

Thesis Summary

Title: God Help the Girl: The Catholic Church and Prostitution Policy Debates in Poland and the Philippines

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Abstract

This dissertation seeks to determine the policy stances of the Catholic Churches in Poland and the Philippines regarding the issue of prostitution. It endeavors to explain why these stances diverge, despite the two Churches ostensibly having the same core theology, and similar levels of sexual conservatism. I argue that the difference can be best explained by treating both Churches as interest groups, which are subject to interest-based moral panics in the right circumstances. As such, both Churches have a vested interest in maintaining their positions as putative national guardians. This position is the source of their moral authority, which they channel into political influence that preserves their power in a secularizing world. Engaging in issues that touch greater national anxieties is a way to maintain moral authority as a national Church.

I argue that the Philippine Church's position is increasingly abolitionist. As time passes, prostitution is ever more conflated with human trafficking, and virtually all prostitutes are considered to be victims of sexual and economic exploitation. An abolitionist position serves the Church's political interest because, in the Philippines, prostitution has become a metonym for the exploitation of the nation by foreign powers. Prostitution of women and children is strongly associated with sex tourism, or prostitution in the service of the American military: it is a reminder of the Philippines' perceived status as a poor country and a neo-colony. Hence, to address prostitution is to defend the Filipino nation against abstract foreign threats, which are given concrete form in the person of the sex tourist.

The Polish Catholic Church, however, has not developed a coherent policy stance. It occasionally denounces foreign prostitutes, but also treats prostitutes of both Polish and foreign nationality as victims of human trafficking. More frequently, prostitutes are seen as victims of individual and familial dysfunction, whose rehabilitation and healing take place largely outside the sphere of the state and its policy instruments. This incoherent approach, too, can be explained with recourse to moral panic theory: the Polish context operates in such a way that a prostitution-related moral panic is *not* in the Polish Catholic Church's organizational interest. Prostitution is *not* a metonym for national exploitation, and foreign prostitutes are not seen as major threats to the nation, either. There is also little incentive to portray prostitution as a large, systemic problem,

as doing so would return Poland to the status of poor, post-communist country, which it seeks to transcend. A more individualistic problem narrative allows the Church to present itself as the defender of vulnerable women, without introducing narratives that might interfere dangerously with other advocacies.

As such, this thesis joins the body of literature that examines Churches as interest groups, arguing for more political and sociological explanations to explain policy positions.