priests, and laymen entering into the public sphere is a longstanding tradition in the United States, but the so-called “pelvic politics” of issues such as same-sex marriage, contraception, and abortion has brought this debate to the forefront of modern American consciousness.

There is little end in sight to the intra-Catholic culture wars, which closely mirror those of the broader American electorate. For every conservative Catholic like Rick Santorum who aggressively asserts his brand of Christianity into the public sphere, there is a politician like Democrat John Kerry or Republican John Boehner who cautions against an aggressive injection of Catholicism into the public policy debates of American governance. The final chapter of this paper examines these various currents through the lens of Catholic philosopher Charles Taylor’s
vision of a “Catholic modernity” and offers approaches to engagement for the cacophonous chorus of American Catholic voices that seek to shape the nature and direction of the faith in the United States over the subsequent decades.
In a 1996 lecture at the University of Dayton, a Catholic university in southwestern Ohio, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor, a devout Catholic, presented his vision of a “Catholic modernity,” offering a vision of how to reconcile Roman Catholicism, modern culture, and the pluralistic religious marketplace. In the lecture, now widely distributed in an essay format with printed responses from other notable Catholic intellectuals and scholars, he distinguishes between the notion of “modern Catholicism,” a loathsome (by his view) arrangement that acquiesces to Western culture’s demands for a reformed theology, and a “Catholic modernity,” in which the Church can offer its theocentric doctrines to individuals who inhabit the secular culture of Western Europe, Canada, and the United States. According to Taylor, the West is preoccupied with individual “human flourishing” and freedom of choice; based upon these demands, the Roman Catholic Church, with its long tradition of tolerating competing viewpoints housed under the same faith, can instruct the broader culture on how to manage the cacophony of opinions and doctrines inherent in a free religious market.86

Taylor’s vision for a “Catholic modernity” does not impose Catholicism upon the public sphere as a privileged or established religion but instead calls for the Church to reach out to those Westerners who may not feel fulfilled by the secular obsession with “human flourishing” and psychological happiness that are the hallmarks of modern belief systems such as Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. According to Taylor, excessive humanism precludes a transcendent reality from infusing the lives of Catholic Christians of the modern era, instead placing the human being, rather than God, as the center of religious faith and devotion. The drive to be personally happy, constantly fulfilled, socially functional, and professionally successful has hijacked the
Western consciousness, sidelining traditional Catholic (and Christian) teaching of seeking a reality that transcends the individual psyche and its quotidian preoccupations.

Taylor imagines the Catholic Church responding to the phenomenon of excessive humanism by reacting in one of two “untenable” ways: first, by fusing select humanist doctrines into Roman Catholic theology; or second, by surrendering to the powerful forces of secular humanism and permitting the tradition in its entirety to be supplanted by secular humanist beliefs. Taylor labels these two reactions “modern Catholicism” and rejects them as unpalatable. By contrast, he offers a more complex vision for engagement – a “Catholic modernity” – that respects the freedom of individual conscience as understood by the Second Vatican Council but that still offers each “buffered” Western individual a more transcendent, theocentric doctrine of religiosity.

Taylor’s vision is an excellent means by which to synthesize the various currents of this thesis: having accepted the disembedding of “immigrant phase”-era Catholic sacred canopies and adopted Vatican II’s understanding of individual conscience, the Church can combat the religious laxity of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism and excessive humanism by offering a theocentric faith to help navigate Westerners through the spiritual emptiness of secular culture.

At its heart, this vision is a radical decentralization of religious authority, placing a great deal of autonomy of choice into the hands of the individual believer, a position at which the Church would have balked in the years preceding the Second Vatican Council.

Taylor states that the ultimate purpose of his lecture is to decide “what it means to be a Christian here [in the modern age], to find our authentic voice in the eventual Catholic chorus,” and claims that is useful to imagine the project as analogous to Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci’s efforts to Christianize the China during the seventeenth century, an endeavor that proved to be
more difficult than Ricci imagined because he found himself preaching to those who were already “learned and wise.” Taylor sees the Roman Catholic approach to modern secular humanist culture in a similar light, understanding that a Catholic might recognize modern culture’s Christian origins but cautions against being mislead into thinking the milieu to be necessarily infused with “true” Christianity. This modern Catholic vision seeks to win souls not by physical force or intellectual coercion, as Voltaire once accused the Church of doing, but by offering an appealing God-centered theology that the Church has espoused for centuries.88

Taylor’s position conflicts with Senator Santorum and Archbishop Dolan’s in that the philosopher does not seek to privilege the Catholic faith over others in public discourse. Even when speaking to evangelical Protestant audiences, Santorum calls to mind the “Christian principles” upon which the United States was supposedly founded and upon which it should continue to operate. Taylor does not seek such hegemony for Roman Catholicism or Christianity in general, instead acknowledging the importance of freedom of choice that the secular state provides to its citizens. While conservative Catholics attempt to salvage the remnants of sacred canopies in the radically democratized American religious marketplace, more progressive Catholics are pushing for a redefinition of the faith in the way that Taylor cautions against, by adopting secular humanist or Moralistic Therapeutic Deistic elements as unofficial Church doctrine; Taylor would find both of these positions to be untenable.

Casanova, Diversity, and Taylor: A Vision for Engagement

For the Church to maintain its public persona while broader American culture rejects many of its central tenets would jeopardize its survival and propagate the view that it is out of touch with the concerns of its flock, but bending to “embrace” secularity, in the words of
Archbishop Dolan, would call into question its integrity and reliability in defending its core beliefs. The way forward for American Catholicism, then, is to find a way to be both relevant in the modern world while maintaining the richness and continuity of a tradition that extends back two thousand years in world history and four hundred years in the history of the United States. No matter what course of action American Catholicism takes, it cannot continue on its current path, which exposes many of the fault lines that are tearing apart both broader American culture and the worldwide Anglican Communion, including its Episcopalian branch in the United States.

Roman Catholicism has perhaps been spared the strife currently afflicting the Anglican Church due to its hierarchal structure and its stubbornness to change: whereas more democratic Protestant denominations sanction open debate on prominent theological issues and are theoretically able to alter their positions by consensus, the Catholic Church is not built upon such a bottom-up structure. Rather, any change in Church policy would come from the Vatican, just as the 1968 *Humanae Vitae* positions were presented unto Roman Catholics as non-negotiable, divinely inspired doctrines. While the ecclesiological structure of Catholicism may be able to suppress open dissent and rapid change, it can also foment discontent among the frustrated faithful, many of whom are lapsing into lesser religiosity or abandoning the church altogether.

At the conclusion of his chapter on American Catholicism in *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Casanova states that the only way for the faith to recover from its reassertion into the public sphere is to retreat into the private realm once again before it risks further alienating its own followers. Charles Taylor’s vision for a “Catholic modernity” supports the non-hegemonic offering of Catholicism’s theocentric doctrines to individual agents who can freely select a faith tradition that offers a transcendent reality in an otherwise excessively secular and humanistic culture. Both of these visions for engagement between Catholicism and modernity
have merit, especially since they recognize that the tone that Church officials have taken has alienated both Catholics and non-Catholics alike. There is certainly a fine line that Church leaders must walk should it intend to maintain a large, diverse American Catholic body while simultaneously remaining true to its central theological principles.

The overextension of religion into the public sphere has dangerous implications, and Casanova’s description of higher religiosity in the United States and Poland, where freedom of religion has been an historical reality, and lower rates of religiosity in France and Spain, where church and state have long been bedfellows, is a compelling comparison for American Catholicism to consider. Granting preference to one religious faith over others in the public sphere – whether that be Roman Catholicism or Christianity in general – is antithetical to the faith’s continued strength and propagation. Religious freedom is smart policy for the Church, and even though it might have to tolerate dissent in its membership as a consequence, this variety of viewpoints only serves to respect the integrity of Catholic doctrine and to preserve the diversity of its adherents. Additionally, the First Amendment to the United States Constitution stipulates that Congress make no law that establishes or disestablishes a particular religion; by this logic, a neutral religious marketplace would not preference one faith tradition over another. To do so would be both bad Church policy and in violation of the American legal tradition guaranteeing free exercise of religion.

The leaders of American Catholicism, whether bishops, priests, or lay public figures, should soften their rhetoric and embrace the merits of their opposition’s arguments; only by such intra-Catholic action can the tone be civilized and the family of American Catholics find common ground once again. The Church has never experienced a completely unified period in its history, and while it should never surrender the spirited debate that makes the tradition so
colorful, it should be mindful of how it crafts its future. Overreaching into public policy and social debate may provoke a harsh backlash that jeopardizes the diversity and storied history that define American Catholicism, while mutual respect and civility will establish it as a harbinger of peace and understanding an otherwise acrimonious secular public square. It would be well within the Christian spirit for the Church to embrace the latter, setting an example of how to properly conduct respectful and enlightening discourse for both the nation and the world.
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6 Ibid. 206.
7 “Gay Marriage in Maryland: Catholic Governors in Five States Sign Legislation.”
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10 Ibid. 78-82.
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