Introduction

The organizational dimensions of religion as well as the religious dimensions of organizations have long warranted the attention of sociologists (Demerath, Hall, Schmitt and Williams 1998). The literature on the former examines how religious denominations have tended to become more technocratic, bureaucratized, and professionalized, and increasingly like their secular counterparts (Bruce 2006), in order to enhance their political effectiveness, institutional efficiency, and social organization.

Within the specific denomination of Catholicism, the Catholic Church has a long history of pressing public claims in national and international policy arenas (Hanson 1987). Indeed, in many parts of the world, there are ample contemporary and historical examples of Catholicism as "public religion" (Casanova 1994:9). Instead of Catholicism's public role being liquidated, it is reaffirming its presence as an active, non-violent force in civil society (Manuel, Reardon and Wilcox 2006), paralleling developments in other faith traditions (Lechner 1991).

How, then, does a complex, multi-level and millenia-old international religious organization like the Catholic Church adapt its public discourses and institutional structures to the three-fold configuration of a differentiated public square (Casanova 1994; Yamane 2005), declining commitment to religious authority and identity (Norris and Inglehart 2004; D'Antonio, Davidson, Hoge and Gautier 2011), and globally diffusing human rights culture (Levy and Snzaider 2006) in a modern and pluralistic society?

This article attempts to answer this question through a cross-national analysis of the claims-making and institutional structures of the Catholic hierarchies of Chile, Ireland, and Nigeria. While there is an extant literature on national Catholic leadership conferences (Burns 1992; Gill 1998; Levine 1981; Mooney 2006; Okure 2009; Smith 1982; Yamane 2005), much of this research is not fully comparative as very few studies involve an investigation of

cases from different world regional contexts, or comparisons representing different varieties of Catholicism within a comparative-historical framework. In most studies, entire world regions, such as Africa, are omitted. In addition, it is difficult to find studies of a few select countries incorporating a close examination of the discursive and institutional components of the Catholic Church together – almost all prior research on national hierarchies – even that with an expressly comparative purpose – involves looking at one or the other as the principal focus but not both at the same time.

At a theoretical level, prior research tends to understand the Catholic Church largely within a functionalist framework (Vallier 1970; Bruneau 1982), in which the church is assumed to play a key role in holding society together by providing it with a common set of basic values and norms which infuses the general population, a value system sustained by religious leadership and grassroots commitment. Moreover, this perspective stresses how the church adapts in response to dynamics going on in the surrounding society including growing secularization.. Empirically, this "outside in" perspective involves paying attention to the "top down" institutional structures the church employs to prolong its integrative role in society. These can take different forms ranging from forging alliances with political elites, promoting Catholic associational life, and acting as society's moral conscience (Vallier 1970; Levine 1981). This functionalist interpretation has mostly been applied to contexts in which the church enjoys a monopoly position as the single dominant religious institution in a society.

A second theoretical perspective adopts a more voluntarist, nonstructural approach by stressing how particular actors in the church, motivated by such things as significant religious ideas (Smith 1982; Mainwaring and Wilde 1989; Bruce 2011), the degree of religious competition (Gill 1998), or the concerns, views and interests of the laity in the surrounding society (Hagopian 2009), may purposely, strategically, or willingly choose to adapt to the

local environment rather than merely adapting, in a kind of automatic way, to external changes. This "inside out" perspective thus focuses on how the church itself may bring influence to bear on its immediate social context and challenge rather than sustain the status quo. It also places emphasis on how church actors may be intentionally or consciously responsive to specific contexts and specific times rather than passive adaptors of structural conditions. This implies focusing on internal church doctrines or external circumstances and how "bottom up" groups as well as "top down" elites within the church may act in relation to them. Paradoxically, grassroots groups frequently invoke religious orthodoxy to challenge institutional church practices (Bruce 2011). At the same time, structural inertia in the church makes sudden organizational innovation difficult and partly explains the church's longevity.. This more recent voluntarist interpretation has tended to be applied to settings in which the church's monopoly is eroding and facing growing legitimacy challenges arising from declining religious belief and practice, redefinitions of church-state interactions, religious competition, and reductions in workforce personnel (Hagopian 2009).

The present study aligns with the latter perspective by focusing on the localization of national churches and the dialectical nature of the church's adaptation to the surrounding social context, paying particular attention to the evolving inter-relation between local and global conditions and dynamics in shaping – and sometimes constraining – the church as a public actor, significant issues that have received relatively little analysis within prior research on the church. I argue that such an investigation contains two important theoretical lessons for the study of religious organizations and institutions in general. Specifically, it highlights the importance of local internal contexts on religious institutions and how globally available religious rubrics bear upon national church dynamics. Thus, the student of religious institutions must attend to not only the local situation but also the relationships between different national churches.

I begin by discussing the conceptual framework and the propositions derived from it. This is followed by a brief discussion of the cases and methods utilized in the study. The third part compares the three Catholic hierarchies with regard to variation in their discursive strategies and organizational structures. The final section of the paper summarizes the empirical findings and theoretical contribution and concludes with directions for future research.

Conceptual Framework

There are a number of good conceptual reasons for expecting variation in the discursive strategies and organizational arrangements of Catholic leadership conferences amidst different social worlds.

The research literature on the intimacy between ethnic and religious identity (Martin 1978; Manuel, Reardon and Wilcox 2006; Zubrzycki 2012) points to the important influence of national historical experiences on religious allegiance. This is particularly the case in societies characterized by a period of colonization by a foreign power or authoritarian government by a communist regime, when religious institutions can play a significant role in channelling the expression of national belonging. This often results in religious identity becoming strongly intertwined with political identity. Religious leaders may also voice opposition to the national society or operate as a minority denomination largely external to the cultural context (Manuel, Reardon and Wilcox 2006; Johnston and Figa 1988). By appealing to national belonging in their claims-making, religious elites can help establish their cultural authority and legitimacy, especially in settings where religion is located in ethnic group expression. This leads to proposition 1: *The tendency of Catholic bishops to make reference to national-ethnic identity should vary in accordance with variation in the degree of intimacy between religious and ethnic identifications in a particular society.*

A second body of research – on the influence of internal religious contexts on organizational strategies – would lead us to expect that religious institutions are influenced by the local national environment in which they operate (Stark and Finke 2004; Kollman 2012; Gill 1998), especially by the presence of competition from non-Catholic groups and by their levels of religiosity. Non-Catholic or non-Christian groups in the local context can have differential effects – on the onehand, their presence may buttress the identity of Catholics by acting as an alternative identity against which Catholicism is defined or, on the otherhand, may weaken the plausibility of Catholic denominational identity by exposing it to the alternative truths of other religious traditions. By adapting their discourse to the composition of the local spiritual marketplace, religious elites can increase their cultural legitimacy. This leads to proposition 2: *The tendency of Catholic bishops to employ solely Catholic symbolism in their political discourse should vary in accordance with variation in the composition of the local religious market in a particular society.*

Third, the literature on elite institutional decision-making (Lammers 1978; Hickson 1987; Demerath at el. 1998) suggests that while elites tend to operate in the boardrooms of an organization and can have different interests to personnel and adherents at lower tiers (Schoenherr and Sorensen 1982), they rely on the voluntary co-operation and consent of the human resource base of the organization – workforce members and religious devotees – to realize day-to-day goals and generate long-term commitment to the organization (Mainwaring 1986; Levine 1981). This membership and devotee commitment is necessary to run the church's various agencies and to provide an organizational, material and financial resource base to sustain it. Put differently, the ability of religious elites to extract and mobilize resources from "below" and "above" constrains or enables their pastoral effectiveness. These resources can take different forms ranging from money and buildings through to people, social networks, and links to power nodes (Johnston and Figa 1998) and,

together, constitute the resource opportunity structure available to the local church. This leads to proposition 3: *The organizational arrangements of Catholic leadership conferences should vary in accordance with variation in the resource opportunity structures in a particular society*.

Cases and Methods

To investigate these propositions, I compared Catholicism in the three quite different cultural settings of Chile, Ireland, and Nigeria. These societies were chosen for comparison because they represent contrasting varieties – suppression, monopoly and minority – and varying geo-political-economic world regions – of global Catholicism and important variation in church-state-society interactions. While the inclusion of other Catholic countries would bolster the cross-national element of the study, it would make the cultural contextualizing of the findings difficult.

The Catholic Church in Chile is an example of a national church in Latin America that falls between the monopoly and minority models and is characterized by a history of suppression by authoritarian regimes as well as growing inroads by evangelical Protestantism in the society's cultural and political life (Smith 1982). Historically, the church in Chile has been regarded as a "progressive" church (Vallier 1970; Smith 1982). This is despite the fact that – as Table 1 shows – the greatest post-Vatican II generational personnel shift within the episcopacy took place in the Irish hierarchy, followed by the Nigerian hierarchy, and then the Chilean hierarchy.

In the Irish example, the Catholic Church enjoys a monopoly position in a Western European society characterized by low levels of religious diversity, weak competition from other faith traditions, and strong organizational resources (Dillon 1996, 2007). In addition, the Irish case is characterized by a strong historical connection between religious expression and ethnic identity (Dillon 1996).

As another non-western church, Catholicism in Nigeria operates in a comparably unfavourable context because of the church's relatively recent presence in Africa, its missionary history and status as a foreign "imported" institution, its relatively small numerical position, the presence of competition from non-Christian religious traditions, and challenges from post-colonial state activities that seek to secularize Nigerian society and culture (Hastings 1988; Okure 2009).

These dissimilar cultural world contexts are potentially important for how the church enters the public square and arranges its organizational structure as they suggest the church responds to quite different cultural legitimacy and resource mobilization challenges in dissimilar settings.

Empirically, this study involved collecting and analyzing data about the discourse and organization of the three Catholic episcopal conferences. For the public discourse element, I carried out a quantitative and qualitative descriptive analysis of collective pastoral letters published by the three episcopal conferences in the 1990-2011 time span. This time period was chosen for study as it allowed for the analysis of a range of national-level pastoral letters covering multiple topics over a relatively long temporal frame. Most of these primary data are readily available online but in some instances, such as the Nigerian case, they were more difficult to secure and so I obtained a copy directly from the national episcopal conference and the library and documentation centre of the International Catholic Mission Society in Aachen, Germany. In the Irish case, I used the Irish newspaper archives to locate the 1994 letter on third world development. Most of the documents, however, were located by using "pastoral letter" as a search term on the website of each leadership conference. In addition, I read communiqués and press statements of each hierarchy for mentions of pastoral letters. For the Nigerian case, I also relied on a compendium of the church's communiqués

(Schineller 2002). In the Chilean example, Google translate was used to translate the original Spanish text into English.

Pastoral letters are part of a broader church system of internal and external communication that also includes press statements, homilies, directories, magazines, guidelines, and so forth. Of these publications, national-level pastoral letters tend to have greater symbolic authority as they reflect the teachings of the church relating to specific issues deemed by Catholic bishops as having significant import for the laity and/or for political elites, represent the official public stance of the bishops as a corporate body, and often function as important tools for mobilization and organization within the church around particular issues.

Following earlier studies of Catholic political discourse (Dillon 1996; Yamane 2005), the analysis of the documents involved delineating the distribution of references in each paragraph to each category of legitimation or "claims to authority" (D'Antonio et al 2011:274). For this content analysis the full document – ranging in length from 2 to 109 pages, with an average length of 11, 14, and 25 pages for the Chilean, Irish, and Nigerian pastoral letters respectively – was the unit of investigation. I coded the documents for mentions of each legitimation category, differentiating between Catholic (mentions of Papal writings, Gospel writings, church synod writings, theological writings, prior writings of the national episcopal conference or of other episcopal conferences, the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Vatican II documents, documents of Vatican offices, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church) and secular (references to national identity, image, values, resources, and history, social scientific and governmental or non-governmental policy research, and the writings of journalists, literary figures, or other non-religious spiritual writers) authority claims. The basic descriptive trends identified by this are presented in Table 1.

An important analytical distinction is necessary here – I categorized pastoral letters as belonging to either the faith and morals domain or the social action domain, the key difference being between moral values applied to personal practices of individuals and families (usually directed at committed Catholics) versus public issues relating to the state and the economy (usually secular power elites as the intended audience) or, put differently, between micro versus macro levels of application. In Catholic doctrine, the former tends to have greater symbolic weight than the latter but this binary distinction is messier in practice, as in relation to the highly politicised issue of abortion (Burns 1992). In general, any one pastoral letter in the church is produced with a particular purpose and tends to address itself to a quite limited thematic range, usually one salient faith and morals or social justice issue.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Data about the organizational structures of the three national hierarchies, encompassing the 1950 to the present time period, came from documentary material published by each national episcopal conference, country-specific general church and religious histories, an online database of national Catholic hierarchies, and financial reports of Catholic relief agencies such as Caritas Internationalis and Cor Unum, the Catholic giving entity of the Roman Curia. I also relied on insider accounts of Catholic organizational life (Dunn 1994; Makozi and Ojo 1982). Although these provide a rich insight into the internal dynamics of the church, an unfortunate limitation of this source of data is that it may suffer from bias. In analyzing the institutional structures, I paid particular attention to cross-national variation in resource mobilization challenges and international organizational linkages through Catholic religious philanthropy.

Findings

The Catholic Church is a global transnational religious institution. Past research would lead one to expect that because national hierarchies share in the universality of Catholic doctrine, vocabulary, and practice (Casanova 1993, 1994), there should be a high degree of standardization in the discursive strategies and institutional arrangements developed across different national churches. At the same time, because the church is an expansive institution that operates in quite different locales, contains many pluralistic strands and varying interpretations and emphases, and stresses the importance of adaptation to local circumstances (Burns 1992), one would also expect significant cross-national differences (Burns 1992; Dillon 1996; Hagopian 2008), resulting in nationally-specific strategies of action. These similarities and differences are discussed below under the two broad headings of variation in public claims-making (Propositions 1 and 2) and variation in institutional arrangements (Proposition 3). By public claims-making I are referring to any discursive intervention in the public arena on the part of Catholic bishops that is aimed at defending or promoting the church's doctrine and teachings and is usually directed at political elites. In using this term I do not mean to imply that national hierarchies necessarily make specific or concrete proposals regarding government legislative policy-making.

Variation in Public Claims-Making

Proposition 1

Table 2 presents the sources of legitimacy each hierarchy appealed to in its pastoral letters in the faith and morals and social action domains. As shown in this table, Catholic bishops in quite different national contexts appeal to similar sources of legitimacy but there are also some interesting and salient differences.

Bishops exercise their authority by appealing to its sacred character and the moral lessons of the past, which may vary depending on the nature of the subject matter. With regard to issues in the faith and morals domain, Catholic bishops tend to be more likely to

appeal to solely Catholic sources of legitimacy – in the form of Gospel, Papal or other church writings and discourses – compared to when they speak out about social action issues. In regard to the latter domain, Catholic bishops tend to invoke a wider range of legitimations including religious legitimations but extending beyond this to encompass secular legitimations such as references to national identity and social or physical scientific research.

Proposition 1 postulated that national identity invocation in bishops' public discourses should be expected to vary based on the religious-ethnic intimacy of a particular society. The data point to weak support for this proposition. I found that the church in Chile and Nigeria appealed to national identity more than its counterpart in Ireland (see Table 2) – in Chile 16% of pastoral letters in the faith and morals category and 10% in the social action category made mention of national identity, compared with 2% and 7% respectively in the Irish case. In Nigeria, 4% of faith and morals and 21% of social action pastoral letters invoked references to national identity. To cite just one example, in their 1998 pastoral letter on the Papal visit the Nigerian bishops wrote:

> His visit at this critical period in the life of our nation should elicit from all of us, Christians and non-Christians alike, a commitment to the values and principles that he champions around the globe. It is obvious that the absence of such values and principles has been the root cause of the multiple maladies that have afflicted our country to date. In a situation such as ours, the Pope should be seen as a rallying point and his visit should be a catalyst for genuine national reconciliation (Schineller 2002:219).

This suggests that appeals to national identity may be more salient for Catholic hierarchies in missionary contexts such as Nigeria in which there is a stronger imperative – and pressure from Vatican instructions – to indigenize Catholic belief and practice, even though national churches generally enjoy considerable day-to-day autonomy in how they

organize local Catholic life. It can also be argued that the use of references to national identity may be seen as an effort to develop national unity in a country fractured by political polarization and to foster an ethnic Catholic identity (Kollman 2012) – as in Chile – in the face of competitive religious groups. A heavy emphasis on the "Chileanness" and "Nigerianness" of Catholic culture – the locating of Catholicism in national identity – is likely to be bolstered as inroads made by other faith traditions increase.

In the Nigerian case, the organizational factors encouraging this ethnic-religious identity at the elite level appear to have an unintended negative and tragic impact at the grassroots level, as evidenced by recent bomb attacks on Catholic parishes by Islamic terrorist groups. The relative absence of conceptual and empirical references to national identity by the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland may reflect its awareness of the increasing ethnic diversification and pluralization of Irish collective identity in the face of recent immigration. It may also reflect a growing acknowledgment among Irish bishops of increasing privatization (Casanova 1994), the weakening of the close identification of Catholicism with the Irish state.

More generally, in the missionary context of Nigeria, the Nigerian Catholic hierarchy has played a long-standing role in Nigerian society as "social conscience" (Okure 2009). In a statement after their meeting in Benin city in 1996, the bishops explicitly claimed this prophetic leadership role as their vision of the church:

> The Catholic Church in Nigeria continues to identify herself with the joys and sorrows of every Nigerian, especially the poor. 'To bring the good news to the poor, To proclaim liberty to captives, And to the blind new sight, To set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour' (Luke 4:18-19). The Catholic Church pursues its prophetic role with undivided attention (Schineller 2002:245).

It would be difficult to find a comparable statement about prophetic stands in a pastoral letter of the Irish hierarchy. Moreover, the Nigerian church has been less inclined than the Irish hierarchy to soften or moderate its public claims-making even when taking up issues outside of the faith and morals domain. For example, in their 2002 pastoral letter on human trafficking and their 2008 letter on oil and gas wealth, the Nigerian bishops included a lengthy list of recommended structural changes to the national government without any qualifying statements urging careful reflection. This variation in local Catholic experience is related to differences in church-state interactions (Kollman 2012) – in Ireland there is a close historical intimacy between state and religious elites but in Nigeria there is a long tradition of hostility between Catholics and the national government. Similarly, in their 2011 letter *Growing a New Nigeria*, much of which involved a critique of secular leaders, the bishops spoke candidly and boldly about the problem of political corruption in Nigerian society, explicitly linking it to moral issues:

> In Nigeria, we are still left with a form of government in which the governed seem to exist for the convenience of those who govern…The situation in Nigeria challenges every Nigerian to reflect on what his or her values really are (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria 2011:23).

When the Chilean and Nigerian cases are compared, however, I found that the church in Nigeria was more likely to mobilize national identity in the social action domain while the church in Chile was more likely to do so in the faith and morals domain – in Chile 16% of pastoral letters in the faith and morals category and 10% in the social action category invoked national identity compared with 4% and 21% respectively in the case of Nigeria.

I also found some interesting patterned convergences between each national hierarchy. First, in his study of the post-Vatican II Catholic Church in Chile, Brian Smith points out that a "graduated binding force" (Smith 1982: 23) prevails in the church in relation

to faith and morals doctrines as against social action teachings, an observation borne out in the present study. Consider, for example, that the Chilean hierarchy characterized their 2001 letter *Life, solidarity and hope* as a discussion paper, while in the faith and morals domain they emphasized their strong commitment to traditional church teaching in *Marriage and Family* and adopted a more dogmatic tone, concluding with a direct quote from Pope John Paul II's writings on family life:

> Loving the family means being able to appreciate its values and capabilities, fostering them always…Finally, an eminent form of love is to give the Christian family today…the very riches of nature and grace, in the mission that God has entrusted to you (Chilean Bishops' Conference 2005:3).

This variable symbolic weight of different church teachings also has application to the Irish hierarchy. In their *Towards the Global Common Good* pastoral letter, the Irish bishops addressed the Catholic laity in a register emphasizing non-directive reflection rather than in terms of binding teachings (Irish Bishops' Conference 2005a). Similarly, the bishops' letter, plaintively titled *The Cry of the Earth*, was also written in a reflection mode and drew heavily on secular scientific concepts – such as the notion of the earth as a holistic entity with a finite carrying capacity (Downs and Weigert 1999) – in presenting an analysis of climate change. This cautious, nondogmatic, and dialogical mode contrasts with the more authoritative and strongly worded approach of the Irish hierarchy in *Cherishing the Evening of Life* in which the bishops' pressed their claims in matters of human life and death by directly appealing to church moral teaching:

> Whether it is by doing something, or by doing nothing when something should be done; be it with or without the consent of the person who is killed, euthanasia comes down to the same thing in moral terms. It is the deliberate killing of a human being, and it is contrary to the law of God (Irish Bishops' Conference 2005b:2).

Second, I found that Catholic bishops acknowledge and invoke other national leadership conferences in their claims-making. For example, the Irish bishops made reference to the writings on the family of the U.S. bishops' conference in *Nurturing our Children's Faith* and the Chilean hierarchy cited the work of the regional episcopal entity in their 2007 letter regarding the rural population. Stimulated by discourses from other national or regional contexts, local churches mobilize them to teach lessons about faith and morals or instruct the faithful in regard to responding to social problems and show how the church's public actor role in a particular society is embedded in a wider global religious environment. They also point to how local churches, by using broader interests to support their moral positions, can help create a universal Catholic faith across national boundaries.

Proposition 2

Proposition 2 posited that the use of distinctly Catholic concepts and symbols by Catholic leadership conferences should be expected to vary based on the composition of the local religious landscape. In keeping with this, in contexts such as Ireland where Catholics constitute a large numerical majority and have relatively high levels of commitment to Catholic belief and practice, Catholic hierarchies tend to be more likely to use Catholic symbols, discourses, and texts despite the problems the church faced here in the 1990s and 2000s relating to tragic cases of clerical child sex abuse (Smith 2007) and consequent losses in the battleground of legitimacy. In the faith and morals domain, the proportion of appeals by Irish bishops to Catholic doctrine was 94%, compared with 74% and 93% in the case of Chile and Nigeria.

But even in the traditional monopoly context of Ireland, Catholic bishops are also likely to appeal to non-Catholic themes to buttress their arguments – especially when this relates to social action because, in many cases, appealing to solely Catholic arguments and symbols, compared with general human values, is seen as less and less legitimate in seeking

to connect one's faith to a pluralist society composed of non-Catholic and non-Christian adherents. Forty-two per cent of legitimations by the Irish hierarchy in the social action domain belonged to the secular category compared with 56% falling into the Catholic category.

The narrative construction of the Irish bishops' 1992 pastoral letter *Work Is The Key* bore this out. Written as a response to the then prevalent problem of high unemployment in early 1990s Ireland, it is peppered with references to the work of sociologists, historians, economists, educationalists, and social policy analysts, alongside distinctly Catholic perspectives, with the express purpose of locating church teaching 'in the context of the actual policies being debated, introduced or modified today' (Irish Bishops' Conference 1992:8). Notably, the letter was the result of consultation with lay groups rather than just clergy, a significant innovation – shared with the 2007 letter of the Chilean bishops on the topic of rural living – in how the church put together its pastoral letters and exercised its moral authority.

Variation in Organizational Arrangements

Proposition 3

Proposition 3 predicted that the organizational arrangements of national hierarchies should be expected to vary according to the available resource opportunity structures in a particular society. To evaluate this proposition, I examined post-Vatican II organizational adaptations as well as linkages to international church agencies and structures in each national hierarchy.

Vatican II (1962-1965) involved important ideational changes in Catholicism but also significant and related institutional reforms aimed at the nationalization of local churches (Casanova 1997). One of the most noteworthy of these was the impetus it gave for the establishment of episcopal conferences (Burns 1992; Hanson 1987; Levine 1981; Wilde

2007). Beginning in the mid-1960s, these leadership conferences began to undergo structural change through the establishment over time of a range of specialized commissions and agencies that came under various nomenclatures but coalesced in focusing on liturgical, media/communications, mission, justice and peace, catechesis, and vocations apostolates in the church. Changes in religious doctrines after Vatican II – and in workforce trends – were reflected institutionally in the increasing frequency with which members of the Catholic laity were appointed to administrative positions in these national-level church agencies and commissions from the 1970s onward, a significant trend across the three national churches.

As the mobilization of symbolic resources such as the media became more important for the Catholic Church in the 1960s (Hanson 1987), national hierarchies began to develop competencies in this area. The Chilean hierarchy, for example, established a media committee under its episcopal conference. One of the earliest responses of the Irish hierarchy to Vatican II was the establishment of the Catholic Communications Institute of Ireland, focused on strengthening the media relations strategies and skills of priests, religious and laity. Some of this media work involved a cadre of clergy visiting missionary settings in Africa and Latin America in the late 1960s, and relaying their experiences through innovative documentary films to the Catholic laity at home, producing an interesting local-global dynamic (Dunn 1994). In the Nigeria church, the hierarchy also gave significant attention to a Catholic mass media presence through its directorate of social communication (Okure 2009).

Harnessing social science research in the service of the church's goals was also given impetus by Vatican II, and it is not surprising, then, that national hierarchies began to develop their research and data infrastructures in the 1960s. In fact, some national hierarchies were already doing this prior to Vatican II as in Chile the bishops sponsored empirical research by priest-sociologists on the church in the 1940s – helped by foreign financial aid – and these efforts were further boasted from the late 1950s through a Jesuit research and politics

institute, the well-funded Centro Bellarmino based in Santiago (Mutchler 1971), as well as the establishment in 1958 of the hierarchy's own internal research entity, the Oficina de Sociología Religiosa (Office of Religious Sociology) (Smith 1982). In addition to sociological studies of Catholic commitment, these research entities carried out research on personnel trends as well as on innovative and somewhat controversial topics such as gender segregation in the church (Gilfeather 1977; Mutchler 1971).

The Irish hierarchy also began to develop its research capacities, though somewhat later in the early 1970s, through the establishment of a Research and Development Unit (Research and Development Unit 1971). Like its Chilean counterpart, it carried out empirical research on the church including social surveys of church attendance. Probably due to having fewer resources and the fact that its energies were absorbed by meeting basic survival needs of the church (Hastings 1988), the Catholic Church in Nigeria did not establish a research center to carry out such empirical investigations.

Other organizational adaptabilities arose in reaction to state activity or inactivity in a specific area. In Chile, the hierarchy began to find a strong prophetic voice after the Allende years, and especially following the well-known Medellín conference in 1968, and sought to speak out about and condemn authoritarian government under General Pinochet (Smith 1982). Organizationally, this took the form of the establishment in 1973 of the Committee of Cooperation for Peace (COPACHI) and its successor entity, the Vicariate for Solidarity, in 1976, providing for the humanitarian needs of the many casualties of the country's military repression (Smith 1982). In Ireland, where the church enjoyed co-operative relations with the Irish state, one transnational agency created by the bishops, an emigrant chaplaincy service established in 1957 (Kennedy 2007), catered to the spiritual and material needs of the Catholic laity who emigrated to Britain in the 1950s and challenged nation-state citizenship

practices. Significantly, this apostolate involved close cross-national co-operation between the English and Irish bishops (Spencer 2012).

The findings in relation to post-Vatican II adaptabilities, then, provide moderate to strong support for proposition 3. Comparing the structures of the three Catholic leadership conferences, they are broadly similar but the Chilean and Irish hierarchies developed capacities in certain niche areas – such as empirical social research – that were not developed in the Nigerian church. Access to adequate financial resources likely helps to explain this specific divergence. Another significant factor was the presence of a material infrastructure of universities within which this research could be attached – in this regard, Chile was well served by universities in places such as Santiago and, in Ireland, Catholic clerics at the pontifical university in Maynooth were its early social researchers. By contrast, especially in a country such as Nigeria, where society was divided by civil war and anarchy and other human rights challenges, it was difficult for the national hierarchy to give priority to the development of its institutional research and data infrastructure and to engage in more abstract thinking about its role in society.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

I also evaluated proposition 3 by comparing national hierarchies with regard to their degree of reliance on and linkages to international church agencies of Catholic giving. These charitable entities represent an important external resource drawn upon by national churches for their development and I found significant cross-national variation (see Table 3) in dependence on them, thus, providing support for proposition 3. The contrast between the Irish case – largely financially independent – and the two other cases is instructive in this regard. From the 1950s though to the 1980s, the Catholic Church in Chile relied heavily on foreign financial aid, from mainly western-based international church aid organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, Catholic missionary groups, and secular sources including the

Ford and Rockefeller foundations in the U.S. and the Christian Democratic Party in Germany (Mutchler 1971). Frequently this foreign aid was given with at least the implicit purpose of influencing the direction of local church systems. In Chile, for example, the church's secular donors were opposed to the political growth of communism there in the 1960s (Mutchler 1971).

However, in the 1990s this money from Catholic relief agencies was increasingly channelled into the church in the newly independent states of Eastern Europe, partly arising from the falling out of favor with the Vatican of "progressive" Catholicism in Latin America (Cava 1993, 1997), resulting in reductions in funding to support the church in this world region including Chile, and increasing pressures on the laity to fulfil their financial obligations to the church. In some situations, then, participation in an international church system may provide a basis for autonomous action by church leaders in relation to local religious actors in the national church. However, despite international shifts in the configuration of donating and recipient countries, Catholic humanitarian agencies, most based in Western Europe, continue to support the church in Chile with significant personnel and financial contributions (see Table 3). In addition, Cor Unum provides financial aid to the church in poorer countries and according to its 2010 annual report, donated $150,000 to meet the needs of Chilean devotees (Cor Unum 2010).

In Nigeria, international church aid agencies have also played an important role in helping to serve the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, especially during Nigeria's civil war in 1967-1970 following the establishment of the independent state of Biafra (Okure 2009). As in Chile, the Catholic Church in Nigeria cannot rely on large financial contributions from the faithful as they are themselves poor and needy, a situation it shares with other Catholic countries in Africa. Through SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar), these national churches represent their financial

interests to international humanitarian organizations and bolster their regional solidarity and weight. One index of the Nigerian church's reliance on foreign aid input can be found in the work of the U.S. Catholic religious funding organization, Catholic Relief Services. This organization channels money, from an annual budget in Nigeria of about $35 million, through the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria to help the church in its response to pressing social and humanitarian issues such as AIDS alleviation. Caritas Internationalis, and its various national branches, is also a significant net contributor to the church in Nigeria (see Table 3) (Catholic Relief Services 2010). In 2010, Cor Unum donated €100,000 to the church in Nigeria (Cor Unum 2010). At their 2002 National Congress in Ibadan, the Nigerian Catholic bishops implicitly acknowledged its lack of material autonomy by praising the continuing work of its agencies and noting their reliance on foreign financial aid but also urged a move towards a self-sustaining church, underwritten by private contributions from the Nigerian Catholic laity (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria 2002).

In Ireland, Trócaire, the relief agency of the Catholic leadership conference, is a net contributor to international Catholic philanthropy, channelling over $113 million into humanitarian assistance, some to the church in Nigeria, and has developed strong connections with other Catholic development agencies such as Caritas Internationalis and the Brussels-based CIDSE, producing a dialectic between the local and the global. The Irish hierarchy also participates in international Catholic networks through its involvement in COMECE (Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community), an umbrella entity representing Catholic leadership conferences in the European Union. The Irish hierarchy, which has permanent representation on COMECE, engages in its work of political lobbying within European Union institutions, in relation to issues such as bioethics and migrant integration, and information-sharing across leadership conferences.

Conclusion

This article has sought to examine cross-national variation in national Catholic leadership conferences in terms of their public claims-making and institutional arrangements and found interesting similarities and differences in the three locales with quite contrasting socio-cultural and structural contexts.

This article's findings contribute to our understanding of religious organizations in general in two important ways. First, this study shows that the internal context of religious organizations matters, even to ostensibly rigid and doctrinaire bureaucratic institutions such as the Catholic Church. By extension, this reminds sociologists of religion that religious traditions are best understood not as essential sets of beliefs and symbols but as identities that need to be examined in practice on a case-by-case basis. To varying degrees, national churches are responsive to the cultural context in which they operate by taking public stands on and providing social services addressing specific national and local needs and problems, without implying that Catholic identity can be associated with any one specific society or context.

Frequently, however, this localized responsiveness takes the form of contested accommodation (Bruce 2006) in which hierarchies enter the public square by acknowledging the pluralistic nature of the modern world or the importance of national belonging while at the same time invoking Catholic teaching to substantiate their public actor role. Rather than religious organizations exiting the public square then, as suggested by older versions of secularization theory (Casanova 1994), the weight placed by them on religious arguments is undergoing change such that less emphasis is given to solely religious symbolism and, conversely, religious elites are increasingly appealing to non-religious secular themes to buttress their arguments, as in many cases invoking purely religious tenets is increasingly perceived as illegitimate. It is also the case that while Catholic symbols and concepts may still predominate, this is being increasingly challenged by cultural legitimacy crises in the

wake of well-documented sexual scandals in the church (and not peculiar to the three cases), but differently so cross-nationally.

Local variation in the locus of control within religious organizations, especially in strongly hierarchical institutions such as the Catholic Church, is also important. In contexts where the church relies heavily on religious order personnel and is constrained by relatively weak material resources – such as in Chile – some organizational adaptabilities may involve religious clergy providing services – such as empirical research – that the hierarchy does not have direct access to or control over, sometimes resulting in fracturing between the hierarchy and agency structures. This dissimilarity in locus of control may also help explain the different orientations of national churches. For example, religious order personnel tend to have strong social justice apostolates compared with diocesan clergy and thus may give a particular local church (as in Chile) a more "progressive" identity.

The relevance of local contexts extends to external regional religious authority umbrella structures – such as regional episcopal organizations – and their influence on national churches. In Chile and Nigeria the church is more subject to these entities – ideologically and institutionally – as its own internal resources are weak compared with the better funded church in Ireland. Despite the global nature of Catholic identity, then, particular cultural contexts and structural conditions in specific societies produce localized and differentiated variants of this religious tradition.

Second, this study suggests that the global context also matters by showing how Catholic elites incorporate globally resonant religious ideas and forms into national church discourses and actions. The reforms of Vatican II diffused widely throughout the international Catholic Church resulting in interesting commonalities across divergent settings in how religious elites negotiated the public square, by appealing to Catholic legitimations, and bureaucratized their pastoral services and programs, by developing and embedding

various apostolates addressing the specialized needs of their constituency and by increasing their mobilization of lay expertise. In addition to relying on transnational rhetorical and bureaucratic resources, national church actors draw on international flows of money to realise their pastoral goals. Resource-poor national churches tend to rely most heavily on Catholic religious philanthropic sources, reinforcing inequitable power arrangements between developed and developing societies. Catholic bishops also make reference to cross-national similarities in the church – by explicitly acknowledging the work of other Catholic leadership conferences – in developing national public discourses and organizational practices. This shows that local churches advance their pastoral effectiveness within global contexts and concerns.

This article's findings should be interpreted in light of three key limitations, shortcomings that necessitate further research. First, the cross-national analysis of the discursive and organizational elements of national hierarchies could be supplemented by an analysis of how these vary *within* national contexts over time, especially in response to critical incidents such as sexual scandals, with local and global dimensions, impinging upon the church's societal authority and legitimacy. Second, as previous research points to the increasing interaction of national church structures with transnational processes (Wuthnow and Offutt 2008), more attention could be given to how local churches appropriate resources (money, personnel, ideas, and information) from international institutions and organizations, religious orders and congregations, and other national churches in implementing local pastoral discourses and actions. Third, this study relies on data from three pertinent cases and future research could usefully extend it by investigating other national variants of the Catholic Church, reflecting other geo-cultural regional contexts such as Asia, in order to better understand how local churches respond to modernity. Such an analysis could profitably incorporate the collection of interview data in relation to the views and opinions of Catholic

bishops, allowing for an assessment of their relationship to church strategies and tactics in practice and a more direct investigation of religious elite decision-making processes. Notwithstanding these deficiencies, this article has attempted to show how the Catholic Church – a two thousand year-old voluntary religious system consisting of older organizational forms of charismatic authority alongside newer routinized bureaucratic elements (Vaillancourt 1980) – seeks to react to local conditions in a changing social order.

Acknowledgment

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Table 1. Pastoral Letters and Generational Changes in Post-Vatican II Catholic Leadership Conferences

National Hierarchy	Pastoral Letter Domain		Total Number of Pastoral Letters	Post-Vatican II Hierarchy[c] (%)
	Faith and Morals[a]	Social Action[b]		
	Marriage, Life	Social Justice		
Chile	7	2	9	27
Ireland	19	6	25	46
Nigeria	4	2	6	30

Sources: The websites of the respective national leadership conferences (for Chile: http://www.episcopado.cl/; for Ireland:

http://www.catholicbishops.ie/; and for Nigeria: http://www.cbcn-ng.org/) for the pastoral letters and http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/country/

for post-Vatican II hierarchy data.

Note: The titles of the pastoral letters of the CEC are *Go and announce the Gospel* (*Id y Anunciad el Evangelio*) (1992), *Teresa de los Andes: A*

road of holiness (*Teresa de Los Andes: Un camino de santidad*) (1993); *Better roads for you: Letter to the peasants* (*Mejores caminos para*

ustedes: Carta a los campesinos) (1993), *Serve as Jesus: Pastoral Letter to the youth of the Association of Guides and Scouts of Chile)* (*Servir*

como Jesús: Carta Pastoral a los jóvenes de la Asociación de Guías y Scouts de Chile (1994), *Contribution to the Church: A Call for All*

(*Contribución a la Iglesia: Un Illamado para todos*) (1997), *Life, Solidarity and Hope* (*Vida, solidaridad y esperanza*) (2001), *Marriage and*

Family: Good News for Humanity (*Matrimonio y Familia: Una buena noticia para la humanidad*) (2005); *Missionary Disciples of Jesus Christ*

for the New Time: Pastoral Letter to the men and women in the Chilean countryside (*Discípulos misioneros de Jesucristo para un tiempo nuevo:*

Carta Pastoral a los hombres y mujeres del campo chileno) (2007); *To accept and promote life* (*Acoger y promover la vida*) (2007); of the IEC

are *Work Is The Key* (1993), *Cherishing the Family* (1994), *On the occasion of the 21ˢᵗ anniversary of Trócaire* (1994), *Remembering the Irish*

Famine (1995), *Conscience* (1998), *The Temperate Way* (1998), *Prosperity with a Purpose* (1999), *Proclaiming the Gospel of Life* (2001),

Living with Dying (2002), *Life in all its fullness* (2003), *The Wonder of Life* (2003), *Life is for Living* (2004), *Towards the Global Common Good*

(2005), *Cherishing the Evening of Life* (2005), *The Life and Presence of People with Disabilities* (2006), *Nurturing our Children's Faith* (2006),

Blessed is the fruit of your womb (2007), *Alcohol: The Challenge of Moderation* (2007); *Vision 08* (2008), *Mental Health* (2008), *You are*

Precious In My Sight (2009), *The Cry of the Earth* (2009), *The Meaning of Christian Death* (2010), *A call to solidarity and hope in difficult*

times (2011), and *Towards Healing and Renewal* (2011); and of the CBCN are *The Nigerian Church: Evangelisation through Inculturation*

(1991), *Be Holy-Be Reconciled*: *Pastoral Letter of the Catholic Bishops' Conference on the Occasion of the Visit of Pope John Paul II to Nigeria*

for the Beatification of Fr. Cyprian Michael Tansi (1998), *Restoring the Dignity of the Nigerian Woman* (2002), *I Chose You: The Nigerian*

Priest in the Third Millennium (2004), *That our oil and gas wealth may serve the common good: The moral challenges of oil and gas wealth in*

Nigeria (2008), and *Growing a New Nigeria* (2011). The higher number of pastoral letters for the Irish hierarchy compared with the other two

Catholic leadership conferences is accounted for by the fact that, to mark 'Day of Life', the Irish bishops published a brief 2-page pastoral letter

each year since 2001. It was sometimes a difficult task to discern whether a particular communiqué represented a pastoral letter or not, as in

some communications bishops employed the terms "thoughts", "reflections", and "responses" rather than "pastoral letter", did not use "pastoral

letter" in the title, or did not use "pastoral letter" at all but referred to it as such in other communications. This ambiguity necessitated making a judgement call in a number of instances about whether to include a particular communication in the study. For example, although the Chilean 2007 communication on human life, *To accept and promote life* (*Acoger y promover la vida*) was authored and signed by the leadership conference, addressed a significant faith and morals issue, and was basically the same length as other Chilean pastoral letters (and thus not a press statement), the specific term "pastoral letter" was not used but I chose to include it in the study. I omitted *I was a stranger and you welcomed me* (*Fui forastero y me acogiste*) (2001) as it was defined as a message only. With regard to Ireland, I chose to include *Towards Healing and Renewal* (2011) on church responses to clerical child sex abuse scandals even though it was subtitled as a "pastoral response" and did not use the specific term pastoral letter. In other church communications, though, it was specifically referred to as a pastoral letter. In the Nigerian case, the communication *I Chose You* (2004) on priestly ministry and identity was directed mainly at church personnel and employed the term "letter" in the text (only three times in the foreword) but not in its title and so I chose to include it in the study. I also included *That our oil and gas wealth may serve the common good* (2008), which did not use the term, but was referred to in other communications of the Nigerian bishops as a joint pastoral letter. I excluded pastoral letters written by commissions of leadership conferences, by individual bishops, or by regional leadership conferences, and instead focused on letters of the national leadership conference.

[a]Signifies total number of pastoral letters in the faith and morals domain in the time period of the study; [b]Signifies total number of pastoral letters in the social justice domain in the time period of the study; [c]Percentage of national hierarchy who were members of the hierarchy in 1962 but not

members in 1970, the higher the percentage the greater the generational change that took place between 1962 and 1970 (just five years after

Vatican II). This percentage was computed based on historical data about the period of appointment of Catholic prelates.

Table 2. Sources of Legitimacy in Pastoral Letters of Catholic Leadership Conferences, 1990-2011

	Chile		Ireland		Nigeria	
	N^a	%	N	%	N	%
a. Faith and Morals						
Catholic						
Papal Writings/Discourse	17	19	58	34	14	9
Church Writings	13	15	47	28	80	54
Gospel Writings	35	40	54	32	44	30
Secular						
National Identity	14	16	4	2	7	4
Social/Physical Science	2	2	1	.5	2	1
Secular Writings/ Discourse[e]	6	7	5	3	1	.01
b. Social Action						
Catholic						
Papal Writings/Discourse	9	10	110	22	28	22
Church Writings	19	20	99	19	54	42
Gospel Writings	57	60	58	12	18	14
Secular						
National Identity	10	10	37	7	26	21
Social/Physical Science			176	35		

		25	5	1	.05
Secular Writings/Discourse		25	5	1	.05

Note: [a]Numbers (and percentages) apply to the number of references in each pastoral letter to the various categories.

Table 3. Financial and Personnel Contributions of National Affiliates of the Catholic Humanitarian Relief Organization Caritas Internationalis, 2012

	Chile	Ireland[1]	Nigeria
Beneficiaries	500,000[2]	500,000	500,000[3]
Annual Budget ($)	750,000	113,000,000	1,200,000
Personnel			
Paid Staff	100-500	100	1,000
Volunteers	100-500		1,000

Sources: Caritas Internationalis (http://www.caritas.org/worldmap/index.html); [1]Through its Third World development aidagency, Trócaire, the Irish Catholic leadership conference is a net contributor to Catholic relief efforts; Chile and Nigeria are net beneficiaries; some of Trócaire's aid is channelled to the church in Nigeria; [2]Supports programs serving children, the elderly, prisoners, refugees, and victims of natural disasters; [3]Supports programs in community development, human rights promotion, peace building, social welfare, emergency response, and information

sharing. In addition to Caritas Internationalis, other Catholic relief agencies materially assist the church in Chile and Nigeria. CIDSE, an

umbrella organization representing many Catholic development agencies, lists 3 (all of Western European origin) Catholic organizations serving

in Chile and 5 (4 of a Western European origin and 1 of Canadian origin) serving in Nigeria. For more information see

http://www.cidse.org/content/general-content/cidse-members-around-the-world.html (retrieved 17 December, 2012).