

Exploring the Connection between Catholics and the Liberal Party in 2004

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Abstract

The voting behaviour of Catholics has puzzled Canadian political scientists for decades. This paper suggests that the continued connection between the two groups is a function of socialization, a Catholic ethos, and community culture. It is argued that the social teachings of Catholicism are adopted by religious followers *and* those in regular contact with them as a type of Catholic ethos, which forms the basis for voters' value systems. The values that dominate the Catholic ethos are socially liberal – and thus, those who hold a Catholic ethos tend to find that the Liberal Party comes closest to representing their views. The current connection between Liberals and Catholics cannot be explained by historical prejudices or even inherited partisanship – instead, one should consider the similarities between the values held by those familiar with Catholic social justice ideas and the ideology of the Liberal Party. In this light, that those with a Catholic ethos vote Liberal is a logical and rational choice based on ideological considerations.

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For decades, the study of Canadian voting behaviour has provided insight into the support bases of political parties in Canada.¹ Especially with the success of the Reform/Canadian Alliance and Bloc Quebecois parties, understanding how parties attract support has been key to understanding the changes that have taken place in the Canadian party system since 1993 (Bowler and Lanoue 1996). Some regularities have emerged from the wealth of voting research – one particularly persistent finding is tendency for Catholics to support the Liberal Party. Despite claims that sociological characteristics are only marginal factors in vote choice,² the fact that Catholics have both *historically* and *recently* (Gidengil et al. 2006) supported the Liberal Party suggests that a closer look at this trend is necessary. Specifically, given the increase in secularism in Canada (and around the world) in the past several decades, why is it that a bond still exists between Catholics and the Liberal Party? Contemporary Canadian politics is not based in religious cleavages (Mendelsohn and Nadeau 1997; Johnston 1985) nor was it even several decades ago (Irvine 1974), that would account for the activation of such social groupings.

One explanation (modestly labelled “success on the 3rd try”; Irvine 1974) is that historic religious disputes, such as disagreements over religious schooling, created religious partisan constituencies that have, in turn, passed on both their religion and their partisanship to their children, perpetuating the religious cleavage in Canadian politics. As Irvine (1974:563) comments, “The religious cleavage has indeed been shown to have been the man who came to dinner – early in this century or before.” Johnston (1985) showed that this theory could not explain the non-uniform transference of Liberal PID, and instead pointed to the importance of community reinforcement of Catholic preferences (Johnston 1991). He found that in provinces with a high concentration of Catholics, the religious cleavage was strongest, while when not reinforced by society, class cleavages took precedence in vote choice. Belanger and Eagles (2005) updated this finding to specify the importance of riding-level Catholicism in maintaining the religious vote.

This paper builds upon these findings, specifically the importance of Catholic communities, to propose an alternative hypothesis. What if the current affinity of Catholics for the Liberal Party is not specifically religious, but cultural? It has been noted (Blais 2005) that the Liberal Party and the Catholic Church disagree on some fundamental issues, like abortion and same-sex marriage. However, the general ideology of the Liberal Party corresponds well with the general values that shape Catholic social teachings. I propose that the current connection between the Liberal Party and Catholics represents the rational choice of voters to vote for a party that best embodies their values, specifically regarding the role of government in shaping Canadian society. In this sense, even though religion is not an explicit feature of party platforms in Canada, religious world views have shaped value systems and ideological leanings and, in turn, have created natural partisan constituencies. Furthermore, the reach of Catholic values, or a Catholic ethos, is not limited to Catholic adherents alone. The social nature of Catholic voting behaviour, as shown by Johnston (1991) and Belanger and Eagles (2005), suggests that the bigger picture involves communities. Indeed, when thinking of how values developed, one must consider the influence of not only one’s family, but also one’s neighbours and friends. Thus, this paper hypothesizes that there is a Catholic ethos that contributes to Liberal support that is rooted in community values and extends beyond just Catholic parishioners to those who have close contact with, and may be socialized by, persons who hold Catholic values.

¹ See, for example, Meisel (1973), Clarke et al. (1980), Johnston et al. (1992), Nevitte et al. 2000.

² LeDuc 1984.

This paper does not presume to explain why Catholics have tended to vote Liberal for decades. It focuses on the present connection between the two groups, and presents an analysis of data from the 2004 election. That there are similar values held by Catholics and the Liberal Party is a partial answer for why Catholics continue to prefer the Liberal Party despite the increased secularization of Canadian society, and involves re-evaluating Johnston's (1985) claim that "[p]ublic policy attitude differences between religious groups are not mirrored by differences between the parties." (p.99) The argument of this paper is that Catholic voters *do* perceive differences between the parties, specifically with relation to the promotion of values found in Catholic social doctrine, and that these differences provide ideological reasons for Catholics to support the Liberal Party. There is a good deal of similarity between Catholic social teachings and general Liberal policy stances; however, this paper does not attempt to address the process, causation or evolution of this relationship. This paper represents just the first step in an attempt to understand of the modern Catholic-Liberal connection.

To develop this hypothesis that Catholic social values contribute to ideology and support for the Liberal Party, it is necessary to demonstrate several things. First, the connection between Catholicism and social policy ideas supported by Liberals needs to be established. Second, the reality of these connections – evidence that they are borne out in the opinions and attitudes of voters – must be shown. Last, the community dimension of this connection must be proven, to show that non-Catholic Liberal supporters can be, in part, identified by their proximity to Catholic communities. After a discussion of extant literature, this paper proceeds in this order to show that the current Catholic-Liberal connection is grounded in ideology and, as such, therefore unlikely to be “shown the door” any time soon.

The Puzzle Pieces

The connection between Catholics and the Liberal Party has been a persistent puzzle in Canadian politics for decades. Some of the very first studies of voting in Canada demonstrated that religion was one of the most important cleavages in Canadian society. Laponce's 1972 study of the elections from 1949-68, for example, highlighted the significance of the voting behaviour of Catholics, especially for the Liberal Party. For the elections between 1957 and 1968, his analysis of the Liberal Party's support shows that religion “is the variable which, in all years, discriminates most.” (p.280)

Meisel's (1956) study of Kingston, Ontario during the 1953 federal and 1955 provincial elections also demonstrates a clear bias, held by Catholics, in favour of the Liberal party, especially at the federal level. He notes that in 1953 83% of Catholics reported a Liberal vote, compared to 2% who voted for the Conservatives and 13% who reported not voting at all. (p.486) This bias was most pronounced among older voters, and less pronounced among Catholics with higher socioeconomic status. (p.491). Interestingly, Meisel also found that in the 1955 Ontario election those who were “close to church”, defined as either being a member of a religious order or a teacher in a Catholic school, were less inclined to vote Liberal. His explanation for this curious result is based upon a possible difference between the two types of Catholics: “the greater concern of the rank and file with the general or socio-political tradition of the members of their religious organization, with what one might call its ‘community aspects,’ rather than with matters of church policy or of the particular interests of their church as an association.” (p.495)

This connection between Catholic voters and the Liberal Party was further substantiated with data from the 1968 election (Meisel 1973). Meisel also found that Catholics systematically rated the Liberal Party better than the others in both 1965 and 1968; aside from vote choice, there

appeared to be . Later election studies also highlighted the relationship between Catholics and the Liberal Party (see, for example, Lijphart 1979, Clarke et al. 1980, Johnston et al. 1992, Nevitte et al. 2000, Blais et al. 2002).

The puzzle of Catholic voting comes from two sources. First, as several authors who have investigated the connection have noted (Johnston 1985; Gidengil 1992), the historic battles that involved religion (schooling, for example) are long since over. Second, at no time have Canadian political parties embraced religious issues or groups as their own. Engelmann and Schwartz (1975:74-75) suggest that religion has not been important at the federal level because “Religious issues do not normally become national, since the areas in which they are most likely to arise, child welfare, the solemnization of marriage, divorce, and education, are all under provincial jurisdiction.” However, they also note that “Religion remains a potent political force in Canada. If religious parties, or their opposites, are lacking it is not because of a lack of religious tensions.”(p.76) Even without an explicit relationship, the connection between Catholics and the Liberal Party continues, evident again in the 2004 election (Gidengil et al. 2006). The question remains: what can explain this connection?

As mentioned at the outset of this paper, some attempts to resolve this puzzle have been made. Irvine (1974) claimed that Liberal voting and Catholic religious affiliation were coincidental, both being transmitted from parents to children. He writes, “It seems clear that all of the religious polarization observed with respect to the vote or to identification in Canada is traceable to those who inherit their identities.”(p.563) Johnston (1985) also puzzled over this connection, tempering Irvine’s claim to “success” by showing that familial socialization alone could not account for the degree of religious voting witnessed in Canadian elections. He also noted that

...the Catholic-Non Catholic difference cannot be resolved into some other cleavage. Class, for example, is only weakly associated with religious preference and controlling for class does not attenuate the religious effect on party preference. The religious effect is not merely a proxy for French-English differences. Indeed, in many recent surveys, English Catholics are most distinct from English non-Catholics than are French Catholics. Similarly, the religious cleavage does not simply stand for differences by country of ancestors or country of birth. As a predictor of party choice, religion stands by itself.(p.100)

Adding another piece to the puzzle is Johnston’s 1991 work that shows the importance of the concentration of Catholics in suppressing class and activating religion as a voting cleavage. This finding was updated by Belanger and Eagles (2005), who used electoral district-level data to confirm the importance of a Catholic community in the religious vote in the 2000 election. They note: “the politicization of religion in Canada does spring from social, rather than simply individual-level, processes – a finding that is somewhat comforting given the general secularization of Canadian society and the absence of explicitly religious issues and platforms at election time.”(p.10)

Finally, the Catholic-Liberal connection was subject to exhaustive statistical tests by Blais (2005), who was unable to find a clear explanation for the voting connection – not different views on issues, not ethnicity, and not support for Catholic party leaders or candidates. Blais also found, using 1984 data, no connection between the concentration of Catholics in a riding and vote behaviour, somewhat contrary to Belanger and Eagles. He concluded that “Party

identification is clearly part of the story. But it is not the whole story...we still do not know much about why Catholics vote Liberal.”(p.830)

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to tackle this puzzle once again, but from a slightly different angle. Johnston (1985:112) hypothesized about a distinct Catholic ethos affecting vote behaviour, something that could be adopted through socialization, such as “growing up Catholic.” In his 1991 work, Johnston wrote that “a full and proper exploration of the institutional and ideological characteristics of Canadian Catholics may well reveal them to be a distinct subcommunity, even if Catholics are not often that much more conscious than are non-Catholics of their corporate character.”(p.128) Gidengil (1992) also commented on this notion of an ethos in her review of Canadian voting literature: “Different religions are associated with very different ideas about questions of individual responsibility, submission to state authority, hierarchy, the organization of society and the extent of the temporal sphere – giving rise to values which can endure even when the religious beliefs themselves have become less salient.” (p.229) This is one possible explanation that has yet to be fully examined.

Even without active religiosity, it is possible that Catholicism has informed and shaped the culture of certain Canadian voters to the point that they have developed a value system rooted in Catholic values. It is this socialization, into a value system, or ideology, that is best expressed by the Liberal Party, that is at the root of modern Catholic-Liberal voting. The next sections of the paper discuss the possibility of a religion creating an ideology, what a Catholic value system might look like, and whether or not it is logical to consider a Catholic ethos existing in Canada.

Religion and Values: Can religion inform a culture?

There is reason to think that Catholicism, like other religions, is capable of fundamentally altering one’s outlook or normal perspective on life. Clifford Geertz (1966) noted that religion could be taken as a form of culture. He defined religion as

a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.(p.4)

He argued that the most important impact of religion is how it “reflect(s) back to color the individual’s conception of the established world of bare fact.”(p.35) It makes sense to think that a religion can inform one’s values and morals to the point that what someone believes is just – for example, the appropriate role of government or how social welfare should be structured or rights allocated – will converge with views held by other co-religionists. Geertz noted that “Religion is sociologically interesting not because, as vulgar positivism would have it, it describes the social order (which, in so far as it does, it does only very obliquely but very incompletely), but because, like environment, political power, wealth, jural obligation, personal affection, and a sense of beauty, it shapes it.” (p.35-6) The culture of an area, therefore, may be able to trace its roots, at least partially, back to the predominant religion of its people.

That religion can inform, and shape, a culture is evident in Williams and Demerath’s (1991) study of Springfield, Massachusetts. They examined the use of “civic religion” in the city, by which they mean the attachment of religious imagery to political issues. They found that the city’s politicians used what they called “the ideology of community” to gather support for a particularly controversial proposal. They note,

The ideology of community comprises recurrent elements in the rhetoric of administration politicians and in newspaper editorials supporting the city's positions on community issues. Although it is not explicitly religious, it resonates with symbols of the moral community that are related to civil religious themes... The major component of the ideology of community is a call for the common good.(p.427)

Williams and Demerath also found that the high concentration of Christians (majority Catholic) in the city had altered the norms and expectations of citizens for city government, to the point that certain 'religious' activities, like displaying a crèche in the winter, were seen as appropriate: "that many do not perceive these symbols as 'sectarian' indicates that they represent general 'civic religious' sentiments."(p.429) This study demonstrates that even when religion is not an explicit part of politics, the values held by religious citizens can do much to affect the culture of the community in which they live. Furthermore, the effect of religious values can extend beyond religious adherents to others in the community, who may internalize the values, or worldview, without adopting the religion. Williams (1996:370) summarizes this process: "To absorb a religious worldview is to absorb a set of taken-for-granted assumptions about one's duty to God *and to society*."(emphasis added) In turn, this worldview can impact policy preferences and ideological placements. Thus, the social values of a religion can easily become a part of one's overall value system, regardless of religious adherence.

In terms of voting, Dalton (2002:79) notes that "[c]itizen behaviour may appear inconsistent and illogical... unless the research considers the values of each person and how he or she applies these values to specific situations." Examining religious voting, Dalton finds that unlike the decline in importance of class voting in advanced industrial democracies, religion continues to be a significant predictor of vote choice "[d]espite the paucity of explicitly religious issues and the lack of religious themes in most campaigns."(p.161) As he puts it, "Religion constitutes a hidden agenda of politics, tapping differences in values and moral beliefs that might not be expressed in a campaign but nevertheless influence voter choices."(p.160) That a religion can shape one's views and ideology, then, is both logical and evident in modern society.

The Catholic Viewpoint

Having established that religious values can shape one's value system, the next task is to identify what a Catholic value system, or Catholic ethos, would look like. Common wisdom suggests that Catholics should be opposed to abortion and same-sex marriage because of the teachings of the Church. Indeed, Blais (2005) finds that Catholics are more conservative on these two issues, but he also finds that such stances lead to support for the Conservative Party. A Catholic ethos that contributes to Liberal voting, then, cannot be based upon these opinions. However, these two issues are simply the most obvious of "Catholic" stances – they do not represent the totality of Catholic ideology. Much work has been done to understand the ideological views of Catholics in the United States. Among the most interesting studies is one drawn from the Notre Dame Study of Catholic Parish Life, conducted in 1983 and 1984. Leege and Welch (1989) found that there was real variation among parishioners in terms of policy preferences, but that these preferences could be linked to specific views. For example, individuals who were 'social Catholics', in the sense that they held more communitarian rather than individualistic views, were more likely to place highly on social liberalism issues such as busing for racial integration and the Equal Rights Amendment. It is thus clear that one cannot simply equate Catholicism with social conservatism.

Welch and Leege (1988) also found that the sociopolitical attitudes of Catholics were shaped by their views of God. In their paper, they found that those who felt connected to God through their community were more likely to hold Liberal views on policy issues. Furthermore, they found that ‘worldviews’ held by Catholics were more important for explaining sociopolitical attitudes than Church attendance. These findings suggest that there is an element of Catholicism that is clearly related to social liberalism. Furthermore, it is not mass attendance or adherence to the Catholic faith that shapes these attitudes, but a more general, normative viewpoint. This echoes Meisel’s suggestion that the reason Catholics who were “close to God” voted Conservative and lay Catholics voted Liberal in Kingston in the 1950s was because of two different views of Catholicism, one doctrinal and church-based, the other more cultural and community-based. In other words, the “culture” of Catholicism, separate from the explicit teachings of priests, may be an important part of the Catholic-Liberal connection.

The Doctrine-Party Connection

If there is a liberal Catholic ethos, how does it relate to the stances of the Liberal Party? Guth and Fraser (2001) found that there are distinct connections between different religious groups and Canadian political parties. They found “partisan profiles that cohere with the religious composition of each party”(p.59) and note that there is a connection between support for the Liberal Party and lay liberalism.³ As noted above, liberalism is a trait held by many Catholics. Furthermore, referring to the entire party system, Guth and Fraser (2001) argue that “...it is not surprising to discover that the social theologies that are characteristic of these difference religious groups also show evidence of influencing the major parties. Evangelical individualism and moralism color the Reform Party’s program, secular libertarianism and religious communitarianism shape the NDP’s social and economic attitudes, while Catholic communitarianism still provides one foundation of the Liberal ethos.” (Guth and Fraser 2001:63)

In explaining this connection, Guth and Fraser (2001:56) note that “Catholic social teachings have historically propounded a strong view of community responsibility, reinforced in recent years by the pronouncements of the Canadian bishops.” It is this idea of community responsibility that is echoed most obviously in the ideology of the Liberal Party. For example, documents from Pope John XXIII state that,

It is also demanded by the common good that civil authorities should make earnest efforts to bring about a situation in which individual citizens can easily exercise their rights and fulfill their duties as well. For experience has taught us that, unless these authorities taken suitable action with regard to economic, political and cultural matters, inequalities between the citizens tend to become more and more widespread, especially in the modern world, and as a result human rights are rendered totally ineffective and the fulfillment of duties is compromised. (*Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth*, Encyclical Letter of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty issued on Holy Thursday, April 11, 1963. <http://www.osjspm.org/cst/pt.htm>)

A 1986 letter from the U.S. Catholic Bishops expands upon this theme:

Society as a whole, acting through public and private institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights. In addition to the clear responsibility of private institutions, government has an essential responsibility in this

³ Guth and Fraser define “lay liberalism” as “the notion that ‘all the religions of the world are equally true and good,’ a rejection of any religious particularism that claims truth only for one faith.”(p.56)

area. This does not mean that government has the primary or exclusive role, but it does have a positive moral responsibility in safeguarding human rights and ensuring that the minimum conditions of human dignity are met for all. In a democracy, government is a means by which we can act together to protect what is important to us and to promote our common values.” (Economic Justice for All, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, U.S. Catholic Bishops 1986. <http://www.osjspm.org/cst/eja.htm>)

There are many similarities between these statements and statements of the Liberal Party. The Party’s website claims that “the Liberal Party of Canada believes in the promotion of the fundamental rights and freedoms of persons, under the rule of law, and commits itself to the protection of these essential values and their constant adaptation in light of the changing needs of modern Canadian society.”(Liberal Party of Canada 2006) The preamble to the Liberal Party constitution also states that “[t]he Liberal Party of Canada is dedicated to the principles that have historically sustained the Party: individual freedom, responsibility and human dignity in the framework of a just society, and political freedom in the framework of meaningful participation by all persons.” These statements reveal a belief that society should help its least fortunate members *and* that government is the right organization to accomplish that. Furthermore, human rights are paramount for recognizing the worth of human beings and must be prioritized. In terms of establishing an ideological connection between Catholic voters and the Liberal Party, what is important is that there are similar *values* that are obvious in these statements.

Do Catholic Values Contribute to Liberal Voting?

The idea that there is a Catholic ethos that leads voters to prefer the Liberal Party seems like a fairly simple claim to make – but one that is not easy to establish. The most difficult task is to identify what a Catholic ethos would look like. From the quotations and discussion above, it is clear that there are some links between Catholic social teachings and the Liberal Party, links that are not only evident when comparing documents from the two groups but that also have been documented by other scholars. Nonetheless, it is difficult to establish the exact parameters of the ethos.

One way to approximate preference for a political party on the basis of views is to look at how Catholics responded to questions asked in the 2004 Canadian Election Study. Using this data, Blais (2005) concludes that Catholics do not systematically differ from non-Catholics. This conclusion is somewhat misleading. Blais notes, for example, that “Catholics are more conservative on abortion and gay marriage. But this does not explain their support for the Liberal party, since opposition to abortion and gay marriage tends to enhance support for the Conservative party.”(p.827) However, it should not be surprising that the stances of Catholics do not correspond to the Liberal Party’s exactly – the connection between Liberals and Catholics is not new, nor is it rooted in contemporary policy ideas.⁴ Instead, this paper proposes that the connection between the two groups is rooted in *values* that are transmitted through contact with the Catholic religion. From this viewpoint, a glance at Blais’s Table 4 reveals that Catholicism does have an impact on two questions that relate to the government’s role in social justice: how much should be done to reduce the gap between the rich and poor, and how much should be done for women. Thus some support for a values or ethos-based approach to Catholic voting behaviour exists in Blais’s analysis.

⁴ I would like to thank Bob Young for pointing out this key difference between Blais’s and my work.

Another way to consider whether a Catholic ethos is responsible for the connection between Catholics and Liberals comes from a question asked in the CNES mailback questionnaire. Respondents were asked which Federal party best represents their views. Table 1 shows responses for Catholics and non-Catholics. (Respondents from Quebec were excluded in this and all analyses in this paper, as is customary, due to the high percentage of Catholics in that province.) As you can see, there is an overwhelming difference between the responses of the two groups – more than 39% of Catholics chose the Liberals as best representing their views, while only 24% of non-Catholics did (less than those who chose the Conservatives). Given that “views” was not defined as relating to any issue or topic in particular, this lends some support to the idea that the Liberal Party is seen as the best representative of Catholic values.⁵

In a further attempt to approximate what a Catholic ethos might look like, I examined responses to questions asked on the 2004 Canadian Election Study Mailback Questionnaire. The questions (in sections A and B of the questionnaire) probed respondents’ views of rights, government activities, and changing lifestyles. Overall, the questions could be summarized as probing social liberalism. Questions were recoded so higher values indicated more liberal views. These questions were chosen because they are more general than those asked during the campaign period, and also because the mailback questionnaire taps attitudes after an election, once the hype and intensity of the campaign has ended. If the link between Catholics and the Liberal Party is an underlying one, which has been shown to be overcome by more salient issues (see, for example, Mendelsohn and Nadeau 1997), then such questions would have the best possibility of tapping into general values.

Through ANOVA analyses, it was shown that Catholics were significantly different from non-Catholics on seven questions. As might be expected, two of the questions discussed newer lifestyles and traditional family values, and revealed Catholics’ conservative opinions on these topics: “Newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society” and “This country would have many fewer problems if there was more emphasis on traditional family values”. The other five questions, however, relate to social justice: “Discrimination makes it extremely difficult for women to get jobs equal to their abilities”, “Protecting the environment is more important than creating jobs” (Catholics were more likely to disagree, indicating the importance of gainful employment for citizens), “We have gone too far in pushing bilingualism in Canada” (Catholics were more likely to disagree), “The feminist movement just tries to get equal treatment for women” and “The feminist movement encourages women to be independent and speak up for themselves.” It is interesting that three of these questions relate to women in society.

A factor analysis of fifteen of the questions (all in section A) reveals that a single underlying factor accounts for over 82% of the variance. Questions that had the highest scoring coefficients on the factor (over 0.15) were “We have gone too far in pushing equal rights in this country” (0.19774); “The welfare state makes people less willing to look after themselves” (0.18263); “Newer lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of our society” (0.16966); “This country would have many fewer problems if there was more emphasis on traditional family values” (0.23105); and “We have gone too far in pushing bilingualism in Canada” (0.15190).

Table 2 shows the mean values of different subsets of the sample on this factor. In addition to those who reported voting Liberal, Conservative and NDP, I also calculated the

⁵ There is a high correlation between responses to this question and the partisanship question asked in the same questionnaire. This is to be expected – as Blais (2005) noted, partisanship is obviously part of the reason for the connection.

means for Catholics, religious Catholics (those who say religion is “very important” in their lives), those who live in ridings that are in the 66th percentile and up for concentration of Catholics in the sample, and non-Catholics who live in these strongly Catholic ridings. While there is no statistically significant difference between Catholics and non-Catholics⁶, it is clear that if Catholics were to draw upon this dimension when making their vote choice, the Liberal Party is much closer, spatially-speaking, than either the Conservative or NDP parties. What is particularly interesting is that individuals living in high-Catholic-concentration ridings and particularly religious Catholics are the closest to the Liberal Party on this dimension of social liberalism. Even more interesting is that Catholics, in general, are further away from the Liberal Party than non-Catholics in heavily Catholic ridings.

This finding implies, in accordance with Belanger and Eagles (2005), that there is a particular *social* aspect to the connection between Liberals and Catholics. It also suggests the need to update Meisel’s (1956:495) comment that “[i]t is the political preference entertained by the mass of one’s co-religionists which seems to be an effective signpost in an election where no great issues determine one’s choice. Not the application of one’s religious principles, nor even the position taken by the leaders of one’s church, but the political tradition assigned to the religious organization viewed as a social group seems to be a decisive factor.” Perhaps it is less co-religionists and the tradition of the social group than community neighbours (who may or may not be co-religionists) and community values and traditions that influence voting in a specific way.

Support for this idea, that the Catholic ethos is a community value that is established when many Catholics live in a small area (riding), is supported by Johnston’s (1991) finding that religious voting is higher in areas that are more strongly Catholic. Further support can be found when one revisits the question about parties that best represent views. Looking at non-Catholics who live in strong Catholic ridings, 31.1% indicate that the Liberal Party best represents their views, compared to 21.9% who identify the Conservatives. This finding points to the possibility that whatever Catholic ethos there is, it may have an influence beyond those who identify themselves as Catholic. As part of the culture of an area, Catholic values may be transmitted to those who do not practice the Catholic religion, who in turn may become Liberal identifiers based on these values.

Evidence for this is available from an analysis of vote behaviour in the 2004 election. A multinomial logit model⁷ of vote choice (vote intent, from the CES campaign period survey) was estimated using age, gender, education, partisanship, immigrant status, first language being French, Catholicism, and the Catholic percentage of the riding (from 2001 census data) as independent variables. Table 3 displays the key results (full results are available upon request). Not only is the Catholic dummy variable significant for Liberal voting (RRR=1.39, $p \leq 0.005$), but the concentration of Catholics in the riding is also significant (RRR=2.52, $p \leq 0.01$). The predicted probability of voting Liberal is 0.1815 if one is not Catholic, and 0.2489 if one is. The probability of voting Liberal also increases as one’s riding becomes more Catholic; the predicted probability is 0.1520 if the riding is 0% Catholic and 0.2377 if it is 50% Catholic. As might be

⁶ Interestingly, ANOVA analysis shows that the differences between respondents who live in ridings defined by their concentration of Catholics (33rd percentile and lower, 66th and lower, 66th and higher), the p value is 0.1307, compared to a p value of 0.5735 when the analysis is done for Catholics vs. non-Catholics.

⁷ I recoded the vote intent variable from the campaign period survey so that Liberal, Conservative, NDP and “Other” were the categories. In the analysis, “Other” was the baseline.

expected (see, for example, Laponce 1969) Conservative vote choice is negatively (and significantly) influenced by these variables.

That both variables (Catholic and % Catholic riding) are significant suggests that there is some kind of community ethos, culture, or value system that is related to Catholicism, but that is not the same as belonging to the religion. The contention of this paper is that it is the social liberalism of Catholicism that translates into such a community ethos. Table 4 supports this contention, showing the results of the analysis, repeated for non-Catholics outside of Quebec. Again, the percentage of Catholics in one's riding is positively related to Liberal vote choice, and negatively related to Conservative vote choice (both significant).

Given that one expects values to inform one's vote *prior* to more proximate considerations, and that other scholars have shown the Catholicism can be overridden as an important vote consideration (Mendelsohn and Nadeau 1997), the analyses were repeated for reported vote (from the post-election CES). Tables 5 and 6 report the results. In the full sample, being Catholic continues to favourably impact Liberal voting, and work in the opposite direction for Conservative voting; using this dependent variable, Catholicism also influences against an NDP vote. What is even more interesting is that the RRR for being in a Catholic riding is much higher for reported Liberal voters (RRR=5.573) compared to those who intended to vote Liberal, and the Catholic composition of the riding is also significantly and positively related to voting NDP. For the non-Catholic subsample, being in a Catholic riding is only significant for reported Liberal voters.

These findings suggest that the "something" about living in a Catholic riding is related to a preference for more left-wing politics, which could explain the influence of the concentration of Catholics in one's riding on NDP voting as well as Liberal voting. However, that this finding only emerges when considering reported vote choice, instead of vote intention, is a bit puzzling. It may be the case that this finding is picking up the strong polarization between social liberals and social conservatives that emerged at the end of the 2004 campaign after the Liberals vilified Harper's Conservatives with charges of being extreme and standing for dramatic changes to Canada's society. If so, then messages transmitted during the campaign can be implicated in the activation of social liberal values as important factors in vote choice.

This collection of findings, while not a "smoking gun", does provide some indication that the contemporary connection between Catholics and the Liberal Party is rooted in similar values, or a Catholic ethos. There is evidence that Catholics feel the Liberal Party best represents their views; that Catholics, as a group, hold some general socially liberal views; that there is a connection between living among Catholics and espousing such views; and that living among Catholics, separate from being a Catholic, is also related to supporting the Liberal Party. These findings suggest that a Catholic ethos that prioritizes liberal social values may very well be the reason that the Liberal Party continues to enjoy strong support from Catholic Canadians.

Conclusion

This paper represents just the first step in trying to understand the contemporary link between Catholics and the Liberal Party. It proposes that there exists, as Johnston (1985) first suggested, a distinct Catholic ethos that goes beyond adherence to the Catholic faith. Much like other values and attitudes that one can gain through socialization, the Catholic ethos is one that reaches not only church-goers but also people who come into contact with strong Catholic communities. This ethos prioritizes social justice and recognizes a role for the government in providing the policies necessary to achieve it. In policy terms, this translates into support for

government intervention to lessen the gap between the rich and poor, and men and women. In voting behaviour, this ethos leads voters to support the Liberal Party.

The analyses presented above provide support for this concept of a Catholic ethos influencing Liberal support in several ways. First, Catholics hold distinct views on certain issues, and their views are spatially closer to the Liberal Party than any other Canadian political party. Second, non-Catholics that live in strong Catholic communities hold similar views, and are similarly positioned. Third, the data from the 2004 election shows that Liberal vote choice is positively influenced by being Catholic (as expected) as well as by living in a strong Catholic community (even for non-Catholics).

The next step in this project is to investigate other data to better determine the nature of the Catholic ethos in Canada. After that, I hope to examine the importance of this ethos to the Catholic-Liberal connection over time. The last step in establishing the role of a Catholic ethos in the Catholic-Liberal connection will be to investigate the causal link between Liberal values and the Catholic ethos, which Guth and Fraser (2001) suggest exists. After completing this project, it is hoped that we will finally have a clear understanding of how the pieces of this puzzle in Canadian politics fit together.

| | Non-Catholic | Catholic |
|-----------------------|--------------|----------|
| Liberal | 24.04 | 39.31 |
| Conservative | 26.01 | 17.61 |
| NDP | 13.16 | 9.43 |
| BQ | 0.30 | 0.31 |
| Other | 1.88 | 0.94 |
| Question not answered | 34.62 | 32.39 |

| | Absolute Distance from... | | |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| | Liberal Voters | Conservative Voters | NDP Voters |
| Catholics | 0.24 | 0.42 | 0.51 |
| High Catholic Ridings (66 th percentile +) | 0.15 | 0.51 | 0.41 |
| Catholics in High Catholic Ridings | 0.16 | 0.50 | 0.43 |
| Non-Catholics in High Catholic Ridings | 0.14 | 0.52 | 0.41 |
| Religious Catholics | 0.10 | 0.56 | 0.37 |

| Table 3: Multinomial Logit Analysis, Vote Intent (Canada without Quebec) | | | |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| | Liberal Vote Intent | Conservative Vote Intent | NDP Vote Intent |
| Catholic (dummy) | 1.393** (0.159) | 0.818* (0.010) | 0.848 (0.135) |
| Percentage of Catholics in Riding | 2.517** (0.876) | 0.406* (0.149) | 1.841 (0.863) |
| N | 3197 | | |
| Pseudo-R2 | 0.1254 | | |
| <p>Table reports relative risk ratios and standard errors (in parentheses). Relative risk ratios indicate the expected increase in predicted odds of voting for a specific party for a one-unit increase in the independent variable, all else being held equal.</p> <p>Controls (not reported) were age, gender, education, immigrant status, French first language learned, partisanship, anger at the sponsorship scandal, and non-European descent.</p> <p>*=$p \leq 0.10$ **=$p \leq 0.01$ ***=$p \leq 0.001$</p> | | | |

| Table 4: Multinomial Logit Analysis, Vote Intent, Canada without Quebec, Non-Catholics Only | | | |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| | Liberal Vote Intent | Conservative Vote Intent | NDP Vote Intent |
| Percentage of Catholics in Riding | 2.257* (1.041) | 0.419* (0.187) | 1.200 (0.706) |
| N | 2361 | | |
| Pseudo-R2 | 0.1211 | | |
| <p>Table reports relative risk ratios and standard errors (in parentheses). Relative risk ratios indicate the expected increase in predicted odds of voting for a specific party for a one-unit increase in the independent variable, all else being held equal.</p> <p>Controls (not reported) were age, gender, education, immigrant status, French first language learned, partisanship, anger at the sponsorship scandal, and non-European descent.</p> <p>*=$p \leq 0.10$ **=$p \leq 0.01$ ***=$p \leq 0.001$</p> | | | |

| Table 5: Multinomial Logit Analysis, Reported Vote, Canada without Quebec | | | |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| | Liberal Vote Intent | Conservative Vote Intent | NDP Vote Intent |
| Catholic (dummy) | 1.233* (0.137) | 0.684** (0.082) | 0.760* (0.114) |
| Percentage of Catholics in Riding | 5.573*** (1.882) | 1.083 (0.389) | 2.562* (1.164) |
| N | 3197 | | |
| Pseudo-R2 | 0.0805 | | |
| <p>Table reports relative risk ratios and standard errors (in parentheses). Relative risk ratios indicate the expected increase in predicted odds of voting for a specific party for a one-unit increase in the independent variable, all else being held equal.</p> <p>Controls (not reported) were age, gender, education, immigrant status, French first language learned, partisanship, anger at the sponsorship scandal, and non-European descent.</p> <p>*=p<=0.10 **=p<=0.01 ***=p<=0.001</p> | | | |

| Table 6: Multinomial Logit Analysis, Reported Vote, Canada without Quebec, Non-Catholics Only | | | |
|---|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| | Liberal Vote Intent | Conservative Vote Intent | NDP Vote Intent |
| Percentage of Catholics in Riding | 5.274*** (2.369) | 1.316 (0.578) | 2.043 (1.135) |
| N | 2361 | | |
| Pseudo-R2 | 0.0757 | | |
| <p>Table reports relative risk ratios and standard errors (in parentheses). Relative risk ratios indicate the expected increase in predicted odds of voting for a specific party for a one-unit increase in the independent variable, all else being held equal.</p> <p>Controls (not reported) were age, gender, education, immigrant status, French first language learned, partisanship, anger at the sponsorship scandal, and non-European descent.</p> <p>*=p<=0.10 **=p<=0.01 ***=p<=0.001</p> | | | |

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