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THE CATHOLIC QUESTION IN  
CONTEMPORARY PORTUGUESE CIVIL  
SOCIETY: A CASE OF MUTED VIBRANCY?

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THE MINDA DE GUNZBURG

CENTER FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES  
AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY



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## ABSTRACT

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The 'Catholic question' in contemporary Portugal obliges us to consider whether Catholicism will remain a force in Portuguese associational life in the next century, or whether it faces a future of slow and steady decline. On the one hand, an overall statistical drop of church membership, and the lack of religious practice by almost half of self-identified Roman Catholics, suggests that the future of the Catholic Church in Portugal will probably be very different than the past. On the other hand, the church's support for democratic processes, the important social services it provides, and its educational establishment, have certainly been a positive factor in Portuguese associational life, and helped the larger process of democratic-regime consolidation since the Carnation Revolution of 1974. This paper suggests that social scientists need to move beyond the lens normally applied to the question of Catholicism in contemporary Europe (i.e. it is a dying, anti-modern, anti-rational, conservative institution), and instead consider the complex interplay of its demographic challenges combined with the popular sources of its theological and spiritual strength, as well as its vital societal contributions, to assess whether or not it will remain a force in Portuguese associational life in the future.

# THE CATHOLIC QUESTION IN CONTEMPORARY PORTUGUESE CIVIL SOCIETY: A CASE OF MUTED VIBRANCY?<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Given the chronic weakness of the traditional institutions of civil society in Portugal, Catholicism has represented an important element of Portuguese associational life for centuries. Prior to the Carnation Revolution of 25 April 1974, some ninety-seven percent of the population self-identified as Roman Catholic, and large numbers of people routinely attended Mass. During this time Catholic Church itself was referred to as the very definition of Portuguese civil society (de Sousa Franco, 1987).

Priests had kept records on the births, marriages, first communions (and other sacraments) and deaths of the members of their parish community for many years before the secular authorities in Lisbon started to collect census information during the First Republic (1910-1926). Priests had also organized local celebrations of popular saints, and were often viewed as extended members of families (see Brettell, 1990; Riegelhaupt, 1973). In many places, there was a tight connection between priest and townsfolk; in that light, the confessional itself could be understood as a type of psychological/religious counseling experience, where concerns, fears and troubles could sometimes be voiced to a trusted friend, and prayerful solutions were proffered. Arguably, Sunday Mass was both a religious as well as socio-cultural community experience. It provided an opportunity for time with God, with family and friends, away from work, and to catch up on the news. The sense of belonging to a community, as well as the religious message of salvation, provided a variety of epistemological and ontological consolations for the Portuguese.

Portuguese civil society was certainly not lifeless outside of church-organized associational

life, but it was weak, and especially so when compared to the experiences of other European countries (Costa Pinto and Tavares de Almeida, 2000). When there were no other viable forms of associational life in a rural society marked by a high illiteracy rate, Catholicism performed admirably, “according to a common saying, ‘to be Portuguese is to be Catholic’ ... Portugal was Roman Catholic not only in a religious sense, but also socially and culturally” (Wiarda, 1994).<sup>2</sup>

Things changed considerably in the years following the revolution. Although Portuguese civil society played a secondary role during the immediate transition period, it has recently shown signs of becoming more articulated, differentiated, and secularized. Once democratic institutions were established, an organized civil society appears to be emerging under the new democratic regime (Hamann and Manuel, 1999). At the same time, the Catholic Church appears to be exercising less influence over the political attitudes and actions of the faithful since the revolution. For instance, the numbers of new vocations for religious life are down, as are the overall numbers of self-identified Roman Catholics, and there are fewer who practice the faith. In addition, the Church has recently suffered a string of high-profile public-policy defeats, including the legalization of same-sex marriage and the decriminalization of abortion. The Catholic Church is, of course, a very complex and complicated grouping of believers, but in the face of all these difficult challenges, many have come to wonder what hold the Church still retains on Portuguese associational life. Indeed, the ‘Catholic question’ in contemporary Portugal obliges us to consider whether Catholicism will remain a force in Portuguese associational life in the next century, or whether it faces a future of slow and steady decline.

The current role of Catholicism in Portuguese society might perhaps best be understood as a dynamic case of *muted vibrancy*. This concept, derived from his work on Catholicism in France by historian Rene Rémond, and coined by historian Steven Englund, suggests that social scientists need

to move beyond the lens normally applied to the question of Catholicism in contemporary Europe (i.e. it is a dying, anti-modern, anti-rational, conservative institution). Rémond points to recent social science evidence to make his point that the church will not soon go the way of the King of France. Quite to the contrary, Rémond suggests that the church in France remains a vital, dynamic, and significant part of associational life (Rémond, 2005). Expanding on Rémond's views, Englund notes:

So, yes, French Catholicism is a minority, [Rémond] agrees, but it is still the largest one in the Republic, and why is it the only one to be judged on its past, not its present? The church's sensitive dealing with immigrants, its genuine openness to other religions, and the bishops' penitence for church inaction in war have all gone un- or underreported...

Catholicism in France all too often sees the secular press reduce its entire doctrine and witness to the magisterium's stand on mores, moral individualism being the litmus test *par excellence* for one's modernity in France (Englund, 2001).

Could Rémond and Englund's observations also be made about the contemporary church in Portugal? That is, do social scientists tend to view the Portuguese church more in terms of its past association with the fascist regime, than on its current engagement in a democratic setting? Has the church helped to consolidate Portuguese democracy, in its teaching, and in its behavior, or made things worse? And, will the church be a continued presence in Portuguese society, or is it destined to die out in a generation or two?

This chapter is organized around three key specific queries related to the larger Catholic question. First, it will explore the density of Catholicism among civil sectors — how big is it and how many citizens it incorporates. Second, it will explore the church's self-identity — what is the role and function it wants to play in the larger societal dynamic? And

third, it will examine some of the ways the church might usefully engage civil society, which, given these good works, could be indicative of new public theology in a democratic and secularizing Portugal.

### **First Query: what is the Density and National Presence of the Catholic Church?**

The Roman Catholic Church retains a deep and pronounced presence in Portuguese society. Although fewer Portuguese have self-identified as Roman Catholics in several recent religious surveys than in the past, Catholicism remains the single largest religious organization in Portugal.

#### *The Portuguese Catholic Community*

Approximately ninety percent of the Portuguese population of 10.6 million remains, at least nominally, Roman Catholic in 2011. These numbers of self-identified Roman Catholics are declining: from around 95 percent in 2000 to 90 percent today, and appear to be on a downwards spiral (World Christian Data Base, 2010; Wiarda, 1994). Weekly mass attendance, which used to be a staple in Portuguese associational life, has dropped since the 1970s. The 2002 European Social Survey found that twenty-nine percent of Catholics, representing approximately three million citizens, attend Mass weekly; fifteen percent of Catholics, or one and a half million people, attend Mass monthly, and eight percent of Catholics, or approximately 750,000 people, attend Mass on occasion. Combined, then, some fifty-two percent of self-identified Roman Catholics, or just over five million people, regularly practice their faith, in some fashion. The remaining forty-eight percent of self-identified Catholics reported to the European Social Survey that they rarely practice their faith. And yet, over ninety of marriages, baptisms, and funerals are still performed according to Roman Catholic rituals, and there continue to be large turnouts for the religious and socio-cultural celebrations of Christmas, Easter and popular saints (European Social Survey, 2002;

World Christian Data Base, 2010; Wiarda, 1994).

These numbers paint a picture of a divided Portuguese Catholic population: a little more than five million Portuguese Catholics regularly practice their religion, and just fewer than five million Portuguese Catholics do not. Given this split between a *religious* and *secularized* Portuguese Catholic population, it is somewhat surprising to note the high percentage of Catholic marriages, baptisms, and funerals, as well as overflowing churches at Christmas and Easter, and large crowds at community celebrations of local saints (Catroga, 2010).

To account for this seeming discrepancy, one line of explanation could follow along these lines: perhaps where there is a lack of faith in a person, a combination of family, community, cultural and traditional considerations may influence a person's decision to self-identify as Roman Catholic. These communal pressures could also account for the high turnout at the traditional religious celebrations, and why the numbers drop-off during ordinary times.

A number of other statistics indicate some interesting fault lines in the practice of Catholicism in the Portugal of 2011. Approximately two-thirds of Portuguese women regularly practice their faith, while only one-third of men do so. Also, older people practice their faith more frequently than young people. It is too soon to predict a dying-out of the faith as the current generation departs; it is possible that individuals will practice their faith more frequently as they age, but more data is needed to confirm such a hypothesis. The distribution of Roman Catholics is spread throughout the country, with greater density in the North and the Islands. Minor religions present in Portugal, representing less than 10 percent of the population, include Orthodox Christians, a variety of Protestant churches, Muslims, Jews, and Hindus. Finally, agonists and atheists number less than 1 percent of the total population (Catroga, 2010; 2nd World Christian Database, 2010; Wiarda, 1994).

## *Network of Churches*

There is a vast and thriving network of Catholic churches in contemporary Portugal. As indicated in Map One, the Roman Catholic Church is divided into eighteen dioceses, with 4381 parishes. The average size of each parish is 1,917 parishioners. The Portuguese church is administered by one cardinal in Lisbon, fifty-two bishops, 3,797 priests, 6,007 religious, 594 lay members of secular institutes and 63,906 catechists. In addition, there are approximately 279 minor seminarians, and 444 major seminarians. Another one million Portuguese nationals live abroad, and there are approximately 346 Portuguese parishes to serve that community (World Christian Database, 2010). The Portuguese Catholic clergy regularly interact with over five million Portuguese, and maintain some contact with the rest of the Catholic population. In these ways, Catholicism clearly remains an important element of Portuguese communal and associational life for millions in contemporary Portugal.

## **Second Query: How does the Catholic Church Engage Political Society?**

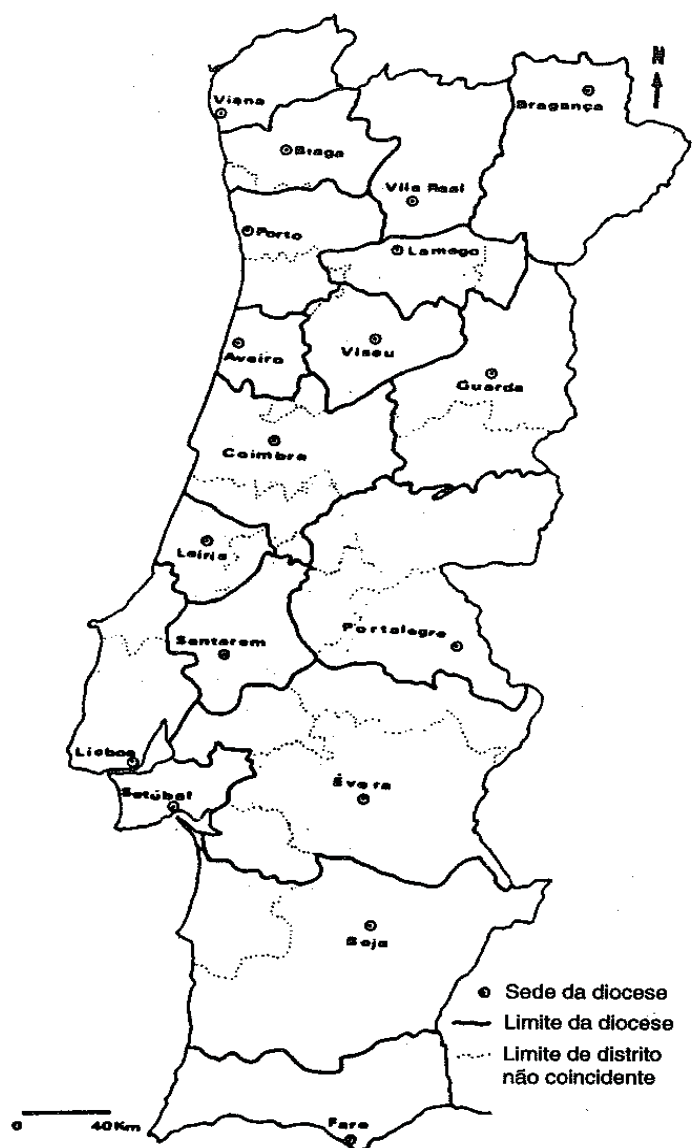
Having established the density of the Catholic network, our next step is to identify the role that the Catholic Church sees for itself in Portuguese politics, and its strategy for implementing that role.

### *The 2001 Law of Religious Liberty*

The legal framework governing contemporary church-state relations in Portugal was framed by the Law of Religious Liberty of 2001, which, among other provisions, guarantees equal treatment for all confessions, the right of a religion to establish churches, and to run schools. The law was originally seen by some as anti-Catholic, because it was believed to take away preferential privileges previously reserved for the Catholic Church. In fact, the opposite was true: Article 58 of the Law on Religious Liberty guaranteed the Roman Catholic Church certain privileges not allowed to other confessions, because

## MAP 1: DIOCESES OF PORTUGAL

### DIOCESES DE PORTUGAL CONTINENTAL



From: P. Miguel de Oliveria, *Historia Ecclesiastica de Portugal* (Lisbon: Publicacoes Europa-America, 1994, 263)

it left the Salazar-era 1940 Concordat between the Vatican and Portugal in tact (Sousa e Brito, 2004).

Jose de Sousa e Brito argues in “Covenantal and Non Covenantal Cooperation of State and Religions in Portugal” that, at first, the new law of religious freedom was actually a hollow measure in the sense that it stood in the untenable juridical position of subservience to the 1940 fascist-era Concordat with the Holy See (Sousa e Brito, 2004). In anticipation of this inconsistency, the Socialist government of Antonio Guterres, who himself

was a devout Catholic, requested in April of 1999 to renegotiate the 1940 Concordat with the Holy See. This request was accepted by the Vatican the following year, and formal negotiations commenced in 2001. They were finally completed during the administration of Social Democratic Party (PSD) Premier Jose Manuel Durão Barroso on 18 May 2004.

The Portugal-Holy See Concordat of 2004 reflected the spirit and declarations of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which had taken place



some forty-years earlier. At the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, the Holy See released two significant documents dealing with church-state relations: *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* and *Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Religious Freedom* in 1965, which offered a new vision for the Roman Catholic Church in the modern world, predicated on democratic principles and religious freedom (Hastings, 1991; Dorr, 1992). The Vatican had been ready to develop a new relationship with Portugal for some time, and embraced the opportunities presented in the new Concordat of 2004. Of note, church officials sought to avoid two historical mistakes with the Portuguese government: the excesses of the *Lei de Separação* (or Law of Separation) of 1911, which allowed the First Republic state to control many church activities, and the church's long association with the Salazar regime.

Regarding the first mistake, the anti-clerical legislative measures passed during the First Republic led to heightened passions and political turmoil between clerical and anti-clerical forces for the next half-century. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Afonso Costa, the National Assembly passed the *Lei de Separação* in 1911, which, among other measures, closed many Catholic seminaries, including the theology program at the University of Coimbra, eliminated national observances of Catholic holy days, secularized cemeteries, and nationalized some Church property (Gallagher, 1996). Two students at the University of Coimbra, Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira (who would become the Cardinal of Lisbon from 1929 to 1971), and his close friend, Antonio de Oliveira Salazar, (who ruled the country as Prime Minister from 1933 to 1968), were deeply disturbed by that legislation. In response, they formed the Catholic opposition group *Centro Académica da Democracia Cristã* (CADC—the Christian Democracy Academic Center) at the University of Coimbra in 1912 (Braga da Cruz, 1978; also Costa Pinto and Tavares de Almeida, 2000). Their eventual accession to power was greeted warmly by church officials at first—as a necessary

corrective to the excesses of the First Republic—but the close relationship between the church and the fascist *Estado Novo* led to a second mistake.

The second mistake became clear as the years passed: it became very harmful for the pastoral work of the Church when its leadership was seen by many elements in civil society as tacitly approving the anti-communist and anti-regime activities of the *Estado Novo*'s secret police, the *Polícia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado*, or PIDE, especially regarding torture and other human rights abuses of thousands of citizens.

Salazar jealously guarded his political power throughout his time in office, and kept Church officials away from actual policy-formation. He certainly derived much political legitimacy from his deep personal Catholic religiosity—including a profound devotion to *Nossa Senhora de Fátima*—but fearing the development of a 'state-within-a-state,' Salazar managed to limit the church's actual political power. Instead, he allowed the church to carve out its own space in civil society for its evangelical work and other activities, and made sure to include church leaders whenever there was a symbolic public event. The Church-State relationship became very unhealthy during the *Estado Novo*, and called out for reform (see Felicidade, 1969; Figueiredo, 1976).

The new accord of 2004 seeks to correct both of these mistakes. To avoid a repeat of the first mistake, the Portuguese state affirms the juridical position of the Catholic Church and its institutions, especially the church's jurisdiction in ecclesiastical matters.

To avoid a repeat of the second mistake, and in the spirit of Vatican II, the church recognized religious freedom in Portugal as a fundamental right for all people, and agreed to live within the democratic processes outlined in the constitution. Previously, the Church had also supported the democratic Constitution of 1976, which provided a legal basis for the freedom of religion, as well as the formal separation of Church and State



Once the transition to democracy was completed in Portugal, the Church had to learn how to operate under new rules, including participating in the political process as an independent player (Bruneau, 1976; Antunes, 1982). There is no explicit 'Catholic' or religious political party in Portugal. The Party of the Democratic Center (CDS) has sometimes been loosely viewed as a Portuguese-style Christian Democratic political party, but a special relationship with the church has not subsequently developed. During the transition, there was one attempt to form a Christian Democratic Party by Sanches Osório, a conservative member of the Armed Forces Movement, but the Council of the Revolution outlawed it in March of 1975 for being too conservative, and Osório became a political exile in Paris (Manuel, 1995).

Although there has been no successful, formal Catholic political movement in Portugal in post-1974 Portugal, the Catholic faith is interwoven with the lives of key political leaders. Here are but a few examples: during the transition, and especially during the so-called "hot summer" of 1975, Father João Cabral Abranches, a Jesuit priest from Oporto, served as an informal advisor to President Costa Gomes, and occasionally celebrated mass with him in the Presidential Palace. Costa Gomes's left-of-center, moderate views, predicated on a Catholic vision of social justice, were contributing factors behind his leadership to a successful transition outcome (Manuel, 1995). Later, during the process of democratic consolidation, two socialist prime ministers have also been practicing Catholics: Prime Minister Maria de Lourdes Pintasilgo in 1978 and Prime Minister António Guterres, from 1995 to 2002. Pintasilgo was the only woman to serve as Prime Minister of Portugal, and had very close connections to the Catholic Church, as a lay member of the Catholic women's order *Graal*. She also served as the Vatican's woman's liaison with the World Council of Churches. For his part, Guterres was a member of the Catholic Student's Youth Movement, known as

the *Juventude Universitária Católica*, as a student at the *Instituto Superior Técnico* in the 1960s. Both Pintasilgo and Guterres have cited the Church's social teaching as compatible with their socialist political ideologies. Indeed, even when muted, the sounds of Catholic teachings can sometimes be discerned in the words of Portuguese politicians.

Since the adoption of the new democratic constitution in 1976 — and with it, the launching of the Second Portuguese Republic — the Catholic community has engaged the political process as an interest group in five key areas, with varying degrees of success. First, they have pressed the Church hierarchy and state officials to normalize Church-State relations, resulting in the 2004 Concordat, discussed earlier. Second, the Portuguese bishops issued a call in their "Pastoral Letter on Christian Perspectives on the Reconstruction of the National Life," issued on 14 March 1979, that the faithful are struggle democratically for the defense of human rights, the poor and the rights of the unborn. Accordingly, Catholic activists have organized politically over the last thirty years to block Socialist-sponsored legislative projects programs designed to decriminalize abortion, and to legalize same-sex marriage. Although unsuccessful in each case, these political battles helped them learn how to use the tools afforded to them in a democratic setting to make their case to the general public. Third, and related to the second point, the Church has learned to look beyond the political issues of the day, and to instead devote its practical and pastoral efforts on its so-called "natural constituencies," which is to say the poor, the ill, and the faithful (see França, 1981). Fourth, the Catholic community has organized four very important and national mobilizations for the visits to Fátima by two Popes ( John Paul II in 1982 1991, and 2005, as well as Benedict XVI in 2009). Fifth, the Catholic community celebrated the life of Sister Lúcia of Fátima (who was the last surviving child seer who witnessed the 1917 Marian apparitions) during a day of national mourning to mark her February 13, 2005 death. The Catholic community also welcomed the construction of the new Church

of the *Santíssima Trindade* (Church of the Most Holy Trinity) in Fátima, Portugal, constructed between 2004 and 2007, and paid for by Catholic pilgrims to the site. The activities in these five distinct areas demonstrate that the Portuguese Catholic community is growing accustomed to how to operate under the religious freedoms afforded by the new constitution, the 2001 law as well as the 2004 Concordat.

In the years since 1976, the bishops have adopted a political strategy reflective of both *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae*, in that they have not used their authority to oblige Catholics to follow their directives. Rather, they have framed their arguments in terms of natural law and reason, and been very careful to address their letters and pastoral teachings, both to Catholics as well as to people of good will. These changes from the church hierarchy have helped the Portuguese Catholic community to become reconciled to a democratic Portugal, predicated on pluralism, national reconciliation, human rights and European unification. This new political strategy asks for individual reflection on the pressing political, social, and cultural issues of the day.

### **Third Query: How does the Catholic Church engage civil society?**

Having established the size of its national operation, and its self-identity as it engages political society, the third step is to see to what extent it has engaged civil society, in an effort at enunciating a public theology. Heinrich Bedford-Strom argues in “An Open Church in an Open Society: Civil Society and an Element of Theological Ethics,” that churches can usefully engage civil society in several broad areas, including the formation of *community networks, social services and serving the needs of the poor* (Bedford-Strohm, 2010). These good works may frame a public theology for believers and non-believers alike, and are in clear harmony with Scripture: “even if you do not believe me, believe the works” (John 10:38). Saint Francis of Assisi is also seen as a patron of using good

works to create a form of public theology, when he is believed to have exhorted his followers to “preach the Gospel! Use words, if necessary.” The ways in which the Roman Catholic Church offers important social services to needy areas of Portuguese civil society may also provide clues to the durability and on-going role of Catholicism in Portuguese society.

### *Community Engagement*

For over one-thousand years, Catholic parishes throughout Europe have been required to establish a sort of welfare system, by collecting money from parishioners, and then apply those funds to develop programs for those in need (see Cammisa, 1998; Jansson, 2008). Medieval monasteries played an important social role. In Portugal monasteries across the country also provided needed service to the poor and vulnerable for many years before the state in Lisbon was also able to do so. For example, in 1280, the Franciscan Order of the Poor Clares founded the Monastery of *Santa Clara-a-Velha* (Saint Claire-the-Older) in Coimbra, and provided services to the needy.

One of the most visible of the Catholic organizations dedicated to social services in contemporary Portugal is a national network known as the *Misericórdia*. It was founded on the 15th of August in 1498 by Queen Leonor, during the reign of Manuel I, and with the support of Pope Alexander VI. Over the last six hundred years, it has since provided relief assistance, care for orphaned children, clinical services and food assistance. Founded on the important Catholic feast day of the assumption of Mary into heaven—15 August—the *Misericórdia* consequently took the image of the Virgin Mary as a symbol of its work for those in need; an image well known around Portugal.

The *Misericórdia* currently operates under Decree-Law 235/2008, and is considered to be a legal entity governed by private law and of public utility. It falls under the jurisdiction of the Ministry

for Labor and Social Solidarity, and is managed by a board co-appointed by the Prime Minister and the Minister for Labor and Social Solidarity. Article 2, of Decree-Law no. 235/2008 of 3 December, provides a modern rationale for an old institution, as follows:

The Lisbon *Misericórdia* has as purpose the realization of improving the well-being of people, mainly the most disadvantaged, including the provision of social welfare, health, education and training, culture and promoting quality of life. According to Christian tradition and works of mercy of their original commitment, and its secular achievements for the community, as well as promoting, supporting and carrying out activities aimed at innovation, quality and safety services, and also development initiatives in the social economy (<http://www.scml.pt>, accessed 13 October 2011).

The footprint of these good works in civil society is deep. In 2011, the national Portuguese Catholic network is responsible for more than six-hundred orphanages and other child-care facilities, five-hundred nursing homes, one hundred medical clinics, fifty family counseling centers, and thirty hospitals. As Bedford-Strom argues, when a church is able to provide these kinds of vital services to a nation's population, it helps to build a social consensus around communitarian values, thereby helping to move civil society beyond bare-knuckled conflicts among and between competing interest groups (Bedford-Strom, 2009).<sup>3</sup>

### *Education*

In their important study, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good*, Anthony Bryk, Valerie Lee and Peter Holland find that the Catholic schools in the United States play a significant role in creating a robust civil society by well educating the young: deepening democratic education and the common good of all students (Bryk, Lee, Holland, 1993).

Similarly, church activities in the area of education

have helped to educate post-1974 generations of Portuguese into the rights and responsibilities of democratic citizenship. According to recent statistics, a total of 129,230 children currently attend 900 Catholic-run schools or other educational institutions in Portugal, at every level.

Since 1936, the Catholic Church has also operated the popular radio station, *Rádio Renascença*, which provides religious educational programs, as well as music, sports and news programming. Although overall numbers of adherents are decreasing as the church faces the headwinds of secularization, it is still contributing to the creation of a robust civil society in Portugal in terms of social services, education, and the religious messages of social justice and communitarian values.

The 2004 Concordat between the Portuguese State and the Holy See also dealt with the Catholic education system. Among other provisions, the Concordat offers official state recognition of the Portuguese Catholic University, and allows the Catholic Church run its own network of schools. It also permits only the Catholic Church to teach religion and ethics in the public schools, for students who chose on their own to take those classes on a voluntary basis. This last provision was not without some controversy, and led to a court hearing. In the end, the Constitutional Court eventually ruled that, partly as a function of the national cultural heritage, only the Catholic Church would be permitted to teach voluntary religious education classes at public schools.

### **Conclusion: Muted Vibrancy in Civil Society**

Referring back to the three categories mentioned at the outset, we have seen that the Roman church measures well in each of these categories. It has an impressive national network, and incorporates some 90 percent of the Portuguese nation. As part of its post Vatican II self-identity, the Roman Catholic Church has sought to influence public policy decisions as



an important institution of civil society, and not as a member of the ruling establishment. It has lived according to the new democratic rules of the political game, and suffered legislative defeats with grace. In its political dealings, the church has addressed itself not only to Catholics, but to all people of good will.

Two historians, Rene Rémond and Stephen Englund, suggest a novel way to understand the changing role of Catholicism in European society: it might perhaps best be understood as a dynamic case of muted vibrancy. That is, perhaps social scientists need to move beyond the lens normally applied to the question of Catholicism in contemporary Europe (i.e. it is a dying, anti-modern, anti-rational, conservative institution), and instead consider the complex interplay of its demographic challenges combined with the popular sources of its theological and spiritual strength, as well as the vital societal contributions provided by church-run, or church-affiliated agencies, to assess whether or not it will remain a force in Portuguese associational life in the future.

The ‘Catholic question’ in contemporary Portugal obliges us to consider whether Catholicism will remain a force in Portuguese associational life in the next century, or whether it faces a future of slow and steady decline. On the one hand, an overall statistical drop of church membership, and the lack of religious practice by almost half of self-identified Roman Catholics, suggests that the future of the Catholic Church in Portugal will probably be very different than the past. On the other hand, the church’s support for democratic processes, the important social services it provides, and its educational establishment, have certainly been a positive factor in Portuguese associational life, and helped the larger process of democratic-regime consolidation since the Carnation Revolution of 1974. The Portuguese church is clearly no longer the church of the Salazar-era Cardinal Manuel Gonçalves Cerejeira. It currently faces serious problems, is perhaps a more muted institution than it used to be, but it retains a deep spiritual life, and

its contributions to associational life are vibrant. The larger question of whether Catholicism will continue to be a force in Portuguese associational life in the future remains open.

## ENDNOTES

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1 To be published in Michael Baum and Miguel Glatzer, *Civil Society After Democratization: The Quality of Portuguese Democracy Today* (Lexington Books, 2012).

2 Wiarda further notes that “Many Portuguese holidays and festivals had religious origins, and the country’s moral and legal codes derived from Roman Catholic precepts ... The traditional importance of Roman Catholicism in the lives of the Portuguese was evident in the physical organization of almost every village in Portugal. The village churches were usually in prominent locations, either on the main square or on a hilltop overlooking the villages.” From <http://countrystudies.us/portugal/60.htm>, Accessed 15 September 2011.

3 Misericórdias in Portugal are located in the following cities: Setúbal, Porto, Benavente, Maia, Praia da Vitória, Angra do Heroísmo, Azeitão, Aveiro, Matosinhos, Mesão Frio, Marco de Canaveses, Crato, Mirandela, Almada, Águeda, Albergaria-A-Velha, Baião, Chaves e Boticas, Estarreja, Mondim de Basto, Oliveira de Azeméis, Vagos, Montargil, Campo Maior, Braga, Fafe, Pampilhosa da Serra, Barcelos, Montemor-o-Novo, São Bento de Arnóia, Santo Tirso, Vila Flor, Murtosa, Pernes, Amadora, Maia, Mortágua, Ansião, Vila Nova de Famalicão as well as in Brazil and India.

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