

CATHOLIC POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND UNCERTAINTY REDUCTION THEORY: SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

Religious persecution and differences of philosophy are often cited as reasons for the migration from Central and Western Europe to North America during the 17th century. However, the underlying political philosophy and the impact of pre- and post-schismatic Catholic political philosophy on pre-17th century westward migration are not adequately researched. By reviewing relevant political philosophies including Aquinas, Macchiavelli, and Luther, as well as related historical events, this article aims to uncover the philosophical reasons behind the migration of peoples in relation to spiritual uncertainty and power imbalances caused by Catholicism.

KEYWORDS: *Catholicism, Protestantism, Migration, United States of America, Uncertainty Reduction Theory*

INTRODUCTION

Innate to the human condition is a drive for survival. Vital to this drive for survival is a need to reduce uncertainty related to the environment in which humans exist, the relationships which humans have, and the understanding humans hold of those things which cannot be touched, seen, or felt (Redmond, 2015). This desire to reduce uncertainty and the motivation, as described by the Uncertainty Reduction Theory, can be directly attributed to the human need to more deeply analyze our situation, create systems, and know as well as attempt to understand God and His will. Many Christian churches ascribe to Martin Luther's idea of sola scriptura as their primary philosophy for understanding the Almighty

and thus reducing uncertainty; the Roman Catholic Church and its communed subsidiaries are unique in their use of papal ex cathedra infallibility and tradition to reduce perceived uncertainties. This allowed them to control their followers in ways that many other denominations could not (Bauerschmidt, 2018: 17; Geysler, 2018: 4; Stern, 2020). Espousing the Aquinian philosophy of reverent and intelligent individuals being most suited for leadership, the Catholic Church leveraged its perceived control over access to Heaven and Hell (Kilcullen and Robinson, 2017). This was used to influence monarchs across Europe to persecute minority denominations for the sake of political stability, to embrace a much more Machiavellian approach, and eventually to force minorities to search for more stable environments (Dawson, 2018; Strauss and Cropsey, 1997). The argument in this article is that the Roman Catholic Church and its propagation of uncertainty in spiritual matters were influential in the processes of the emigration of religious minorities that led to the founding of the United States of America (Dawson, 2018; Strauss and Cropsey 1997).

NATURE OF HUMAN BEINGS

To understand why human beings would have a desire to migrate from a familiar state of existence to an unfamiliar state of existence, one must first come to terms with the human drive for survival, their desired state, and how they are meant to live in regards to society and leadership. Delving into any of these first requires an assumption as to the rationality of humankind (Korsgaard, 2016). Once this assumption is made, advancement can be made towards determining what kinds of leaders should

take charge in society, the role of utilitarianism in society, and the impact of free thought in destabilizing the Catholic Europe.

Are Humans Rational?

Aristotle proposed that rationality was to an extent synonymous with the ability to reason, and thus humans were at least at some level rational beings (Keil and Kreft, 2019). This idea of rationality is vitally important, as it not only separates human beings from other beings but also sets the stage for understanding human motivation, including the motivation behind politically motivated actions such as mass migrations. It is largely incomprehensible to make the statement that human decisions are preferential to overall long-term stability if humans are not rational enough to make complex decisions past those that provide immediate stability. This is because decisions related to long-term stability may be in direct competition to those that provide short-term stability (Steele and Stefánsson, 2020). The normative branch of Decision Theory holds that man will ultimately weigh outcomes in a series and choose the series with the better end result (Redmond, 2015). Actions indicated are in line with the Uncertainty Reduction Theory which espouses that individuals find certainty desirable over uncertainty, and will thus try to obtain certainty. This long-term focus is repeatedly shown in governance decisions made in the New World by the colonies. This further indicates the rationality of man, and sets the stage for the understanding of the motivation behind the decisions to escape religious persecution (Redmond, 2015).

Aquinas and Machiavelli meet Luther

Due to its power in Europe, the political philosophy of the Catholic Church reigned heavily over much of the first 1600 years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth. While theological differences abounded and were discussed in councils leading to the creation of creeds and religious norms, it was Saint Thomas Aquinas who compiled, analyzed, and built much of the basis for the Catholic philosophy from

the 13th century onwards (Strauss and Cropsey, 1997: 116-128). Unique in his pairing of philosophy and church in order to further both, Aquinas held strongly that men, although sinful and imperfect, were rational beings made by God, who must strive to understand both the law God has given and the natural laws espoused by man (1997: 124). Consequently, Aquinas strongly insisted that the individuals who understood both to the highest degree possible, while being most totally devoted to Christ, should indeed have the right to rule over all others both spiritually and in civil politics, and the common man should accept such rule as a gift from God in line with the Bible (McInerney and O'Callaghan, 2014; Romans 13:1-5). From Aquinas' point of view, this meant that papal totalitarianism was not only acceptable, but preferable and correct (1997: 127).

Three hundred years later, another prominent philosopher who practiced Roman Catholicism would step against this process of thought, claiming that goodness or morality had no bearing on who should lead. Rather, Machiavelli posited that the possession of power itself was permission enough (Nederman, 2019). Niccolò Machiavelli's philosophy held that not only must the proper leadership rule but that so long as the leaders were able to maintain the function and efficiency of the state, that any means were therefore justifiable (Nederman, 2019). While this rebuke of moralism would seemingly challenge the Catholic Church's position in regards to the divine rights of the Papacy, the Church instead continued it as though this were endorsement which gave it authority by its positive impact and an excuse for previous sins (Dawson, 2018: 281). However, this did not stop the Church from banning Machiavelli's works. Interestingly enough, the successful challenge of this authority would come not from the outside but from the inside of the Church.

Martin Luther, a Catholic Priest, theologian, and accidental philosopher focused his efforts on the comparison and mediation of the Bible and

Catholic Doctrine. Ultimately, Luther found the doctrine wanting and also in direct opposition to the Bible, particularly regarding papal infallibility and the role of 'works' in salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9; Geysler, 2018: 4). Luther argued that humans were imperfect creatures fallen out of God's grace and that the perceived goodness, education and philosophy he referred to as a type of scholastic theology had no role in deciding who should lead the Church (Stern, 2020). Rather, he espoused that humans were savable only through Grace, only in Christ alone, and they should follow the Scripture alone (Stern, 2020). Additionally, Luther insisted that the Pope had no right to interpret any of the above, nor role in deciding who was damned or saved (Stern, 2020). As this was the Pope's primary method for influencing the populace of Europe at the time, it was seen as a most dangerous challenge, which would consequently lead to a massive second schism within the Church as well as creating an accelerated start to the Protestant Reformation. This action and the conflicting philosophies between the Catholic Church and Luther effectively destabilized much of Central and Western Europe, leading to several centuries of war, famine, persecution, and a search for spiritual and physical certainty (Dawson, 2018).

CATHOLIC VS. PROTESTANT VS. STATE

With the questioning of 1500 years of papal authority over the understanding, access to, and forgiveness of God, much of Catholic and Protestant Europe entered a transitory period consisting of the struggle for power between the Catholic Papacy, Catholic monarchies, Protestant monarchies, and both Catholic and Protestant Republicans (Tuckness, 2020). This battle, simultaneously occurring over a number of locations ranging from Germany to the modern United Kingdom, raised a plethora of philosophical questions, including: 1) Should the government be beholden to the perceived representative of God on earth? 2) What difference exists between the governed and the governors? 3) How should dissent be handled by the government?

As the first question pitted the interests of the "Vicar of Christ" against the interest of those who were deemed anointed by God, and most of Europe fell under the control of one, if not both. A lynchpin of change and violence came to be (Bauerschmidt and Buckley, 2017: 88).

The Papacy and the Monarchy

Considered widely infallible in their teachings and the decisions, and perceived based on their own interpretation of Matthew 16:19 to have the right to control entry into Heaven as well as the ability to forgive or retain sins as interpreted from John 20:23, the Pope and his emissaries maintained spiritual control over much of Europe including monarchs (Matthew 16:19; John 20:23). This control was largely maintained via both the discussed ideas of Aquinas and the acceptance of unholy actions as espoused by Machiavelli, as well as the control of the level of uncertainty as related (Kilcullen and Robinson, 2017). As approximately 22% of the western European population was illiterate, many individuals relied heavily on spoken word for the transmission of information, including religious guidance (Melton, 2001: 81-82). This also allowed for rhetorical presentation to play a larger part in the control of audiences. As such, the Catholic hierarchy was largely able to demand taxes, sell dispensations, and act as desired based on their ability to forgive themselves or others, a philosophically questionable action in and of itself (Haji and Caouette, 2013: 61). While this benefited those who could afford it and did not question teachings as well as those in charge, once the questioning of this standard was brought about by Luther and Arminius, monarchs began to question not only the excess influence of the Pope but also the monetary and spiritual costs of a relationship with the Catholic Church (Koolani, 2016; Manchester, 2014: 56-59). At risk of losing influence, the Catholic Church responded by destabilizing the continent by reducing certainty related to the afterlife including the defrocking of

priests, the excommunication of disenchanted monarchs such as Henry VIII as well as inspiring uprisings of Catholics in such dissenting countries as Scotland and the Holy Roman Empire (2014).

Persecution and Uncertainty

As discussed above, the conflicting philosophies of Aquinas, Machiavelli, and Luther led to a massive destabilization due to contestations over the equality of man and the right to rule. Consequently, the Catholic response to such instability and uncertainty was to legally reprimand, inspire action against, and overall persecute those who disagreed with the primacy of the Church, particularly Anabaptists, Mennonites, Huguenots, and Lutherans (Foster et al., 1998). This led to the Protestant reaction, particularly in England and Scotland, to respond in equal measure towards the Catholics, exacerbating the already tumultuous situation as neither was willing to reconcile, as indicated in the multiple Scottish Jacobite rebellions. Combining the Machiavellian idea that actions which led to stability were acceptable with the Aquinian philosophy of who was best suited to lead, the Catholic Church created a system of morality in which their actions were considered ethically and theologically appropriate (Strauss and Cropsey, 1997: 248).

Reformationist Churches generally believed their actions also be sound largely based upon the idea of the literal interpretation of the Bible and the view of the Catholic Church as an organization that was led by the Anti-Christ (Dawson, 2018: 269; Matthew 15:3-6; Wells, 1972: 281). Additionally, monarchs were often influenced by the writings of William of Occam and Marsilius of Padua who argued for the subordination of the Pope and the Church to other powers, a philosophical process which strengthened many monarchs including Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, in their anti-Papist leanings (Kilcullen and Robinson, 2017). This age of confusion and uncertainty in religious philosophy and leadership across Europe created a level of

spiritual and political uncertainty amongst both Catholics and Protestants. This, in turn, contributed to migration to the newly founded colonies alongside those who were being sent to the same for religious dissidence, creating the potential for a geographic hotbed of religion (Dawson, 2018).

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND THE PURSUIT OF CERTAINTY

Between 1620 and 1682, no less than seven colonies were founded on the basis of religion: Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay for Puritans escaping the English Protestant rule, New Hampshire and Connecticut for religious liberals escaping strong the Puritan rule in Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, Maryland for disenfranchised Catholics who were accepting of Anglicans, Pennsylvania for the Quakers, and Rhode Island for overall religious tolerance (Goldfield, 2007). Other than most settlers relocating as part of the search for either economic or religious certainty, all settlers also shared their unique geographic separation from Europe as well as a role in the beginning of the American experiment.

As noted above, seven of the fifteen pre-18th century colonies were founded most heavily upon religious reasons while four of the remaining eight espoused a particular religion, generally Anglicanism (Goldfield, 2017). Simultaneous to founding of the colonies was the emergence of the philosophy of John Locke and Charles Montesquieu, both of whom argued against despotism and the singular primacy of monarchy (1997: 113-147). Unique to Locke's ideas were that he found all people to be intrinsically equal and hold the inherent rights to life, freedom, and property (Tuckness, 2020). Montesquieu stepped further towards the macro-view of government, identifying the inherent risks of monarchy and despotism and pinpointing a government where power was split between different organizations to be the best remedy (1997: 131-147). Both sets of these ideas stemmed from reformationist rebirths

of Greek Sophists as a direct response to the adoption of heavily Aquinian and Machiavellian philosophies by a multitude of Catholic monarchs (Strauss and Cropsey, 1997). However, both sets of these ideas would become essential to the running of the colonies and the foundation of the United States, as evidenced by their codification in the United States Constitution, Bill of Rights, and parallel documents within the individual colonies (Green, 2000: 536).

Codification of Religious Freedom

Due to their vast experiences with religious persecution directly attributable in its original cause to the Catholic-espoused philosophy, colonial governments almost immediately began to codify different levels of religious freedom, beginning with Rhode Island in 1635 (Albert, 2005: 901-902). Due to his own persecution in Massachusetts, Roger Williams founded Rhode Island and immediately codified into the charter that no man would be held accountable for his choice of faith or lack thereof (Albert, 2005: 898). This was followed by Lord Baltimore's introduction to the Maryland General Assembly of the Maryland Toleration Act, which held that people could not be "troubled, molested, or discounted" for their belief or nonbelief. While Pennsylvania followed with their Act of the Freedom of Conscience in 1682, this only allowed for freedom of worship by Christians but did eliminate and forbid codified denominational requirements or preferences (Albert, 2005: 899). Other colonies adopted unofficial policies or levels of acceptance, while several, including Virginia, were rather particular about their espousal of the Anglican belief system. Ultimately, the long-term effects of Catholic persecution of Protestants, the retaliatory actions, coupled with the humanist philosophies emerging in the 17th and 18th centuries, led to the concept of the formalized separation of church and state as stated in the 1st Amendment of the United States Constitution (Levy, 2017).

CONCLUSION

Beginning with Aquinas's philosophy that the most moral, most religious, and most knowledgeable man should rule and that man generally happened to be the Pope, the Catholic Church began down a path which would ultimately lead to the espousal of an ends-justify-the-means, Machiavellian philosophy. This, in turn, allowed for the persecution of countless Christians who denied the authority of the Pope (Strauss and Cropsey, 1997). Lutheran philosophy no doubt stirred the fire regarding interpretation of the Bible and reduced the level of respect for the Catholic hierarchy, reduced the stabilizing authority of the pope as a mediator between Catholic monarchies, and ultimately spread among Europe's monarchs and philosophers alike (Heuser, 2019). This political and spiritual uncertainty and philosophical questioning pitted religion against monarchy across the continent (Kilcullen and Robinson, 2017). This consequently led to acts of retribution and retaliation on both sides of the conflict, creating a vastly unstable environment where life was not tenable for many people in search of the freedom to worship their God. What was considered to be an economic or penal colony by some was found to be a potential religious safe haven to others (Goldfield, 2007; Redmond, 2015). With their search to follow the laws of God as they interpreted, many people found certainty and allowed their sufferings to become the basis for a codified freedom of religion for others, following the call of Saint Peter to "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God" (1 Peter 2:16 [ESV]). By living through the long-term effects of the sufferings of the bastardized Aquinian and Machiavellian philosophy of the Catholic Church influencing Biblical interpretation, the founders of the United States were able to create a nation based on the philosophical idea of religious freedom for all.

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