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Book review
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Geopolitics of Global Catholicism. Politics of Religion in Space and Time, by Petr Kratochvíl. London and New York: Routledge, 2024, 254 pp.; ISBN: 9781032599472

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The second half of the XX century brought us two important legacies: the anti-colonial struggle and the rise of the unipolar world. The *leitmotif* of both legacies is the dominance of the West and consequently the Eurocentric worldview. It is precisely this approach to the study of geopolitics of religion that is questioned in the latest work by Peter Kratochvíl, *Geopolitics of Global Catholicism*. While some would argue that the struggle against colonialism is not complete yet, formally, new sovereign nation-states have formed. On the other hand, unipolarity has been brought into question, with the rise of China and the newly formed BRICS economic alliance. This new geopolitical reality make us question our geopolitical focus. Kratochvíl does exactly that: not only does he focus on the Catholic communities in the Global South, he also departs from the Eurocentric approach of the Holy See to its own believers. Besides the introductory remarks and the conclusion, this book brings five relevant case studies: Brazil, India, the United States, China and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In short, Kratochvíl analyzes Catholicism and the Catholic Church (a distinction he emphasizes) by focusing on the context in which the state, the Church and the local community interact. The product of this interaction is a geopolitical *theoscape* defined by its temporality and its spatiality. This analytic tool helps Kratochvíl describe Catholic communities in relation with time and space, contextualizing their Catholicism and not succumbing to the error of analyzing the faith as a "pure idea" (15-16). He uses two ideational spatial (inward/outward oriented) and two ideational temporal orientations (past/future oriented). These orientations are not presented as simple descriptions, they are rather the product of the community's self-understandings of its perception of space and time. By giving the religious community a spatial and temporal

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dimension, the author tries to prove that the theoscape is not just a discourse, but the embodiment of religious practice too.

After defining the theoscapes, Kratochvíl moves on to the question of Catholic Church in international relations, the recent shift of Catholicism to the South and finally, Catholicism and geopolitics. Staying true to his emphasis on the complexity of Catholic religion, Kratochvíl describes the important distinction between "the Church as a whole, the Holy See, and the Vatican City State" (24). He claims that there is a difference between Catholicism and its many forms (identity, ideology, culture, the political agency of the Church, church-state relations and, lastly, Catholicism as an ethnic belief) on one side, and the Church as an institution on the other.

The first case study is Brazil. In this chapter, Kratochvíl deals with the interaction of the history of Catholic Church in Brazil and how the interaction between the people, the Vatican, the colonial authorities and later the republic, and in the present, the arrival of new religious communities, created different theoscapes. He puts emphasis on the distinction between the colonizer and the colonized, the "imposed receptivity," the role of the Church in the process of modernization, regalism[2], the relationship of the Church with the Vargas regime, the intra-church disputes between the liberation theologists and the Vatican, and lastly, how and why the Church lost its hegemonic status after the arrival of Pentecostal religious communities. From these interactions throughout history, various theoscapes develop attempting to answer multiple complex questions the interactions pose and their implication to the self-understanding of the Church and believers in terms of spatiality and temporality. He outlines four most influential groups of theoscapes fistly: Colonial theoscapes of imposed receptivity, that deal with the question of the imposed receptivity, that is, the perception of the self as always lagging in progress, and the overall dependence on the Crown through the system of patronage. Then, the important in the early twentieth century is the fascist project of Neo-Christendom, that understands Brazil as "a Christian nation", that put the Church in the position of the supporter of the fascist movement, thus making it again dependent on the state, which was the unintended consequence, as the Church "yearned" for more influence over the State (47-49). The democratization and the Second Vatican Council, as well as the political situation in Latin America brought about by the development of the liberation theology. After the dictatorship, the Church embraced "its critical, prophetic voice, leaving behind the theoscapes imagining the Church dominance over the State" (50). This development created new difficulties in the relationship between the Vatican, especially under popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, who fought against what they saw as radical theoscapes. But this

[2] The supremacy of the Portuguese Crown over the Catholic Church.

struggle against the radicals died down once the whole Church found itself in danger of losing its hegemonic status: the rise of the Pentecostal communities, that created (at first) depoliticized theoscapes, focused on the individual spiritual self-improvement.

In the chapter on "The Catholicism in the United States: a House Divided?", Kratochvíl deals with the three stadiums in the historical development of the Catholic community in the US. The first is what he terms republican Catholicism, with the theoscape of double loyalty: to the Republic, as well as to the Vatican. With the influx of large Catholic immigrant population, the Catholics, now largely an immigrant population, were to develop a Catholic subculture. Kratochvíl argues that the theoscapes from the first two periods were primarily spatial, as they were defined by their countries of origin, the loyalty to the Vatican, and by "delimiting the Catholic political space against the Protestant majority" (78). After the subcultural period, that ended with the presidential win of John F. Kennedy, "the paradigm shift" and the polarization made the theoscapes primarily temporal, as they started to be shaped by culture wars, that are always temporal (86). Once spatial and defined by the country of origin, class, loyalty to Rome, to America, today, Kratochvíl concludes, theoscapes deal mainly with the temporal questions of the perception of the past, the importance of tradition and the fight for the future (78).

In the chapter on India, titled "Indian Catholicism: A Vibrant Microcosm under Threat", Kratochvíl describes theoscapes that were produced by the interplay between the indigenous Christian population: St. Thomas Christians, again, the colonial authorities, the missionaries and the Indian caste system. Kratochvíl, chooses to analyze India for its future Catholic potential. What makes Indian theoscapes differ from others in former colonies is the idea of colonial powers to separate religion from culture, to incorporate faith in the cyclical Indian view of temporality, as well as the Indian caste system. The other important peculiarity is the presence of a Christian community before the arrival of Western missionaries. Finally, the most important is the anticolonial struggle and the reshaping of the Indian identity, which poses new challenges to Catholic believers in India. Such a composite situation in India, created, according to Kratochvíl, five major geopolitical axes, that entertain the question of local and imported Christianity, the different approach of colonial and papal Catholicism, the colonial heritage of Catholic presence and its decoupling from colonial authorities (the Dutch, and later, the British), and what is most important today, the relationship of Catholic believers in India to the majority population (99).

In the Chapter on Catholicism in China, Kratochvíl analyses the historical development of the relationship between China and Catholicism in the context of the inaccessibility of China. What sets out China from other case studies is

the growing attention given by the Vatican to the present and future situation of the Chinese Catholic. The inaccessibility, Kratochvíl argues, influenced missionaries' spatiality and temporality, as the missionaries were focused on the vast territory of China and thus, they put efforts in proving that Christianity is compatible with indigenous religious traditions. The latter created a unique form of indigenization of the local Church: *sinicization*. To Kratochvíl, this attempt at indigenization had an apologetic tone, borne out of the struggle to convince the emperor that their teachings are compatible with the teachings of indigenous religious traditions.

Kratochvíl shows that these struggles were not tied to the Empire alone, as they continue down to the present-day Republic--even after the "opening of China" under Deng Xiaoping (1978-1989). Yet, there is a crucial difference. The theoscapes in the Empire focused on the indigenization, while the ones created during the Cold War were shaped by the global struggle against communism (151). The peculiarity of the Chinese case, argues Kratochvíl, led to a specific diplomatic approach of the pontiffs in dealing with the Chinese authorities. To illustrate, Kratochvíl quotes now late pope Francis, who said once that the agreement between the Chinese government and the Holy See must be done the "Chinese way", that is slowly, at their pace. Kratochvíl argues that this attitude of the pontiff is the product of past interactions, and many errors that led to the extinction of the Catholic presence in China (134).

Finally, the last case study is the Catholicism in the Democratic Republic of Congo, or as per Kratochvíl, in "the heart of Catholic Africa" (162). This chapter deals with what the author sees as the "the perennial question of Congolese Christianity": firstly, is a theoscape that harmoniously incorporates the Catholic faith and the African context possible, and secondly, how can Christianity continue to exist and develop after its rejection of colonial powers that brought that very faith to the region (164-165). The author shows that the answer to this question cannot be straightforward. The peculiarity of the Congolese case lays in the fact that Christianity wasn't imposed on the population by a colonial power, but that it "was introduced following a free decision" of the Congolese king (165). This fact, according to the author, led to the partially independent development of Christianity in the country. The indigenization of Catholicism was an integral component from the very beginning. Kratochvíl analyze the case through four phases of development of Catholicism in Congo and their dominant theoscapes, that, he argues, revolve around the range of inclusivity of Christian life. Yet, he shows too, that one of key elements in the development, from the very start was the church-state relationship, from the precolonial period, and its dependence on the Kingdom and its adaptation to the local context, the colonial period, where it served as "the most important" institution of the colonial authorities (182), and lastly, in the post-independence period,

where it found itself as "the only institution with the functional network" across the country (185) and which helped her gain political influence.

Due to its strong theoretical foundation, comparative nature and the richness of cases analyzed, the *Geopolitics of Global Catholicism* is indeed a much-needed contribution to the field of religion and politics. It will surely be of great value for scholars and students interested particularly in the study of geopolitics of religion. By introducing the novel concept of spatial-temporal theoscape, the book provokes the established static view of religion, including the view of religion as a transnational immaterial discourse. Often neglected history of Catholicism in the Global South can also serve and help scholars interested in colonial and post-colonial studies. Finally, this book shows, perhaps unintentionally, how important the institutional context to the development of theoscapes is, and, more broadly, how the same religious tradition can create different perspectives in different institutional contexts.