

Call for Papers: Catholicism, Challenges to Democracy, and the Legacy of Jacques Maritain

Guest Editors: Laurie Johnston and Gregoire Catta, SJ

...we cannot avoid noting with concern how today, and not only in Europe, we are witnessing a retreat from democracy. Democracy requires participation and involvement on the part of all; consequently, it demands hard work and patience. It is complex, whereas authoritarianism is peremptory and populism's easy answers appear attractive. In some societies, concerned for security and dulled by consumerism, weariness and malcontent can lead to a sort of skepticism about democracy. Yet universal participation is something essential; not simply to attain shared goals, but also because it corresponds to what we are: social beings, at once unique and interdependent.

At the same time, we are also witnessing a skepticism about democracy provoked by the distance of institutions, by fear of a loss of identity, by bureaucracy. The remedy is not to be found in an obsessive quest for popularity, in a thirst for visibility, in a flurry of unrealistic promises or in adherence to forms of ideological colonization, but in good politics. For politics is, and ought to be in practice, a good thing, as the supreme responsibility of citizens and as the art of the common good.

– Pope Francis, Address in the Presidential Palace in Athens, December 4, 2021

As Pope Francis recently noted, democracy is facing major challenges around the world. Yascha Mounk and others have documented striking declines in support for democracy among young people globally.¹ Economic inequality undermines the social cohesion and solidarity that are required to sustain democratic governance. Populism, nationalism, and authoritarianism are on the rise in many places, often accompanied by disregard for the human rights of minority groups and of migrants. Social media and viral disinformation contribute to splintering and polarization in societies, and even in traditionally democratic countries, political leaders attack the press. The coronavirus pandemic has provoked deep controversies over how to balance coercive public health measures with individual liberties. Many question whether contemporary democracies are even capable of responding effectively to the climate emergency. And on an international level, there remains a “democratic deficit” in international institutions such as the UN, the WTO, and the World Bank. At the same time, growing empirical evidence demonstrates that democracy is crucial for the effective promotion of many aspects of human dignity, from the work of Amartya Sen on famines² to more recent work on the correlation between democracy and improved health.³

2023 marks the 50th anniversary of the death of Jacques Maritain. Maritain was a key shaper of modern Catholic Social Teaching on politics, human rights, and democracy, and had a significant influence in the drafting

¹ Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, “The Democratic Disconnect,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 3 (July 2016).

² Amartya Sen, A. *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford University Press, 1981).

³ See, for example, Thomas J Bollyky, et al. “The relationships between democratic experience, adult health, and cause-specific mortality in 170 countries between 1980 and 2016: an observational analysis,” *The Lancet* 393, no. 10181 (April 20, 2019): 1628-1640.

of the UN Declaration on Human Rights.⁴ Maritain's reflections on faith and politics, including his book *Christianity and Democracy*, played an important role in the slow endorsement of democracy by the Church – an endorsement that was explicit in Pius XII's 1944 Christmas radio message, but more fully present at Vatican II. Maritain's work on integral human development also had a significant influence on the drafting of the encyclical *Populorum Progressio*. Many key themes in Maritain's thought remain relevant: integral humanism, conscience, human rights, the common good, and natural law. But his intellectual journey was a complex one, taking him from the far-right Action-Française in the 1920s to the left in the 1930s, to an eventual skepticism of all totalizing systems or "integralisms." When he and his wife Raissa escaped to the US during World War II, he came to appreciate American democracy. He also became a passionate advocate against antisemitism, particularly antisemitism within the Catholic Church. Throughout his career, he responded to a wide range of social and political issues – some of which resemble our contemporary challenges.⁵

The Journal of Moral Theology invites submissions of papers on the topic of "Catholicism, Challenges to Democracy, and the legacy of Jacques Maritain." While we are particularly interested in papers that deal specifically with Maritain's thought, other topics related to Catholicism and contemporary challenges to democracy are also welcome. Topics might include:

- What aspects of Maritain's thought on modernism, democracy, the relationship between faith and politics, the nature and role of the state, or the concept of sovereignty are relevant to address today's democratic crises? What aspects of his thought are more problematic?
- Maritain discussed the idea of religious inspiration in politics and drew a distinction between "acting as a Christian" and "acting in a Christian way" (cf. *Integral humanism*). What should/could be the contribution of Catholics and Catholicism to democracy today? How might that contribution vary in different cultural and political contexts?
- Maritain was particularly concerned about the dehumanizing effects of totalitarianism. How might his thought offer resources for responding to contemporary forces of dehumanization such as global consumer capitalism, extractivism, or "big data"?
- During his time in the US, Maritain's observations of how its democracy functioned led to a major change in his views on the subject. Both he and John Courtney Murray drew specifically upon the US example as they contributed to the Church's shift to an explicit endorsement of democracy. Given the challenges that US democracy is facing today, what might be some implications for the global church?
- Social media appears particularly corrosive to democracy and social cohesion. What resources might Catholic social thought offer for navigating the tension between freedom of expression and the problem of viral disinformation?
- Governments have responded to the coronavirus pandemic in vastly different ways; when have autocratic approaches been more successful, and when have democratic ones? What might this reveal about the

⁴ See Samuel Moyn, "Jacques Maritain: le origini dei Diritti umani e il pensiero politico cristiano," in *Dialogo interculturale e diritti umani: La Dichiarazione Universale dei Diritti Umani, Genesi, evoluzione, e problemi odierni* (1948– 2008), ed. by Luigi Bonanate and Roberto Papini (Bologna: Il Molino, 2008).

⁵ See, for example, Paul Valadier, *Maritain à contre-temps: Pour une démocratie vivante* (Paris: Desclee de Brouwer, 2006).

promise or pitfalls of democratic governance in the pandemic era?

- Growing economic inequality poses a threat to democratic stability and to world order. How can Catholic Social Thought provide a corrective?
- What is the relationship between limited government and the duty of Catholics to promote the common good?
- Decreasing participation in political life and electoral processes presents a challenge to many contemporary democracies. How might Catholic social thought contribute to promoting inclusive participation and to reinvigorating democracy?
- Both Poland and the Philippines experienced democratic revolutions in the 1980s that were driven to a significant extent by support from the Catholic Church. Today, the Church in the Philippines is strongly critical of an autocratic leader, while the Polish Catholic Church largely supports the antidemocratic Law and Justice political party. What theological and cultural factors are necessary to sustain support for democracy in countries with a significant Catholic population?
- Maritain's "social Catholicism" had a significant influence in Latin America and even "helped set the stage for the coming of liberation theology."⁶ How might his legacy be relevant to the struggle for democracy in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Brazil, or other Latin American countries today?

The guest editors of the volume, Laurie Johnston (johnsla@emmanuel.edu) and Grégoire Catta (gregoire.catta@centresevres.com), welcome any questions regarding topics you are considering.

Submissions should conform to the standards and style of the *Journal of Moral Theology* and can [be submitted here](#) until January 1, 2023. All papers will be subject to peer review, with ample time for revision before publication. The issue is targeted for a 2023-24 release. More information on *the Journal* and previous issues available at: <https://jmt.scholasticahq.com/>.

⁶ Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 81. See also José Gómez Cerda, "Presencia de Jacques Maritain en América Latina: Su influencia en influencia en el pensamiento social Cristiano," *Wall Street International Magazine*, January 28, 2021.