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**Book Review: Wittenberg, J. (2006). *Crucibles of Political Loyalty: Church Institutions and Electoral Continuity in Hungary*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press**

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In sum, this book combines much of the best that comparative politics has to offer: conceptually clear and rigorous theorizing based on insights from extensive field work, and tested in a methodologically solid fashion on a wealth of quantitative and qualitative data. The conclusions constitute a major contribution to our understanding of violence in civil conflict. The theory generates a multitude of implications—only some of which the author has tested—and invites extensions that themselves will generate multiple testable implications. The subject matter is fascinating, and the author’s encyclopedic treatment of anecdotes from the literature on civil wars in general and a detailed history of one such war, makes the book a highly enjoyable read. In addition, the meticulous construction of the theory and explicit objectives laid out as reasons for the structure of the empirical analysis in addition to the detailed appendices will endear the book to students and instructors of the comparative method.

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In 1989, Johannes Hempel, the Lutheran bishop of Saxony in East Germany, noted, “State representatives at various levels have often said to us over the years, ‘The question of power has been decided here—the socialist state has taken power.’ We in the Church answered, ‘So it is, and we don’t want any part of it.’” The remark was indicative of traditional Protestantism’s accommodation to the realities that lay behind the Iron Curtain. Although they were exceptions, Protestant churches were far less confrontational or committed to their autonomy than were their Roman Catholic counterparts (Osa, 2003; Ramet, 1998). Its greater tension with socialism may be one reason that the Catholic Church retained members under Communism far better than did Protestant churches. Stubborn Catholic persistence appears to continue influencing patterns of religiosity today (Froese & Pfaff, 2001).

The struggle between the church and the state is at the center of Jason Wittenberg's exemplary book, which touches equally on political science and social science history. It offers a sociological theory that can help explain the "paradox of political persistence"—that is, the intergenerational transmission of political preferences. The question he poses is, "Why do mass political loyalties persist long after the circumstances around which they arose have disappeared?" (p. 1). Political persistence has been observed many societies, including in 20th-century Hungary, where voters in some regions gave their support to parties of the Right before Communism and after its demise. Loyalty persisted despite the regime's concerted efforts to transform Hungarian society, particularly rural strongholds of conservatism. Under Communism, rural society experienced urbanization, collectivization, and concerted efforts to subordinate civil society to party control. One indicator of the sweeping breadth of change is Hungary's collectivization rate of more than 80%, which massively transformed the agrarian social structure (quite in contrast to Poland, where small-holder agriculture survived). In addition to the scale of change, Wittenberg provides several reasons why Hungary is a good case study: some initial electoral support for Communism; regime moderation after 1956 that allowed opponents some room to maneuver; a multiconfessional landscape (Roman Catholic, Calvinist Reformed, and Lutheran); and not least, the possibility of diligently assembling election data at the community level for the 1945, 1990, 1994, and 1998 national parliamentary elections.

So why did some regions retain their rightist orientation while others did not? Wittenberg's answer, based on an impressive combination of state-of-the-art quantitative analysis and detailed interpretation of qualitative evidence is that "Persistent attachments to rightist parties emerged as an outgrowth of local church-based social networks that girded their members against pressures to succumb to the many incentives to assimilate into the surrounding socialist milieu" (p. 13). Serving as the crucibles for casting political loyalties, active local church organizations, led by defiant clergy, mobilized to resist efforts to remake society, secularize education, and promote socialist culture (including scientific atheism). Church communities helped to keep a conservative, rural social milieu intact, "fostering social interaction independent of the Party's supervision" (pp. 51-52). But where churches failed to assert their interests and independence, the distinctive society of rural Hungary—and with it, the political loyalties it nourished—eroded.

Treating electoral preference for the same party, or family of parties, at the local level as an indicator of persistent mass partisan attachments, Wittenberg seeks to uncover the social mechanisms that explain party loyalty. This is achieved by combining analysis of municipal electoral returns across Hungary with in-depth analysis of church-state relations over four decades in two counties. The statistical analysis focuses on electoral results for party lists rather than for individual candidates, as they are a better indicator of partisanship and eliminate the idiosyncratic effects of particular candidates. Contemporary survey data reinforce the findings, demonstrating the enduring connection between church members and a preference for rightist parties evident in the 1990s.

The large-N analysis of electoral returns in around 3,000 municipalities establishes patterns of electoral continuity and discontinuity linked with confession. However, to reveal the “microlevel mechanisms” that transmit political loyalties, Wittenberg turns to party and church records from two provinces, one predominantly Catholic and the other predominantly Reformed, for purposes of qualitative assessment. While the state preserved nominal religious freedom, it attacked the traditional privileges and land-holdings of the churches. Mandatory religious training was eliminated, but pupils and their parents could voluntarily enroll in confessional instruction. Wittenberg shows that a bitter struggle ensued, as state agencies and teachers tried to discourage or suppress enrollment and clergy tried to elevate it. In those localities in which active, defiant clergy maintained enrollments, the area’s religious milieu tended to persist. In other areas, where clergymen were co-opted, lacked initiative, or were intimidated, religious communities often gave way.

Where those communities gave way, the relational mechanisms transmitting traditional orientations across generations also gave way. Wittenberg returns to statistical analyses of aggregated data to support his qualitative findings. Based on graphical and statistical methods, including Gary King’s Ecological Inference Model, Wittenberg tests whether the rate of religious youth enrollment in the decades after 1945 explains the persistence of electoral loyalties. Multivariate analysis, backed by ecological regression, consistently reveals correlations between the proportion of youth enrolled in religious instruction and subsequent voting patterns. Confessional differences are apparent, corresponding to qualitative evidence that showed that Catholic clergy were more likely to be hostile to Communism and to mobilize parishioners than Protestant clergy. As a result, Reformed Protestants are less likely to remain religiously committed after Communism and less likely to have persistent political loyalties to the Right.

The differing performance of Catholic versus Protestant religious communities is explained through institutional analysis. After an initial period of open defiance, the Catholic Church gradually accommodated itself to the new order. But it never made concessions as damaging as did the Reformed Church, which went so far as to modify its doctrines, once proclaiming that “revolutionary socialism” was consistent with “God’s just, merciful, and continuous judgment” (p. 104). The reason Wittenberg gives for the difference is that the Catholic Church inherited institutional features that made it more robust. These included a source of authority external to the polity (the Vatican), an official theology elevating the role of the clergy and the necessity of celebrating the Mass for redemption, and pastors dependent on the Roman hierarchy for certification of their authority. These gave the Catholic Church stronger powers of social control over parishioners and clergymen as well as the solidarity to resist.

Wittenberg’s fascinating narrative sections detail how Hungarian Communists intent on building Socialism in the Soviet mode initiated a “Battle for Souls.” Like their comrades across the region, they intended to drive people out of the churches, eliminate religious influence in education, and assail “reactionary clericalism.”

Land reforms and educational reforms removed the twin pillars of the churches' traditional position and authority. So how did churches weather the revolutionary storm? As Wittenberg astutely observes, whatever the formal understanding reached by Communist elites and ecclesiastical officials in the national capitol, the real struggle was in local parishes. There ensued a tug-of-war between a resourceful state and besieged churches to set the costs and benefits of church affiliation and religious participation. The clergy had little to offer adherents except soft incentives, such as a feeling of community, spiritual succor, the promise of redemption, and other immanent rewards. As Wittenberg realizes, these rewards are valuable largely to the extent that others are involved. He notes that "being nominally Roman Catholic (or Calvinist) mattered less for the transmission of rightist attachments than being around other Catholics (or Calvinists) in a church community" (p. 51). This echoes the insight of the rational choice theory of religion, which contends that religious goods are collectively produced, meaning that their value to the individual is determined, at least in part, by what others in the group contribute (Iannaccone, 1994). In focusing on the rate of enrollment in religious education, Wittenberg aptly chose an indicator not only of the cohesion of underlying religious social networks but also one that suggests the probable quality of those goods for adherents.

Wittenberg draws on cascade models of behavior—which make an actor's decision to participate dependent on how many others participate—to explain varying attachment to church communities. "Church community" is understood as "the aggregate adherence to religious rules and rituals" (p. 14). Church attendance, baptisms, confirmations, weddings, funerals, and so on are all concrete indicators of community. But what of individual belief? The strength of faith and the ideal incentives it creates should have helped determine the distribution of participation thresholds in a given community. Presumably, many towns were characterized not by a normal distribution of religious thresholds but by large clusters of citizens with either high or low thresholds, imposing conditions influencing church vitality independent of clerical zeal. Of course, data limitations obstruct this line of inquiry fully. Still, Wittenberg's institutional analysis indicates that the rules of a religious organization matter. Yet many of those rules are theologically derived, meaning that their authority depends on belief. Religious beliefs that emphasize subordination to the will of an institutional authority for salvation (e.g., Roman Catholicism) will presumably lower the average participation threshold among the faithful. Doctrines that emphasize private conscience and the priesthood of all believers would probably increase the average participation threshold within a group of adherents (e.g., Protestant churches). This may help to explain why Catholics, on average, may have been more prone to participation and thus available to respond to priestly mobilization than the Protestants. It would be instructive to have some indication of the strength of belief, such as rates of church attendance or voluntary commitment, before the "Battle for Souls" began. To what extent should we pay attention to ideological variables? Were Catholics simply more pious, or did the nature of beliefs really matter?

It would be a pity if Wittenberg's audience were limited by its Hungarian case. Certainly, he has done a great service to sociologists of religion and area specialists alike in demonstrating how churches can provide the basis for an alternative culture and endure as a rival pole of social identification in hostile regimes. Yet we should not understand the book's contribution primarily as a study of churches or of socialist/postsocialist society. Wittenberg's object of analysis is political culture. He offers insight into the social mechanisms by which political identifications persist, are forged, or are altered. Sociologically, he suggests that collective loyalties are most robust when they have a relational foundation in organizations that mobilize people and involve them in activities that reinforce group solidarity. This lesson is of great historical and comparative importance, and Wittenberg conveys it with immense skill and analytic clarity, backed by impressive evidence. *Crucibles of Political Loyalty* should have an impact on students of political culture, experts on religion and politics, historical and comparative methodologists, and analysts of electoral politics. It will surely inspire social scientists to focus on mechanisms in their efforts to explain complex social phenomena.

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