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Book Review: Democracy, Culture, Catholicism: Voices from Four Continents, edited by Michael Schuck and John Crowley-Buck

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Democracy, Culture, Catholicism: Voices from Four Continents, by Michael Schuck and John Crowley-Buck, eds.

FORDHAM UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2015 360 PAGES

Reviewed by Joy Gordon

Democracy, Culture, Catholicism: Voices from Four Continents comes at a critical juncture in many regards. It emerged from a project on Catholicism and democracy, coinciding with the Arab Spring. The collection represents a six-year process of dialogue and collaboration among scholars from four countries, each of them in a different region of the world: Lithuania, Indonesia, Peru, and the United States. The collection explores the complex relationship between the Catholic Church and the state in contexts ranging from post-Soviet Lithuania to leftist regimes in Latin America. There are contributions exploring civil discourse, citizenship, and public space in Muslim, Christian, and secular cultures. Within a cross-cultural and interreligious context, the articles in the collection explore themes of memory, trauma, and restorative justice.

Perhaps what is most striking about the book is simply the nature of the project. Cross-national collaborations are never easy and are often fraught with challenges with regard to logistics and language. But this multinational project involves regions that are tremendously diverse, with great differences in scholarly traditions, national experiences, and the history of the church. The topics and approaches of the 23 chapters emerged from a series of three annual meetings, involving extensive discussion among the scholars from the four regions, as they

explored areas of commonality and of divergence. The collection represents work from 14 academic disciplines and four different religions. Working collaboratively, the editors and contributors sought to identify the critical issues to be addressed in light of the seismic changes taking place globally in regard to political participation and empowerment, and the role of religion and the Catholic Church in particular. At the same time, the contributors draw on the distinctive qualities and aspects of each culture – ranging from the narrative of the trauma of Sept. 11, 2001, in the United States to kethoprak theater in Indonesia.

The questions explored within this collection – or suggested as a direction for further consideration – reflect the multidimensionality of the enterprise. What might be the distinctive role of the Catholic Church in matters of public concern, given the considerable differences in the kind of space it occupies in difference cultures? In Latin America, the church had a formative role in shaping the colonial legacy of the continent. This was in marked contrast with the Catholic Church in Lithuania, which was marginalized and suppressed under the atheist state of the Soviet Union. And it contrasts again

with the role of the Church in predominantly Muslim Indonesia. What might Catholic social teachings have to offer the analysis of class divisions, incarceration, and labor in such diverse contexts? How might the Catholic Church contribute to public dis-

course on the environment and the rights of the indigenous in the Amazon?

Certainly many of these questions and themes are not new. But *Democracy, Culture, Catholicism* makes it possible to consider them through such different and intersecting frameworks that there is a sense of looking through a kaleidoscope: the book offers us so many different lenses to

look through that each theme in turn comes to take on a vivid set of new possibilities. In addition, this book suggests a methodology that might fruitfully be employed in other initiatives as well. In convening dialogue among collaborators of such diverse backgrounds and interests, the project of simply working together to understand with clarity the viewpoint of another is fully as important to the process as the particular chapters that were the outcome.

Democracy, Culture, Catholicism is a rich and engaging collection that has much to offer those who might want to explore the role of the Catholic Church in the rapidly changing international landscape of politics and culture. At the same time, it challenges its readers to consider the limitations of their own perspectives, and to seek ways to transcend them.

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