THE VATICAN IN WORLD POLITICS: TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM
AND THE CAMPAIGN FOR DEBT RELIEF

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by
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DEDICATION

This thesis is a product of tears, insomnia, and stress. Nevertheless, it all has been worthwhile to present my accomplishment to my loved ones and say “Aquí está mi tesis”. To my mom and dad, who are the foundations of who I am. Whose unconditional love and support I have always felt surrounding me. My brother, for bringing smiles to my face when I am saddened, and reminding me of the need to let go of my worries. I cannot wait to see where life takes you. To my dear grandma Luz for always checking on my health, both mental and physical, and never giving up on me. My beloved grandma Chole who I know is proud of me and whom I think of everyday. Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to my love, and future husband, Grant. Your support and unending patience has been critical to keep me continuing on. You, more than anyone else, know the academic challenges I faced to finish this thesis. I know I inspired you to write a thesis of your own. Thank you for being my unconditional editor.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Vatican in World Politics: Transnational Activism and the Campaign for Debt Relief
by
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Type International Relations scholars have largely neglected the presence of the Vatican as an actor in the international arena, despite the fact that it is the capital of the state of the Holy See. The Vatican carries strong political influence and privileges, such as its United Nations Permanent Observer status, that allow it to mobilize and reach out to national and international political figures. However, due to its lack of military power and productive economic capacity, the Vatican does not have the “hard” power to lead the international political agenda. Therefore, when it comes to advocacy for social, political, or economic causes, the Vatican relies on transnational activism to spread its message to followers and to persuade state leaders and international institutions. This thesis analyzes the role of the Vatican in transnational activism, while also analyzing its differences and similarities with secular transnational activists. It draws on the literature on transnational activists to understand the Vatican’s behavior in international politics.

To help understand the Vatican’s transnational advocacy work, this thesis analyzes its strategies, such as the use of political opportunity structures, media influence, moral authority, and the mobilization of its base. The thesis evaluates these efforts with a substantive case study focused on its work with other human rights groups to persuade international financial institutions (IFIs) and rich-country governments to adopt debt relief programs to ease the burden of the heavily indebted poor countries. The outcome of such advocacy was the creation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative in 1996, and a reformed and enhanced initiative in 1999. This case demonstrates that the Vatican relied on both its quasi-state features and on the tactics of transnational activism to put pressure IFIs and creditor states to develop and modify international debt relief programs. The Vatican was not alone on this cause; the collaboration and influence of transnational activists and international organizations, such as Jubilee 2000, strengthened the church’s impact. The enhanced HIPC Initiative was an interesting demonstration of successful collaboration between the Vatican, as a religious transnational organization, and secular transnational organizations. The thesis demonstrates how the Vatican’s religious message of the biblical Jubilee resonated with the moral messages of secular organizations, lending forceful credibility to the cause.

The findings presented here illuminate the value of studying both religious and secular forms of transnational activism. In this case, the Vatican was able to persuade international financial institutions and creditor states and garner support from secular activists in the HIPCI, but such cooperation across religious-secular lines is not always the case. In other areas, such as population control, the religious positions of the Vatican clash
with the values of secular organizations, limiting the church’s effectiveness in international policy. Ultimately, the Vatican is just another international actor seeking allies and relying on the approval of the international community to advance its causes.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, the literature on transnational activism has had a significant impact in political science. Analysis of the role of transnational activists has challenged the prevailing conception of sovereignty and challenged realist assumptions about state self-interest. Scholars of the Hobbesian tradition reject the notion that non-state international actors challenge state sovereignty. The “Hobbesian prescription for international conduct is that the state is free to pursue its goals in relation to other states without moral or legal restrictions of any kind. […] If any moral or legal goals are to be pursued in international politics, these can only be the moral or legal goals of the state itself” (Bull 1977, 24). For Realists, states will ignore pressure from transnational activists, especially if that advice goes against states’ interests. There is no question that states are the ultimate decision makers in international politics. However, as more transnational activists participate in international dialogues, states cannot so easily ignore their presence.

Because the Vatican shares some of the defining characteristics of a state, we cannot fully consider it a transnational activist in the way such actors are defined in the existing literature. It is nevertheless worthwhile to analyze this international religious institution’s role in transnational activism in order to improve our understanding of its behavior and interests, and to elucidate the role of non-state actors in international politics. Because this thesis primarily focuses on the Vatican’s advocacy activities in the international arena, it is appropriate to compare the Vatican’s activism with that of other transnational activist organizations. The nature of the Vatican, its prominent place in the international community, and its involvement as a protagonist in controversial global issues such as international debt relief, human rights, and population growth make it an intriguing object of analysis. Furthermore, a study of the Vatican as a participant in transnational activism makes a valuable contribution to the literature on the role and effects of transnational activists in the international system.
The Vatican is a unique entity on the global stage. It is the head of the Catholic Church, which oversees 1.2 billion Catholics. It is a hierarchical, religious institution with the Pope at its head. The Church considers the Pope to be the Vicar of Christ. The Vatican is also the capital of the Holy See, which is an authoritative, semi-sovereign, state-like entity located in Rome, Italy. Like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), a powerful transnational activist, the Vatican is a Non-Member State Permanent Observer in the United Nations. This allows the Vatican to participate in the General Assembly, to co-sponsor resolutions, and put these resolutions to vote, among other privileges. In terms of international relations theory, then, the Vatican is a peculiar entity that possesses some characteristics of a state, as well as some characteristics of non-state actors, including a dedication to transnational activism.

For centuries, the Vatican has participated in world and geopolitical matters. Its unique nature as a hierarchical religious institution with presence across the globe grants it opportunity to be a powerful political actor in the international community. However, scholars have not given it adequate examination in these terms. To address this gap in the literature, this study addresses three questions. First, what role does the Vatican play as a transnational actor? Second, how does the Vatican’s transnational political advocacy resemble or differ from that of secular transnational activists? Third, how do the particular resources and position of the Vatican aid or undermine its effectiveness as a transnational actor? It is my objective to correct the neglect in the literature and make a distinctive contribution by bringing greater analytic attention to an important, yet overlooked player in international advocacy.

To begin analyzing the Vatican’s participation in transnational activism, Chapter Two of this thesis presents analysis of the relevant literature on transnational activism. I define transnational activism, and discuss its features, political significance, merits and adverse characteristics. It is not my purpose to evaluate and judge the Vatican’s behavior in general, but rather to understand its nature and behavior more narrowly within the scope of transnational activism. The literature on religious transnational activists is scarce; most analyses feature secular actors. Though religious transnational activists possess some features that are distinct from those of their secular counterparts, they still share many characteristics. The Vatican does not qualify as a transnational activist due to its state-like qualities, but by
looking into the characteristics of transnational activists, I hope to show how the Vatican utilizes similar behavior in its advocacy.

Chapter Three of the thesis elaborates on the behavior of the Vatican as a religious institution using transnational activism. I present the Vatican as an actor focused on international advocacy for causes of moral concern, particularly the alleviation of poverty. Due to the lack of existing political science literature on the Vatican specifically, and on religious transnational activism more generally, Chapter Three compares the role of the Vatican to that of secular activists. The Vatican employs a distinctive method to create awareness, seeking the approval of states to support their causes. At the same time, it is fascinating to look at transnational activists who demand state compliance with agreements and promises. Actors employing transnational activism, including the Vatican, vary their behaviors according to circumstances; they seek states’ approval when needed or criticize states when necessary. Chapter Three also explores differences between the Vatican and secular activists. For example, I show how the Vatican’s hierarchical structure helps it collaborate with key domestic and international leaders. As a religious organization with a moral ethos, the Vatican’s use of morality is different than that of a secular organization, which might be equally well-intended but driven by different motives. In addition, because the Vatican possesses some features of a state, it can employ those qualities, such as the ability to forge diplomatic agreements, to accomplish its missions.

The fourth chapter of the thesis explores the Vatican’s transnational activism in the case of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative II (HIPCII). In this instance, the Vatican was heavily involved in advocating that international leaders create debt relief programs for the poorest and most heavily indebted countries. In the mid-1990s, the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank created the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative I (HIPC I). By the year 2000, it had failed to fulfill the expectations of the Vatican, as well as of key international organizations, developing states, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Vatican took a leadership role in a sophisticated network of transnational advocacy organizations in calling for reforms to the HIPCII. This chapter first explains the religious dogma behind the Vatican’s advocacy of debt relief. It then presents background information on HIPCII and the Vatican’s campaign. Though multiple transnational activists and organizations share the credit for the creation of this new
initiative, I show how the Vatican employed religious transnational activism to pressure the international financial institutions to develop a second, reformed HIPCI, the HIPCI II.

In the fifth and final chapter I summarize my findings and analyze how the literature on transnational activists discussed in Chapter Two and the characteristics of the Vatican as an international actor discussed in Chapter Three can be seen in the HIPCI case study. Because of the lack of scholarship focusing on the Vatican’s advocacy, there is more to study to expand on the knowledge of the Vatican’s behavior in the international community. Therefore, I suggest future scholarship to expand on the groundwork laid by my thesis and further explore the possible interaction between secular and religious activists in world politics.
CHAPTER 2

TRANSACTIONAL ACTIVISM IN
INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

Transnational activists have become prominent players in the international community since the end of the Cold War. In the last two decades, their interactions with states and other international organizations has become more visible (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 1). States and transnational activists coexist by (among other things) sharing information, advising one another, or by challenging each other. Not only have transnational activists challenged the concept of state sovereignty, but they have also challenged the idea of states as the sole guardians of the wellbeing of humanity. The number of transnational activists has increased rapidly. Those advocating for human rights and environmental rights together make up almost half of all transnational activists. The number of human rights organizations increased five times from 1953 to 1993 (to 168), and the number of environmental organizations increased to 90 in 1993 from just two in 1953 (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 11). With the proliferation of transnational activists in the international realm, we cannot ignore their presence or deny their influence.

This chapter presents various definitions of transnational activists, and analyzes their roles and political significance. It explores the debates among scholars on the desirability of their intervention in international politics. For this purpose, my focus is on Western transnational activists, which will provide useful background for the subsequent analysis of the Vatican’s transnational activism.

DEFINING TRANSACTIONAL ACTIVISTS

Analysis of transnational activists is still relatively new to the field of international politics. Scholars have many different ideas about the impact of transnational activists, and there is more to learn about their behavior and their effects on the international system. Definitions vary among scholars. Aall, Miltenberger, and Weiss (2000) assert that transnational activists are “dedicated to the service and protection of those sectors of society
that tend to be unserved or underserved by governments and other official institutions such as the United Nations” (89). Keck and Sikkink (1998) define them as “networks of scientists and experts whose professional ties and shared casual ideas underpin their efforts to influence policy. Others are networks of activists, distinguishable largely by the centrality of principled ideas or values in motivating their formation” (1). For Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco (1997), transnational activists are nonstate actors that advocate institutional and policy changes at the international level (xiii). Graubart (2008b) bridges the differences between Smith and Keck and Sikkink by defining transnational activists operating “beyond state borders by working on global causes, networking with activists in other states, utilizing international institutions, and invoking international norms” (160). It is beyond my scope to determine which definition best describes transnational activists, but for the purposes of this thesis, I will rely upon Graubart’s definition.

**THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM**

Transnational activists must play along with the international etiquette of behavior, such as following norms and regulations implemented by international institutions and international law, to gain access to policymakers, state leaders, and international institutions. The United Nations (UN) offers the space for transnational activists to navigate (Shelledy1 2003; Smith, Chatfield and, Pagnucco 1997). “The United Nations and its specialized agencies [italics in original] have grown by expanding their membership and by increasing their function and operations. […] [it] has many features that provide a basis for the formation and influence” of transnational activists (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 10). Such influence is demonstrated when transnational activists take part in global conferences, functioning as researchers for policymaking, and as lobbyists. As international actors, transnational activists have the opportunity to monitor the behavior of states and international institutions to later advocate for their policies. Through the basis for influence

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1 In this thesis I heavily rely on Robert B Shelledy’s scholarly works (2003 and 2004). His scholarship is one of the very few which focus both on the Vatican’s transnational advocacy and debt relief together, which is useful for my thesis which focuses on these subject matters. Unlike Shelledy I am not aiming to prove the neo-secularization theory. The purpose of my thesis is to have a deeper understanding as to how the Vatican operates in transnational activism.
that the UN and its agencies provide to transnational activists, these activists can heighten attention to social-based norms, conduct investigations, and gain influential allies (Graubart 2008a, 45). Transnational activists are members of the international community, and the UN and its agencies grant them access to key players and opportunities that they can use to achieve their goals.

Transnational activists have become important actors participating in the shaping of global reforms. Though scholars generally agree that states carry the last word on global policy formation (Chandler 2003; Graubart 2008b; Weiss and Gordenker 1996), the impact of transnational activists on the direction of many global policies is unquestionable. The importance of transnational activists as policy shapers “is recognised by the [UN] secretary general himself” (Weiss and Gordenker 1996, 87). As participants in the global community, transnational activists have contributed to “global changes by directly influencing particular policies and by affecting the context in which they are made” (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 3). Moreover, Boehle (2010) explains that transnational activists “often start the initial initiatives that result years later in changes in national and international law, in (re)informing international values and norms, and in (re)shaping international institutions and their programs” (384). Boehle argues that transnational activists have the influence to mobilize the international arena to address issues that state leaders and international organizations might otherwise ignore or postpone. One of those circumstances transnational activists influence is the UN Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (Boehle 2010, 384). Transnational activists have capabilities that induce global changes; for example, working transnationally allows them to work with national institutions as well. “They often try to affect the views of the attentive public and elites, at the regional or global level […] at the national level to influence officials, national organization and the public at large” (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 16). Through the efforts of changing views on international matters, transnational activists are contributing to the making of international reforms. According to Graubart (2008b), the “extent of influence is open for debate but transnational activists have undoubtedly become significant global actors” (160).

Transnational activists are advocates for global policy; however, the implementation of many global policies remains in the hands of the states. Therefore, transnational activists
must take the role of mediators among states to address global issues. To achieve consensus among states, transnational activists will use the “interrelated system of institutions that govern interactions among states and facilitate collective problem solving” (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 68-9). Such interrelated system of institutions are the UN conferences often hosted by transnational activists with the purpose of calling the attention of states to issues of concern, while offering a platform for discussion and agreement.

Such was the case with the official definition of “violence against women” at the international level. Transnational activists had “to build a transnational campaign because it allowed them to attract allies and bridge cultural differences” striving to find common ground central to liberalism and to other cultures (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 172). As mediators, transnational activists must gain the trust of all parties. Once achieved, transnational activists assist governments to reach agreements in multinational negotiations by expanding policy options, enhancing the transparency of international negotiations (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 191). This makes transnational activists politically significant due to their ability to set the table for political negotiations (Weiss and Gordenker 1996, 88).

Transnational activists, particularly those associated with religions or ethnic identities, can draw people together across the globe and create a stronger bond. This connection increases the influence and propagation of transnational activists and their causes. Smith and Johnson (2002) believe “transnational identity” provides a powerful motivation to champion the homelands’ causes, as they demonstrate with the Sons of Italy and Slovak League, both US-based organizations (56). Transnational identities affect international affairs when transnational activists that represent an ideology, culture, or profession that has the support of a large group. The International Workers Congress and the International League of Peace and Liberty collaborated across the globe to represent the interests of their profession and values when they called for workers to celebrate Labor Day, May 1, by taking off work (Smith and Johnson 2002, 55). Connecting with people based on religion, ethnicity, or profession empowers transnational activists because “transnational identity” crosses all borders and can unite otherwise dissimilar individuals in various countries, who may in turn put pressure on their states to support a particular policy advocated by the transnational activists to whom they are connected.
Transnational activists need to identify opportunities within the structure of the international community to mobilize and spread their causes more efficiently and effectively. Scholars emphasize their use of political opportunity structures. Graubart (2008a) explains that “transnational political opportunity structures involve a confluence of elements that enable activists to gain material and normative support for their cause” (45). Transnational activists gain momentum when using the tools available to them through political opportunity structures, such as “an international institution geared to activists’ concerns” (Graubart 2008a, 45). One such opportunity structure is the United Nations. Working through the United Nations provides transnational activists with benefits by bringing “heightened attention to social value-based norms, provid[ing] grants for attending summits and conducting investigations, open[ing] access to elite actors and to the media, and [allowing] activists to gain influential allies” (Graubart 2008a, 45). Transnational activists can choose not to participate in these structures; however, the inability to cooperate with allies, receive funding, or garner media attention can limit their ability to spread their message and to gain support. Transnational political opportunity structures do not guarantee a successful campaign for transnational activists, but they can improve their odds.

Transnational political opportunity structures can also provide openings for transnational activists to deal with legal matters with states. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a transnational political opportunity structure, allows transnational activists from Canada, the United States, and Mexico to use quasi-judicial mechanisms to demand accountability from any of these countries in matters of the environment and workers’ rights. What transnational activists “gain from the transnational quasi-judicial channel are a legal process for mediating the dispute, legitimizations, especially if the quasi-judicial body validates the complaint, and added international pressure on the target actor” (Graubart 2008a, 51). NAFTA as a political opportunity structure is open for transnational activists from the North American countries to challenge any of those states in a legal dispute. Such validation of a complaint creates pressure for the targeted country to comply; however, countries can refuse to comply, even at the risk of jeopardizing their credibility (Graubart 2008a, 50). In the case of transnational activists whose cause and complaints against a targeted state are unlikely to succeed, the use of transnational legal mechanisms adds “status to their cause” (Graubart 2008a, 49). A main reason to use these legal
mechanisms is to build domestic and international support, and to call media attention to their campaign.

Scholars view the political force of transnational activists in the international community not only as initiators of global reforms, but also as a shield that provides political cover to states and to intergovernmental institutions such as the Security Council. Graubart (2008b) comments that prominent transnational activists have “played a crucial role in expanding the [Security] Council’s scope of authority to encompass fundamental reconstruction of a state’s political, economic, and social infrastructure” (154). An actor as important as the Security Council needs the involvement of transnational activists in areas of the Council’s interests to legitimize the intrusion of foreign personnel and actors. For example, after the Rwanda genocide “the UN Security Council and the major Western powers used relief agencies as their principal policy instruments”; in this case “humanitarian action was made to stand in place of political action” (De Waal 1997, 192). De Waal (2003) also perceives transnational activists as working in coordination with states and Western institutions: “It suffices to say that the readiness of Western human rights organizations to embrace, often uncritically, the agenda of military-humanitarian interventionism reflects the extent to which they are grounded in the discourses and worldviews of Western capital cities” (486). The interest of transnational activists is not questioned when they assist in areas of conflict or where human rights violations are common, but rather there is the concern that powerful states and institutions take advantage of the legitimacy of transnational activists to serve their own interests.

Some critics of transnational activists identify them as tools of powerful Western states. Despite being tools of Western states, skeptics see transnational activists as egocentric players, due to their Western backing, and are critical of their interventions and their calls for global reforms. Leading transnational activists are located in Western countries while they predominantly execute their work in the global South (Aall, Miltenberger, and Weiss 2000, 87). Being Western-centric leads transnational activists “to be less attentive to issues of particular concern to populations in the South, such as local political, social, and economic practices” (Graubart 2008b, 161). Transnational activists address issues that involve different cultures with different priorities and perceptions than their own. Therefore these activists can
target issues they consider to be of importance, while not taking into account the demands made by communities in the global South.

**THE MERITS OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM**

The political significance of transnational activists has been beneficial in pressuring international actors, whether they are states or intergovernmental organizations such as the IMF and World Bank, to address global concerns which otherwise may have been ignored. Transnational activists can track the progress of policy reforms and bring light to the failure of states and intergovernmental organizations to fulfill their promises. As Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco (1997) explain, transnational activists “remind government delegates that they are being watched” by their respective constituents (italics in original statement, 266). Once states and institutions agree to address reforms, transnational activists monitor the process to ensure that they fulfill their commitments. State policymakers try to avoid losing credibility or attracting negative attention by failing to uphold their promises. Unfortunately, when governments are conscious of their breaches of promises they tend to prefer to mitigate the problems, rather than to act for their prevention or reversal (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 176). Whether or not states are interested in fulfilling their promises for policymaking and reforms, transnational activists will shadow these states until the government fulfills these promises.

Once a government has publicity committed itself to a principle … [transnational activist] networks can use those positions, and their command of information, to expose the distance between discourse and practice. This is embarrassing to many governments, which may try to save face by closing that distance. (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 24)

Since transnational activists have no power of their own to enforce norms and only possess the power of advocacy, they must remind states of their agreements and promises in order to achieve their mission. States are the most powerful actors in the international community; therefore, when state leaders make an agreement or promise, it is desirable that activists hold them accountable for following through.

Transnational activists not only deal with important international actors, but also with the ideologies and conceptions of the status quo of the international community. States and international bodies that prevail in the international community have their own sets of values and beliefs. Transnational activists challenge those ideals, giving voice to actors who are not
part of the status quo. Many transnational activists “seek to challenge the great inequalities in
the world. The immense differences in wealth, power, and status within and among countries
are oppressive for those people who have little” (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 18).
Transnational activists strive to look after the interests of the people who are oppressed or
ignored by defenders of the status quo. Though there is the danger that these transnational
activists might patronize or assume the needs of the people for whom they fight, challenging
the international policies of the status quo is an important step to give a more complete voice
to people in the periphery of the international community.

Transnational activists do not only observe the fulfillment of international
agreements, but they also call attention to domestic violations committed by states. Human
rights abuses are common in both democratic and non-democratic governments; therefore,
transnational activists such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch play
important roles in documenting violations. This awareness can induce other governments to
pressure a violating state to address their violations. As Keck and Sikkink (1998) explain:
“foreign governments [have] placed pressure on human rights violators only after
nongovernmental actors had identified, documented, and denounced human rights violations”
(117). Transnational activists give voice to the victims of human rights violations who would
otherwise be voiceless. Although “people in one country may be intimidated and endangered
by protesting the wrongful imprisonment of individuals in their country,” through
transnational activists and other foreign movements, the voiceless’ concerns and suffering
can be brought to light (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 16). The suffering of citizens
at the hands of their governments has minimal probabilities of being addressed without the
awareness and pressure brought by transnational activists. Though it is up to state leaders to
choose the degree of attention they will give to the transgressions, transnational activists lay
the groundwork for addressing domestic violations.

Often states try to mitigate their transgressions and distract the international
community while the issue succumbs to obscurity. Transnational activists must continually
raise such issues for them to remain relevant and reduce relapsing. “Governments,
particularly democratic ones, have short attention spans. Particular issues become salient and
action seems necessary, but then attention wanes and another issue suddenly claims
attention” (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 17). As public attention wanes, victims find
themselves without the means to continue change. The state may even reverse previous gains or impose worse penalties against the victims, especially if the distraction is deliberate. When state political leaders wait for public forgetfulness, transnational activists provide channels to spread communication. Voices “that are suppressed in their own societies may” find useful transnational activists that can “project and amplify their concerns into an international arena, which in turn can echo back to into their own countries” (Keck and Sikkink 1998, x). Global issues such as human rights violations due to religious affiliation and political ideology are common in various parts of the world. It is important for groups such as transnational activists to keep reminding states, intergovernmental institutions, and the public of the suffering of otherwise silent victims.

The mass media have always proven to be a strong tool for spreading awareness across various parts of the world, and now more than ever with interactive social media. Transnational activists enhance the public understanding of various global concerns and have become more focused and strategic in their use of the media (Rugendyke 2007, 71). Because transnational activists need public support for their goals and policies, it is critical to draw the public to their side. Fortunately for transnational activists, through the various methods of spreading awareness, “many citizens are beginning to see transnational efforts as necessary responses” to global developments (Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 9). Transnational activists have demonstrated a vital role in global crises. Moreover, the visibility of transnational activists has expanded in recent years, as “television coverage of a series of humanitarian crises has spotlighted the vital role that [they] play in relieving suffering” (Aall, Miltenberger, and Weiss 2000, 100). The use of media is essential for transnational activists to spread awareness, and is one of their greatest tools in advocating for change. This advocacy helps transnational activists in their broader efforts to call upon states to account for their promises, or to bring greater awareness of the voiceless victims of transgressions.

**THE PERILS OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM**

Transnational activists are not always accountable to the people for whom they claim an advocacy role. The only way transnational activists are held accountable is when they receive or fail to receive funding from donors or from Western institutions, such as the UN Security Council (Aall, Miltenberger, and Weiss 2000, 111). However, the people or
organizations that are the targets of their advocacy do not typically have any means to hold them responsible for the aftermath of their actions (De Waal 1997; Rugendyke 2007). This is a potentially dangerous characteristic. De Waal (1997) comments that the “responsibility” of transnational activists “is vague and easily evaded moral responsibility—nothing more than an aspiration—rather than a practical obligation for which the ‘responsible’ institution can be called to account” (70). Transnational activists, particularly those who provide humanitarian assistance, do not always rigorously evaluate their processes or the effects of their policies. It is alarming to have influential actors not take responsibility for shortcomings in the policies they advocate. Instead of properly looking after their causes and people, they are prone to follow the same mistakes. “One of the challenges facing NGOs is to extend evaluation of their advocacy to attempting to remedy this knowledge deficit” (Rugendyke 2007, 230).

It is presumably noble for organizations to take humanitarian stands and advocate for causes that need attention. However, the intrusion of transnational activists into the domestic affairs of states presents the danger of diminishing the domestic accountability its people possess over their state. According to Chandler (2001), this “new humanitarian” principle of no longer requiring a state’s consent for long-term involvement and taking over responsibilities is a convenient way to bypass a state’s sovereignty for transnational activists (678). As Branch (2011) explains in the case of Africa, when legitimate domestic institutions fail to protect the people, “it putatively becomes up to the West to respond to the moral imperative and save strangers in Africa, to sanctimoniously take upon ourselves the burden of defending Africa’s humanity from Africa’s inhumanity” (6). No doubt transnational activists are able to improvise and initiate municipal and alternative services for the benefit of local people when the central state authority collapses, but the consequences of their efforts can be troubling (Aall, Miltenberger, and Weiss 2000, 110). Internationalizing domestic problems, such as famine and poverty, can leave populations with a weaker government that they cannot hold accountable. They are left with only the support of international actors and institutions that then have the power to decide what policies they deem appropriate. As De Waal (1997) showcases with the case of international action in famine relief, “U.N. institutions, international NGOs, foreign governments and any citizen of any country in the world become […] stakeholders in any famine happening anywhere in the world” (70). International actors, such as transnational activists, are not elected by the
domestic people but rather supported by Western institutions. “Political activity is increasingly undertaken outside of traditional political parties and is becoming a sphere dominated by advocacy groups and single-issue campaigns who do not seek to garner votes but to lobby or gain publicity for their claims” (Chandler 2003, 340). When activists adopt responsibilities that belong to states, particularly in the South, they can reduce the state’s capacity to represent civilian interests and demands. Internationalizing domestic issues can thus sometimes lessen the effectiveness of democratic state institutions.

Critics charge that Western international language and perceptions of the appropriate world order heavily influence many transnational activists (Branch 2011; Mamdani 2008). According to Mamdani, Western-centric transnational activists are reinforcing the new concept of “responsibility” and the “humanitarian” part of the term “new humanitarian order” (Mamdani 2008, 18). “Responsibility” for the protection of people now falls to the international community. The crises that cause populations to suffer, and that prompt foreign intervention, grant the “rescuers” the mantle of “humanitarianism” (Mamdani 2008, 18). Transnational activists adopt this new language and apply it to their own causes. The changes in international language seem to work for all but the targeted states, typically in the global South. Moreover, if Third-World states disagree with the international language and with the intentions of transnational activists, Western institutions and activists tend to dismiss them as backwards. For example, the “redemption or salvation of the state is solely dependent on its submission to human rights norms” (Mutua 2002, 11). Academic critics assert that some transnational activist organizations advocating for humanitarian intervention thus inadvertently reinforce the vision of states in the South as uncivilized. Activists who intervene in the name of humanitarianism are imposing their own, Western standards of human rights, which can fuel anti-Western sentiments in the target countries.

The issue of Western-centrism not only undermines the treatment of Third-World states, but also undermines the problem-solving techniques that transnational activists often employ. Since transnational activist organizations are often staffed by Western professionals, it can be less likely they will correctly address the issues most salient to local populations in host countries (De Waal 2003, 485). De Waal (1997) provides the example of famine relief in Africa; Westerners often perceive famines as a result of “epidemic undernutrition” rather than treating them as social and political phenomena (55). Western-centrism can work
against the effort to address inequality and poverty, particularly when advocacy organizations are not open to the idea of collaborating with citizens of the Third World, or when they undercut their efforts by refusing to cooperate with respected leaders or authority figures. Activist groups that act with arrogance and paternalism can endanger the human rights that they supposedly aspire to protect. This kind of intervention displaces human rights “from the political to the administrative, from the popular to the elite, from the autonomous to the dependent […] from struggle to demobilization” (Branch 2011, 7). Following Western-centric conceptions without critically analyzing negative consequences can dangerously backfire.

Some critics have argued that transnational activists, while advocating for global issues, can also demonstrate patronizing attitudes toward the leaders of non-Western states. De Waal (2008) sees this kind of condescension among Hollywood celebrities who want to fulfill their off-screen “victim-savior” role. Transnational activists often perceive non-Western institutions and organizations as unreliable to address their needs and to achieve successful development (Chandler 2001, 686). Rugendyke (2007) claims it is common for Northern transnational activists not to collaborate with Southern partners (79). Moreover, unless “Northern and international NGOs advocacy is strongly grounded in their field experience, there may be merit in questioning their legitimacy to speak as advocates for the Southern poor” (Rugendyke 2007, 79). Northern transnational activists cannot effectively advocate for reforms if they have no interest in listening to the needs articulated by the targets of their actions. De Waal (1997) charges that Northern academics, consultants, and relief agencies have failed to address the issues of the South (65). In some cases, activist organizations have paid little attention to the opinions of the people of the South; they are supposed to follow the regulations and carry out their advocacy work without question. The most effective transnational advocacy is possible when activists work to avoid the pitfalls of a savior-victim discourse.

**Conclusion**

Transnational activists are goal-oriented organizations, and act based on their particular interests. They move around the international arena and use political opportunity structures to facilitate the achievement of their goals. Political opportunity structures such as
the United Nations and NAFTA allow transnational activists to contact and collaborate with political leaders. The main feature of transnational activists is that they do not represent states or their interests. Though they often cooperate on shared causes, especially humanitarian ones, transnational activists retain independence from and monitor the behaviors of states. Despite strong arguments condemning Western transnational activists who act as shelters for the interests of powerful states, it is unfair to characterize most transnational activism as paternalistic. On the contrary, transnational activists have also held powerful Western states accountable to their promises, and when needed have exposed their behaviors.

This chapter has shown that there are as many kinds of transnational activists as there are definitions. One variation that I have not yet considered is the distinction between the motives, characteristics, and behaviors of religious versus secular activist organizations. Religious transnational activists have played an important role in international politics. Religious institutions and congregations have been particularly active in matters of debt relief, poverty, and religious freedom. Though the Vatican does not fully qualify as a transnational activist in the way such actors are defined in the existing literature, the Vatican is a powerful religious institution that has used its political and moral power to participate in transnational activism. The next chapter analyzes the Vatican as a religious institution participating in transnational activism.
CHAPTER 3
THE TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM OF THE VATICAN

Scholars of social movements and international affairs have analyzed the behavior and nature of transnational activist organizations, which vary in purpose, ideology and structure, as discussed in Chapter Two. However, most scholars have ignored the religious dimension of transnational activism. The study of religious transnational activism is scarce, and there is virtually no comparative analysis of religious and secular transnational activism. This lack of scholarly interest may be due to the secular tendency of modern social science (Shelledy 2003, 2). Whatever the explanation, studies of religious transnational activism are close to non-existent compared to studies of secular organizations. As Berger (2003) explains, there is a “long-standing trend in the social and political science literature to overlook the role of religious actors in the public sphere” (17). In this chapter, I turn to the current literature on secular transnational activists to attempt to understand how the Vatican operates in the international realm.

The Vatican is an international actor with significant influence in the international arena. While not precisely an activist organization, it regularly participates in many forms of transnational activism. Vatican leaders operate transnationally to persuade state leaders and international organizations to do what they consider the morally correct courses of action. The Vatican’s leaders have played an activist role in areas such as human rights, poverty alleviation, and population control. While the Vatican does not deliver food and health care directly, for instance, it does play that advocacy role through its organizations such as Caritas Internationalis.

The Vatican has been a key player in the international arena for centuries. The religious influence it carries has allowed it to reach out to both national officials and to international officials. In recent years, it has become an outspoken actor on issues such as poverty and human rights, often finding itself at odds with states and intergovernmental organizations which take different approaches to such issues. With millions of Catholic
followers around the world, the Vatican has a unique opportunity to spread its human rights concerns globally. During the Cold War, for instance, the Vatican collaborated with the United States to spread a message of anti-communism (Weigel 1992). Like other religious institutions throughout the world, the Vatican has long been involved in issues such as poverty alleviation and human rights, though it is marked by a distinctive hierarchical structure and the influence that comes with having more than a billion followers.

To properly analyze the Vatican’s transnational activism, I first discuss the similarities between it and secular transnational activists. In the second section of this chapter, I draw contrasts between the qualities and tactics of the Vatican and secular transnational activist organizations. These comparisons are useful in the following chapter to understand how the Vatican reflects scholarship on secular transnational activism in the specific case of debt relief for poor countries.

**SIMILARITIES BETWEEN SECULAR AND RELIGIOUS TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM**

As I discussed in Chapter Two, transnational activist organizations often use mass media outlets to reach public and government audiences, and to create awareness on issues of concern. Similarly, the Vatican is no stranger to press conferences, newspaper columns, and radio broadcasting. To address its concerns on abortion, poverty, war, human rights violations, and wealth maldistribution, reaching out to its millions of followers can be challenging. As Keck and Sikkink (1998) explain, although activists’ “influence often depends on securing powerful allies, their credibility still depends in part on their ability to mobilize their own members and affect public opinion via the media” (23). With this in mind, on the eve of the UN International Conference on Population Control and Development in Cairo in September 1994, the Vatican mounted a “full court press against abortion involving the Vatican diplomatic service, the Roman Curia and bishops around the world” with the purpose of gaining support in its fight against abortion (Buss 1998, 343). The Vatican was aware of the effects of a press conference in which the Roman Curia would be present; it was a tactical move. Just as transnational activist organizations use media campaigns to secure donations and support for their initiatives, the Vatican uses the media to reach their target audiences. When the Church opposes the position of a government, for
instance, its media campaigns can inspire activism among citizens to pressure a state to change its policies. The media can be an efficient tool of transnational activism. The Vatican knows how to use this tool, even more so when key figures such as the Pope and the Roman Curia are present.

The main players in the international community are states. Transnational advocacy organizations understand that they must collaborate with states in order to fulfill their agendas. Powerful transnational activist organizations such as the Red Cross, Amnesty International, and Oxfam enjoy direct access to state leaders. So does the Vatican. This facilitates advocacy and communication with political leaders. As I illustrate in the next chapter, in the case of debt relief, the Vatican was able to lobby states through its ability to communicate with political leaders and with international financial institutions. Shelledy (2004) explains that the Vatican “focused its debt-relief efforts towards international elites” (152) who could assist with developing an international program to ease the external debts of poor countries. Such elites included the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the President of the World Bank, and the Deputy Secretary of the US Department of the Treasury. The Vatican collaborated with transnational activists such as Christian Aid U.K. and Oxfam, influencing not just powerful states like the United States and Great Britain, but also international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. Oxfam, like the Vatican, lobbied the World Bank and presented briefings (Rugendyke 2007, 97). Having the support of key leaders is important for transnational activists to achieve their agendas. The Vatican is well aware of the importance of securing the support of powerful states for their positions in the international arena.

A common area of transnational activism is human rights, and the Vatican participates in human rights advocacy. Religious persecution is a widespread violation of human rights, and is one of the Vatican’s chief concerns. Human rights activists often point to China and Saudi Arabia for their intolerance of religious minorities. To prevent human rights violations, such as religious persecution, the Vatican has used transnational political opportunity structures by working with other international organizations and with the UN framework, especially the Human Rights Commission (Shelledy 2003, 151). With its access to political leaders, the Vatican has worked with states to improve and to recognize religious freedom in states such as China, a country with low tolerance for religious freedom.
Unfortunately, states often pay lip service to the requests of transnational activists with regard to human rights violations. For example, after Pope John Paul II visited Cuba in 1998 to celebrate Christmas, the government lifted its 1969 ban on that holiday. However most “human rights groups report that Cuba still severely restricts religious freedom” (Shelledy 2003, 159). The Chinese government likewise severely punishes Catholics who are loyal to the Pope rather than to the government. The government imprisons practicing Catholics and blocks their seminars. Chan (1989) estimates that there have been about 100 Catholics in detention in China, including clergy members (824). The Vatican has publicly denounced these violations. Though there has been little improvement, the Vatican has joined other members of the international community in putting pressure on China to respect the human rights of all of its citizens irrespective of their religious convictions. The Vatican has also directed attention to Islamic majority states, where non-Muslims are “persecuted and treated as second-class citizens” (McEachern 2010, 81). When activists fail to stop human rights abuses, they condemn the negligence of the state, and create ties with international organizations and other activists to work to spread tolerance.

A shared cultural identity is especially salient for transnational activism centered on religious or ethnic heritage. “Transnational identity,” as Smith and Johnson (2002, 56) define it, has generated a powerful connection between transnational activists and the people who support them. Religion creates a specific bond that ties the faithful to their religious leaders. This type of connection can cross borders, is blind to cultural and national differences, and is especially characteristic of Catholicism. Just as groups like Oxfam encourage followers to donate to a cause, the Vatican spreads its political and human rights concerns to Catholics across the globe. Catholic transnational identity allows the Vatican to share its stance on issues such as abortion and poverty in the hope that local parishioners, 1.2 billion strong, will pressure political leaders and organizations to support their positions as well. Given the power of its hierarchy and the growth of the Church globally, the Vatican has a wide reach.

Over 1 billion people, 17% of the people in the world, are under the spiritual jurisdiction of the Vatican and its head, the pope. Despite the fact that the Vatican’s spiritual jurisdiction is qualitatively different that a state’s jurisdiction over its citizens, Catholicism and the Vatican’s central role in Catholicism provides a transnational source of identity and normative framework for a large segment of the world’s population. (Shelledy 2003, 15)
This shared transnational identity is possibly one of the Vatican’s greatest strengths when it comes to advocating change in social agendas.

**Differences between Secular and Religious Transnational Activism**

One of the most striking differences between most secular transnational activism and that of the Vatican is the hierarchical structure of the Church. This sets the Vatican apart from transnational activist organizations, especially the dominant ones that work with extensions and networks in various countries and are independent of one another. For example, US Human Rights Watch, U.K. Human Rights Watch, and Canada Human Rights Watch are organized horizontally; they are all part of the same organization, but operate independently of one another. Due to its hierarchical structure, the Vatican has a different impact when dealing with states and international bodies. The Pope sits at the top of the Vatican’s hierarchy. Though the council of cardinals and the rest of the curia advise him, the ultimate decision making rests on one person’s authority. This vertical source of authority can be beneficial for defending the Vatican’s positions. Shelledy (2004) explains that the IMF and the World Bank could not ignore the Pope’s authority and quash or postpone the petition to work on an initiative to pardon the debt of heavily indebted poor countries (153). When dealing with a board of directors of a secular organization, activists can often lobby one director to counter the rejection of another. Opponents of a position only need to convince the majority to take their side in order to change the direction of an organization. In contrast, a Church with only one head is harder to circumvent. This in turn, keeps the direction of the Vatican more stable in its decision-making.

For example, in the case of population control, the executive director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)\(^2\) had attempted to meet with Pope John Paul II about the Church’s position on abortion. The secretary general of World Population also wanted to meet with the Pope. The director of the Cairo Conference, Dr. Sadik, also met with the Pope (Shelledy 2003, 67). In most of the meetings these representatives wanted to persuade the

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\(^2\) The United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) was originally established in the late 1960s. Though in 1987 it was renamed to the United Nations Population Fund, the original abbreviation (UNFPA) was kept (United Nations Fund for Population Activities 2008).
Pope to change his position on abortion, but the Pope remained adamant. The meeting between the Pope and Dr. Sadik in 1994 was the most confrontational. Dr. Sadik “claims that the John Paul II yelled at her in their private meeting” (Shelledy 2003, 67). Because of the power of the papacy, heads of state have a much harder time resisting the Vatican’s position on policies. Even if opponents of the Pope’s position find allies within the Church hierarchy, the only opinion that really matters is the Pope’s.

Compared to secular organizations, religious transnational activism also makes a distinctively moral claim. For the purposes of this thesis I consider “morality” a word that carries political influence. I do not intend to analyze the concept or pass judgment on the moral claims of the Vatican. Of course, most transnational organizations utilize morality in their campaigns. However, the sacred claim of religious morality differentiates it from the way in which secular activists deploy moral arguments. “Religious organizations seek to meet sacred goals, but given humans’ inherent inability to know perfectly the divine, there will always be room for a variety of interpretations of what the goals are and the best method to achieve the goals” (Shelledy 2003, 9). This ambiguity of “the sacred” allows for justification of various policies. However, any policy responses must be consistent with the internal theology of the Church: “Whereas other organizations can more easily compromise on the basis of political expediency, this is less the case with religious organizations because of the importance of theological consistency” (Shelledy 2003, 9-10). This consistency gives the moral values of a religious organization greater weight than a secular claim. The Vatican is much less likely to change a position it has held for centuries than a secular organization established in recent years with an ever-changing board of directors. This stability spreads throughout the organization to all its members. When a religious organization unites on a particular issue, its voice carries more weight, at least among believers, because followers believe the religious authority’s source to be supernatural (Arendt 1958, 82-3). This unity of conviction can strengthen the Vatican’s claim to the moral integrity of its positions, particularly when it can impose that position across the entire global community of Catholic followers.

The most significant difference between the Vatican and most transnational activists is its quasi-state status. The Vatican City is the capital of the state of the Holy See. The Holy See “has its own flag, coat of arms and seal, as well as a national anthem […] These are only
external signs of sovereignty” (Martens 2006, 752-3). The literature on transnational activists does not include states; indeed states are generally the main targets of transnational activism. The Vatican is unique in this regard, compared to other NGOs or activist organizations. As a religious institution, it pursues transnational advocacy in a form similar to that of non-state actors, yet it can leverage the added power and prestige of the state sovereignty of the Holy See over which it presides. This gives it a distinctive ability to influence states and international organizations in areas such as human rights. “On 1 July 2004, the General Assembly of the UN adopted a resolution on the participation of the Holy See in the work of the United Nations. The status of the Holy See is recalled—a [Non-Member State Permanent Observer]—as is the fact the Holy See is a party of diverse international instruments and enjoys membership in various United Nations subsidiary programs, specialized agencies and international intergovernmental organizations” (Martens 2006, 758). The Vatican thus enjoys the best of both worlds: it has the freedom of action and the moral authority of a non-state advocacy organization, but it also enjoys the privileges and power that come with state sovereignty in a global system of states.

I have shown that secular transnational activists can put pressure on states to abide by their promises to address and respect human rights. However, the Vatican is uniquely positioned to forge official diplomatic agreements among states, which increases the probability that states will abide by those agreements. The Vatican has diplomatic relations with 175 states. “A good number of states want to keep their embassy in the Holy See or open one, because it is an interesting diplomatic crossroad where useful and vital information can be exchanged and contacts can be made” (Martens 2006, 757). Moreover, the Vatican has international treaties with the European Union, and special relations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). As I will show in the following chapters, this capacity for international diplomacy has facilitated the Vatican’s advocacy campaigns for debt relief and population control.

It is important not to overstate the Vatican’s state-like characteristics or authority. The Holy See resides completely within Italy, boasts a population of fewer than 850 citizens in a total of .44 square miles, and has no military power or productive economic capacity (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] 2013). In terms of political clout, the Vatican does not possess the international influence of a state. For example, in the 1960s the US was providing
health and social service programs to countries in Latin America, which included the support for abortion and family planning (Stycos 1967, 67). At the time, analysts thought it was “unlikely that governments of the region would adopt national population policies because of the opposition of the Church” (Kirk and Norman 1967, 138). However, by the late 1960s, the US policy to institute family planning as a regular public health service had already taken place in Chile, was soon to be instituted in Jamaica and Honduras, and was under serious consideration in Columbia (Kirk and Norman 1967, 138). Despite the Vatican’s strong historical ties to the Catholic countries of Latin America, the US position prevailed. As I will show below, the Vatican does not inherently possess greater influence than powerful transnational activist organizations such as the Red Cross, which also enjoys Permanent Observer status in the UN. The Vatican lacks the economic and military power by which states express authority in the international system. Therefore, its advocacy work relies heavily on its moral authority, and the same strategies as those deployed by other non-state activists.

CONCLUSION

The Vatican’s pursuit of transnational activism shares many qualities of secular transnational activism. Such qualities include the use of media to spread awareness, working with states through international political opportunity structures, holding states accountable when they fail to respect human rights, and utilizing a shared transnational identity to strengthen its message. The differences between secular transnational activists and the Vatican seem to be more of a difference between the nature of a secular organization versus a historical religious institution. Such differences include its vertical structure and its moral claim. The Vatican’s state sovereignty gives it an advantage over other transnational activists. However, the lack of military and economic capacities partly nullifies the magnitude of the state privileges it enjoys. International institutions, such as the UN, grant some of the state-like benefits utilized by the Vatican to powerful transnational activists such as the Red Cross which likewise enjoy observer status in the UN. The above-mentioned similarities between the Vatican and transnational activists demonstrate the likeness of the Vatican’s actions to other forms of transnational activism. Likewise, the minimal magnitude of state power granted to the Vatican makes its transnational activism an appropriate subject
to analyze through scholarship on transnational activists. Now that I have established the analytical similarities and differences between the Vatican’s advocacy work and that of secular transnational activist organizations, I will turn to an empirical case study demonstrating the Vatican’s advocacy work.
CHAPTER 4
A CALL FOR DEBT RELIEF: THE VATICAN AND THE HIPC INITIATIVES

Like many other religious institutions, the Vatican opposes poverty and promotes a message of charitable giving to those in need. However, we must look into the social teachings of the Catholic Church to understand why this institution has gone to greater lengths to launch an international campaign to encourage states and intergovernmental institutions to come up with a program to forgive the external debt accumulated by poor countries. The Vatican strives to follow its Catholic Social Teachings which encourage people to look after the dignity and wellbeing of all people, particularly the poor. These teachings state that “individuals and institutions are obligated to protect and promote the dignity of all persons. […] All people of goodwill are thus challenged to exercise a preferential option for the poor in examining the social impact of economic and financial policies and institutions” (Donnelly 2007, 110). The Vatican advanced the cause of debt relief because its principles conflicted with the unfair repayment programs set up by international financial institutions. Bishops who advocated for debt relief argued that:

-debt was accrued without the participation by or benefit to the poor who suffer most from austerity measures imposed to service it…; it has been paid already many times over through the unusually high interest rates… ; [and] most of the renewed borrowing, beyond the initial loans, has been undertaken almost entirely to service the debt, rather than for genuine development. (Donnelly 2007, 117)

The Vatican has viewed the accumulation of debt and the inability of debtor states to lift their populations out of poverty as moral issues that need to be resolved to bring fairness and justice to debtor nations. Relying on biblical justification, the Vatican believes that “those who are in debt retain their dignity as well as their basic human rights…; debtors cannot be reduced to a situation of abject poverty in order to pay their debts” (Donnelly 2007, 118). Accordingly, “respect for human rights of the poor entails meeting their basic needs, in accordance with the integration of social and economic as well as political and civil
rights” (Donnelly 2007, 118). Poverty and debt accumulation by poor states is not just a moral issue, therefore; it is also a human rights issue.

For the Vatican, the problem of debt accumulation by poor countries has to be solved through cooperation between intergovernmental institutions, creditor states, and debtor states. It is not enough to blame creditors and financial intergovernmental institutions for granting money to poor states without ensuring they would be able to repay their debt, or to blame debtor states for borrowing more than they were able to repay. All of the involved parties were conscious of their capabilities and proceeded with the expectation that borrowers would repay. To achieve international economic justice, the Vatican advocates for ethical principles such as accepting co-responsibility: “Acknowledgment of the sharing of responsibility for the causes [of international debt] will make possible a dialogue which will seek joint means of solutions. Co-responsibility concerns the future of countries and of entire populations” (Pontifical Commission injustitia et Pax 1986). It would seem obvious that co-responsibility already exists between creditors and debtors, but if that were the case then fewer poor countries would be burdened by external debt and more would have achieved greater poverty reduction. As the new millennium approached, the scriptural concept of a “Jubilee Year” provided an opportunity for the Vatican to send out a clear message in favor of a new program to provide debt relief to the heavily indebted countries.

**THE CREATION OF THE HIPCI I**

In 1996 the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) initiated the first Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative I (HIPCI I) as a response from the to the persistent pressure of transnational activists to address the issue of the external debt owed by poor countries to international financial institutions (IFIs) and to the Paris Club. The Paris Club is composed of 19 countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and France, to which heavily-indebted countries owed their external debt. The HIPCI I was not the first initiative to attempt to alleviate the burden of debts held by poor countries. Easterly (2001) explains that since “1967, the U.N. Conference on Trade and Development argued that debt service payments in many poor nations had reached ‘critical situation’. A decade later, official bilateral creditors wrote off $6 billion in debt to 45 poor countries” (20). Since then, IFIs and members of the Paris Club have created other programs to address debt
relief: “Since 1987, successive G7 summits have offered increasingly lenient terms, such as postponements of repayment deadlines, on debts owned by poor countries” (Easterly 2001, 20).

Compared to previous attempts to deal with debt relief, such as the “Toronto Terms”3 and the “London Terms”4, the popularity and support for HIPCI I was partially due to the worldwide cooperation and advocacy from transnational activists, as well as religious and secular organizations, that pushed for a serious initiative. Davies and Maillet (2000) explain that by the early 1990s:

it was clear that the depth of debt forgiveness was insufficient. Even under the most generous terms available from the Paris and London Clubs, the poorest, most heavily indebted countries, especially those in Africa, would be unable to meet the debt-sustainability programme (272-3).

This lack of success to properly deal with the poverty-debt issue triggered a coalition of transnational activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and religious institutions to collaborate, advocate to IFIs and state leaders, and educate the public in both rich and poor countries. The coalition was comprised of Oxfam, Christian Aid, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD), national churches, and the Vatican, among others. This collaboration was not new; “NGOs and churches had been working to alleviate the harmful consequences of debt and structural adjustment since the late 1970s, with efforts at national, regional, and then global collaboration” (Donnelly 2007, 109).

The HIPCI I was a joint collaboration between the IFIs and creditor states to assist heavily-indebted countries to repay their debts. The HIPCI I was meant to be “the first comprehensive plan to reduce the bilateral and multilateral debt of qualifying countries; it featured among its complex terms the possibility of forgiveness of 80 percent” of bilateral debt (Donelly 1999, 26-7). Under this program the participation of creditors (multilateral, bilateral, or commercial debt) is not mandatory (Fonchamnyo 2009, 323; Hughes et al.

3 In 1988 at the Toronto G7 summit the member states adopted the “Toronto Terms.” From 1988 and 1991, 20 low income countries received payment rescheduling, with “$6 billion of payments falling due being either partially cancelled or rescheduled on a concessional basis.” However by 1990 it became evident to the Paris Club that the concessions and debt reduction were insufficient to prevent the continued and unsustainable debt of poor countries (Daseking and Powell 1999, 9-10).

4 In 1991 the Paris Club agreed to increase the degree of concessionality to 50% to assist poor countries with their debts. (Daseking and Powell 1999, 10).
Debtor states must demonstrate that they were doing their best to follow the guidelines stated by the IFIs and creditor states to qualify for debt relief. To be classified as a HIPCI I country, a debtor nation must meet three criteria: “First, their outstanding debt must be 200-250% of their total exports. Second, their debt service must be greater than 20-35% of their export earnings. Finally, they must have some other vulnerability that prevented them from paying off their debt” (Shelledy 2003, 113). However, falling under the criteria did not automatically grant debt relief to poor states. A three-step process needed to be accomplished successfully by these countries. In the first step the IMF arranges a stabilization package for the debtor states; this package must be followed for three years.

If after three years, a country has a “sustainable debt,” meaning that it can continue to pay down the debt and still reduce domestic poverty, it will continue on the stabilization package as long as necessary. If the debt was not sustainable, then after three additional years on the stabilization package, multilateral creditors will forgive their debt and everyone else will reduce eligible stock by 80%. (Shelledy 2003, 113-4)

Despite the efforts of IFI and creditor states to help heavily indebted countries to pay off their debts and find a path out of poverty, the initiative had weaknesses that proved to be problematic. For example, most of the heavily indebted countries, especially those in Africa, were unable to fulfill the second part of the program, the debt-sustainability program (Davies and Maillet 2000, 273). African countries in need of debt relief had been unable to complete the program because they did not have the capabilities or resources to do so. This seemed an unrealistic expectation by the creators of HIPCI I. Criticism also targeted the stabilization packages, also known as structural adjustment programs (SAPs), created by the IMF and the World Bank. According to critics such “programs have regularly featured national currency devaluations to enhance export earnings and discourage imports, the privatization of government-controlled industries and services (causing cuts in jobs and wages)” among other budget cuts to health and education (Donnelly 1999, 1). Furthermore, the HIPCI I debt relief mechanisms lacked “the means to deal with multilateral debt, that is, debts owed to the IMF, World Bank, and regional development bank(s)” (Davies and Maillet 2000, 273). These limitations made it difficult to reach agreements between the debtors and the creditors.

Another strong criticism of HIPCI I was that countries in need of urgent assistance did not fall under the criteria to be part of the initiative. Donnelley rightly points out a fear
from the coalition in regards to HIPCI I. In a June 1999 estimate, analysts found that of the 41 potential HIPC countries,

perhaps 24 would qualify for some reduction in debt service payments by the end of the year 2000, and that the reduction would be significant for only 16 of these. No additional debt relief was offered to countries, such as Lesotho, that did not qualify as HIPCds but also had high debt servicing requirements that impeded government action on poverty reduction (Donnelley 2007, 128).

Moreover, according to Donnelly (2007), the creators of HIPCI I had not taken into consideration internal wars and natural disasters that could prevent debtor states from fulfilling the requirements (128). The HIPCI I was a campaign that overlooked the different environments of the heavily indebted countries. It created cookie-cutter policies and expected the poor states to be able to fulfill them.

The weaknesses and unfulfilled promises of creditors led a coalition of advocates to once again renew their pressure on the IFIs and the Paris Club. Given this initial disappointment with the initiative and the pressure from religious and secular groups, the G7 leaders, in collaboration with the IMF and World Bank, enhanced the HIPCI, creating the HIPCI II, which they expected to provide faster debt relief (Shelledy 2003, 100).

**THE HIPC INITIATIVE II**

In June 1999 during the Cologne Summit, the G7 agreed to an enhanced HIPCI, also known as HIPCI II, to correct the flaws of HIPCI I. The purpose of this initiative was to improve the commitment between IFIs, creditor states, and the debtor states (Davies and Maillet 2000). The new initiative was supposed to make debt relief “broader (that is, apply to more countries), faster (allow recipients to reach their completion point more quickly), and deeper (allow for a higher amount of debt-write-off)” (Davies and Maillet 2000, 274). The end goal of HIPCI II was to eliminate $100 billion in debt from dozens of heavily indebted countries (New York Times 2004, A.26).

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5 At the Cologne Summit in June 1999 the G8 countries addressed the criticisms of HIPC Initiative. The leaders agreed “in principle to cancel an additional $45 billion of the bilateral and multilateral debt owed by 41 potentially qualifying countries” (Donnelly 2007, 126-7)

6 The G7, formed in 1975, includes the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom. In 2005 it became G8 when Russia joined. (Economic Financial Affairs 2012).
Though the enhancement of HIPC was designed to be broader, faster, and deeper, heavily indebted countries still had to follow the guidelines laid out by the creditors. This stage was known as the “Decision Point.” As with the first HIPC, for a country to become eligible it had to “demonstrate to the World Bank and the IMF that it has a poverty-reduction plan and sound economic management policies” (Hughes et al. 2010). To demonstrate the capacity of a poverty-reduction plan, “a smaller set of critical benchmarks has to be met at the decision point before access is granted to completion point HIPC fund resources and a reduction up to 90 per cent in eligible Paris Club” (Davies and Maillet 2000, 277). As with the original HIPC, countries must first build a track record. Creditors, IFIs and creditor states are “judging the economic governance of potential recipient developing countries” (Davies and Maillet 2000, 275). The enhanced version differed from the original HIPC by allowing local authorities to take part in the strategy to reduce poverty. Shelledy (2004) explains that the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) were introduced by the World Bank and the IMF as an essential component of debt relief. Local authorities would draft them, in conjunction with members of civil society (152). In addition, the reforms lowered the debt/export ratio from the previous 200-250 percent to only 150 percent, and called on the Paris Club to grant debt relief beyond 80 percent (Shelledy 2003, 118). Reducing the debt/export ratio would allow more countries to be able to participate.

To reach the next stage, the “Completion Point.” a country must have followed the poverty-reduction plan for at least a year and met the triggers agreed to by the IMF and the World Bank, also known as the Common Reduction Factor (Hughes et al. 2010). Once at the “Completion Point” the country “receives assistance on its multilateral debt obligations through the HIPC trust fund, which is managed by the World Bank and the IMF” (Davies and Maillet 2000, 278).

Though designed as an improvement over the original HIPC, an initiative as complex and ambitious as the enhanced HIPC was bound to have shortcomings, especially when it put poor indebted countries through strict guidelines. Donnelly (2007) explains that though transnational organizations “welcomed the explicit link between debt relief and poverty reduction, the call for civil society participation, and greater transparency of budgetary procedures to protect social expenditures” they continued to object to several features of the enhanced initiative (127). The first objection was to the limited amount of
relief given by the IFIs and creditor states. According to Shelledy, after the enhancement of HIPCI, the World Bank and the IMF announced “twenty-four countries would receive debt relief by the end of 2000. However, by July 2000, only nine countries had received any relief and no country had received any debt cancellation” (Shelledy 2004, 152). This means that few countries were capable of successfully following the guidelines stated by the initiative.

A second concern was the empowerment of the IMF and the World Bank, granting the IFIs greater control over the debt reduction process granted by the Cologne Initiative. Critics were especially concerned about the IFI policy agenda. “Countries receiving debt relief would still be required to undergo IMF-sponsored structural adjustment, a process that network critics had consistently charged exacerbated poverty.” (Donnelly 2007, 128)

The enhanced HIPCI, like its predecessor, was a response to the substantial pressure the Paris Club and IFIs received from a stronger and more vocal coalition of activists, organizations, and the public. Participants included Oxfam, Christian Aid, numerous relief agencies, the Vatican (with an outspoken Pope John Paul II), rock star Bono from the band U-2, Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs, and an international mobilization of churches, among others. These participants were reacting to the shortcomings of the HIPCI I, among them the “disproportionate burden placed on the poor by structural adjustment programs (SAPs) mandated by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in conjunction with debt rescheduling and reduction” (Donnelly 1999, 1). Moreover, as the year 2000 approached it became clear that the first HIPCI was not achieving its mission of assisting poor countries with their poverty and debt burden. “In the first three years [of HIPCI I] only four of the 41 countries qualifying for HIPC debt relief had advanced to a point in the review process at which their debt was actually reduced: Uganda, Bolivia, Mozambique and Guyana” (Donnelly 1999, 27). Indeed indebted countries needed the advocacy of high profile organizations and participants to speed up the process to ease their debt burden. Interestingly, Bunting (2000) explains that during the advocacy for an enhanced HIPCI, governments were wondering how such advocacy could materialize, seemingly out of nowhere, and mobilize so quickly with almost no resources; the answer is the role of Christian churches (31).

7 The Enhanced HIPC Initiative is still in place. The IMF and World Bank recognize that challenges remain to ensure that states do not return to unsustainable levels of debt (The World Bank 2013)
THE VATICAN’S CAMPAIGN FOR THE HIPC INITIATIVE II

As expected, the shortcomings of HIPCI I encouraged secular and religious organizations and institutions to insistently advocate for a reformed initiative to ease the debt burden of poor countries. For those involved in promoting a program such as the first HIPCI, the poor design and lack of results of the program were disappointing. Transnational activists and organizations needed to intensify the campaign for more extensive debt relief. The Vatican was a major supporter for a reformed initiative. Though bank analysts considered the HIPCI I successful, as the year 2000 approached Vatican officials worried that it had not sufficiently alleviated the burden of external debt. By virtue of its size and resources, the Vatican had played a leading role from the early days of the movement (Donnelly 2007, 107).

On the eve of the year 2000, the Vatican, as well as other religious and secular groups, saw an opportunity to launch a campaign for debt forgiveness using the scripturally based Jubilee Year. The Jubilee Year comes from a Jewish tradition, which the Catholic Church and other churches have connected with a spiritual obligation of helping the poor. Pope John Paul II explained: “Christians will have to raise their voice on behalf of the poor of the world, proposing the Jubilee as an appropriate time to give thought, among other things, to reducing substantially, if not canceling outright, the international debt which seriously threatens the future of many nations” (Shelledy 2003, 110). Taking into consideration petitions from parishioners in developing nations to address the issue of debt forgiveness, the Vatican was morally concerned with advocacy for the poor (Shelledy 2003, 105). This situation resembled the process that Boehle (2010) describes when transnational activists strive to (re)shape international programs (384). The Vatican put “substantial effort into debt relief consistent with its post-Vatican II solidarity with the poor and with the ideas of the Jubilee Year” (Shelledy 2004, 151).

Though the campaign to reform the 1996 HIPCI was a success due to sustained pressure of advocates to IFIs and creditor states, my focus in the next two sections is to analyze the role the Vatican played to persuade the IFIs and political leaders, especially of the G7 states, to accept an enhanced HIPC initiative that would be more effective at providing debt relief.
VATICAN ADVOCACY AND THE IFIs

Initially the IFIs were not convinced that they needed to reform the HIPCI:

The IMF was concerned about funding issues and especially funding for its own Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF). The IMF needed funds to finance its structural adjustments programs … The IMF worried that funds spent on debt relief would replace funds use to implement adjustments to countries’ macroeconomic policies, which the IMF considered to be more important (Shelledy 2003, 112-3).

The campaign to pressure IFIs to revise the debt relief program was one that needed the unification of secular and religious organizations and of transnational activists to succeed, particularly those that were part of the campaign prior to HIPCI I. The Vatican and Jubilee 2000, the leading umbrella organization, had an informal relationship. Though they shared the same goals, they each worked separately and only occasionally met throughout the process. Shelledy (2003) claims that through the “efforts of the Vatican and Jubilee 2000 providing momentum, debt relief coalesced around the policies of HIPC II” (120). The Vatican is an entity that does not need the collaboration of other institutions to get the attention of political leaders and institutions. However, having allies such as Jubilee 2000 and celebrities such as Bono striving for a debt-relief program legitimized the movement and increased resources, which improved the odds of success. The power of mobilization and popularity of Jubilee 2000 was unique. “Jubilee’s members generated [reports] not only to present to leaders and policy makers, but also to educate supporters of the movement, as well as the general public, about the complicated and devastating nature of third world debt” (Fraker 2004, 69).

Along with transnational activists and other groups advocating for an enhanced HIPCI, the Vatican attended meetings with officials of the IMF and the World Bank. Having tracked the progress of the HIPCI I, and aware of the failure of policy makers to fulfill their role in the original initiative, the Vatican knew that there were serious problems. Fraker (2004) explains that advocates for an enhanced debt relief program “carefully documented and widely disseminated all official commitments to debt relief that have come out of commercial banks, creditor governments” and IFIs (74). The Vatican held meetings with financial organizations and leaders to address shortcomings in the design of the initiative, at times condemning the faults of those involved, such as the US and the IMF, for falling short in their promises. A meeting held in Rome in June 1997 was one such occasion for lobbying
the World Bank and the IMF. The Vatican invited archbishops from various countries to explain to the IFIs the needs of the people. Important participating bishops were Archbishop Oscar Andres Rodriguez, the head of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM), Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, the chair of the US Catholic Bishops Committee on International Policy, and Enrique V. Iglesias, President of the Inter-American Development Bank (Shelledy 2003, 116). The Vatican in its advocacy knew the importance of persuading the IFIs to become more open to the matter of debt relief for heavily-indebted countries for the enhanced HIPC I to succeed. This was true because the Vatican “and the IFI representatives [disagreed] over the proper scope of HIPC and the eligibility standards” (Shelledy 2003, 116). Indeed the IMF and World Bank were interested in assisting poor countries, but their vision was not as extensive as the Vatican’s and other advocates.

A more successful international conference was the seminar on debt held in March, 1999. The Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (PCJP) hosted the conference with the US National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB, now known as the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB). In this conference, held at Seton Hall University in New Jersey, the Vatican intended to lobby for action from Michael Camdessus, the director of the IMF, and James Wolfensohn, the president of the World Bank (Shelledy 2004, 152), the two important leaders capable of restructuring the HIPC I. The Vatican had the opportunity to present information to emphasize to the IMF and World Bank the urgency of a new debt relief program, by pointing out flaws in the first HPCI, which prevented the expected number of countries from receiving debt relief (four rather than 40). The Vatican invited organizations that supported its cause to the conference. After the conference, two major developments happened. First, the IMF and the World Bank introduced the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). Second, the IFIs announced that 24 countries would receive debt relief by the end of the year 2000 (Shelledy 2004, 152). Though the IMF and World Bank were not entirely persuaded to reform the HIPC I, it was a major victory on the road to the establishment of the HIPC II.

The use of moral claims by international advocacy groups often places the international organizations they target in a difficult situation. Despite not being driven to act on behalf of moral values when they consider international matters, political leaders are more likely to do so when persuaded by transnational activists. Keck and Sikkink (1998) explain
that activists “have been able to convince people [political leaders] that the World Bank bears responsibility for the human and environmental impact of projects it directly funds, but have had a harder time convincingly making the International Monetary Fund (IMF) responsible for hunger or food riots in the developing world” (28). Advocates such as the Vatican have often relied on moral claims to put the leaders of international organizations in uncomfortable positions. In the case of the HIPC, the Vatican was able to persuade both World Bank and IMF officials of their institutional responsibility. “Neither the IMF nor the World Bank deferred on the pope’s authority in carrying out the HIPC Initiative. Instead, religion provided some critical prestige and political plausibility for certain actors in support of debt relief” (Shelledy 2004, 153). This does not mean that the IMF and the World Bank acted on the HIPC in direct response to the pope’s request. However, these IFIs were willing to listen to the advocacy positions of the Vatican, which relied on moral claims. Despite the Church’s moral claims, it took various meetings to persuade the IMF and the World Bank to enact the reform. Still, due to their unique moral clout, Vatican leaders were able to obtain concessions from the leaders of the IFIs who might not have been persuaded by purely secular advocacy groups.

By 1999, the Vatican, along with other advocates, had convinced the IMF and the World Bank that the debt-relief program needed to be changed. However, during the process it proved to some members of the IMF that they and the World Bank were incapable of eliminating poverty and assisting with debt relief due to constraints in their structures and bureaucracies. Though Michael Camdessus, the director of the IMF from 1987 to 2000, was open to dialogue with Catholic groups, he “felt constrained by the institutional pressures within the IMF against the proposition of debt relief” (Shelledy 2003, 115). In 2000, Mr. Camdessus left the IMF to join the Vatican as part of its PCJP. As a member of PCJP, Camdessus, wanted to be an active part of the PCJP campaign, which encourages the IMF and the World Bank to cancel the debt of the heavily indebted poor countries (Beattie 2000, 8). He realized that from there was little he could do within the institution, and to avoid debilitating bureaucracies he needed to work from the outside.
VATICAN ADVOCACY AND STATES

IFI approval was needed for the achievement of the enhanced HIPC initiative. However, the support of governments, especially from the creditor states was just as critical. For the programs to work, the leaders of the creditor states must adopt resolutions granting debt relief programs and assistance. At times, advocating for programs is more laborious if conservative parties are in power. The Vatican actively addressed governments. It relied on mobilization from its supporters to pressure policymakers in creditor states, especially the countries of the G7, to support a new debt relief program, and to hold them accountable to their agreements on debt relief.

Pope John Paul II was highly visible in his global advocacy for debt relief. For over 17 years during his many trips to debtor and creditor states he made public sermons and met with officials representing the national governments with whom he emphasized the importance of debt relief (Donnelly 1999, 18). As the leading country in the G7, the US was a main target of the Vatican’s efforts. The pope and Vatican officials often met with members of the Clinton Administration. In January 1999, the pope met with President Clinton for the fourth time, in St. Louis where he once again urged the US to support a debt relief program. In this meeting President Clinton and Pope John Paul II “addressed some of the present challenges to peace and justice around the world and the ways in which mutual cooperation could bring an end to conflict and relief to suffering populations” (EWTN Global Catholic Network 1999). This cooperation was announced in September 1999, when President Clinton gave his support to a new debt relief initiative. “President Clinton was the first world leader to announce that his country would cancel 100 percent of debt owed by countries that came through the HIPC process” (Fraker 2004, 75). The pope’s advocacy to President Clinton played an important role in his change of position. However, the Vatican also needed to apply pressure to other members of the Clinton Administration. Meetings and conferences hosted by the Vatican’s PCJP and the USCCB included the attendance of Lawrence Summers, Deputy Secretary of the US Department of the Treasury8. The Vatican

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8 As previously mentioned, In March 1999, the Vatican’s PCJP and the US National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) held a seminar on debt relief at Seton Hall University in New York. (Shelledy 2004, 152).
targeted key political leaders of the administration, though the Clinton administration’s change of position was also influenced by other advocates, such as Jubilee 2000.

The US Congress was even more hesitant in accepting the idea of US support of Third-World debt relief. In addition to the Vatican, the USCCB assisted with the advocacy at the legislative level. In the late 1990s, the USCCB and non-US bishops conferences lobbied heavily in a Republican-dominated Congress. Congressional Republicans viewed US participation in international organizations as an infringement of US sovereignty, and debt relief as a liberal issue (Shelledy 2003, 120). “Conservatives were as skeptical of IFI development programs as they were of domestic government programs. In addition, the funding IFIs offered a tempting target for budget cutting” (Shelledy 2004, 153). Initially Congress would only support a debt relief initiative with the end goal of reducing funding to the IMF and World Bank. The USCCB needed to reach out to Congressional representatives and educate them on the urgency of debt relief. Speaking in Congressional speeches was a way to directly connect with legislators. Using religious rhetoric in connection with emphasis on the moral conflict of debt relief, Church leaders eventually persuaded conservative Christians Representative Spencer Bachus of Alabama and Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina to support a debt relief initiative (Birdsall, Williamson, and Deese 2002, 51, 52, 58). “With the underpinnings of a Scriptural warrant and the backing of a conservative Pope, conservative leaders in the United States could plausibly support debt relief” (Shelledy 2004, 153). In late 1999, Congress passed legislation approving $110 million for US bilateral debt relief. The USCCB’s success at persuading a conservative Congress to act provides an example of an organization becoming more involved in the international dialogue concerned with poverty reduction [and] debt relief … The teachings of key religions are sometimes at odds with key themes in international development policy, yet the involvement of representative organizations in dialogue with governments … is critical to the creation of multistakeholder partnerships needed to tackle global poverty. (Clarke 2006, 841)

Not only did Church activists use religious and moral arguments to sway the US government, but the Vatican employed similar tactics against other creditor states, such as Germany and Italy. To persuade governments to support international debt forgiveness, the Vatican linked the issue to matters of humanity and morality. As a moral entity, the Vatican could challenge the “Wrong” of debt and poverty in favor of the “Right” of charity and relief,
with a religious meaning (Berger 2003, 19). The HIPC Initiatives carried a moral significance that put pressure on states and international organizations to accept their terms. Rudolph and Piscatori (1997) claim that religious advocacy groups “[shaped] perceptions and expectations that [contributed] to world public opinion and politics” (2). The Vatican used morality to send its message of the righteousness of debt forgiveness. According to Donnelly (2007), there “are not many instances in modern history in which moral appeals based on religious principles drive political change” (107). The debt relief movement was one of these instances. As a religious transnational advocate the Vatican shaped the perception of the heavily indebted poor countries as worthy and in need of the moral forgiveness by the creditor agencies and states. The Vatican and its allied organizations invoked a “biblical prescription for periodic debt relief” urging “the international community to mark the millennium by recognizing a period of ‘jubilee’ for poor countries, in which government debts would be canceled and the free-up resources used to alleviate poverty” (Rudolph and Piscatori 1997, 108). Such moral and religious references helped to persuade key leaders in the creditor states that forgiving the external debt of poor countries was their duty.

Sometimes simply engaging in dialogue with international leaders and governments was not enough. In Chapter Two I noted that transnational activists need to mobilize their followers in order to strengthen their causes. The political and social pressures generated by followers play an important role in transnational advocacy. This is when Smith and Johnson's (2002) “transnational identity” comes into play (56). The Vatican has been able to mobilize Catholics and non-Catholics who share its mission through transnational identity. Due to the urgency of readdressing the debt of poor countries for an enhanced HICPI, gaining the support of the public was essential for the Church’s advocacy work. As a centralized institution, the Vatican reaches out to its followers through the local clergy and laity who in turn make the Vatican’s missions known to their congregations.

For example, members of the Catholic Charismatic Movement, led by Peruvian Carmen Rodriguez and other lay leaders, went door to door gathering signatures for their petition calling for the one-time cancellation of unpayable debt for heavily indebted poor countries (Donnelly 2007, 108). “More than 1.8 million Peruvians in just three months’ time and 17 million people from over 160 countries signed the petition … The delegation [presented] the petition to German chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who accepted it in the name
of the G-8 leaders” in June 1999 (Donnelly 2007, 108). The campaign by the Peruvian NGO, Catholic Christian Movement, was essential to the Vatican’s success. “Because domestic human rights NGOs are a crucial link in the network, where these groups are absent… international human rights work is severely hampered” (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 117).

In addition to mobilizing followers to sign petitions, another successful advocacy tactic was the Church’s indirect encouragement of participation in demonstrations around the globe in support of a debt relief, particularly in front of buildings where government leaders were meeting. For example, in Great Britain, parishioners viewed spreading awareness for the cause of debt relief as their “faith in action” (Bunting 2000, 31). As the “idea gained ground in the UK, it began to spread through diocesan links, between bishops’ conferences and via parish twinning to the southern countries” (Bunting 2000, 31). The call to action by the Vatican and other advocates such as Jubilee 2000 led to high turnouts. Eventually, the number of people gathered outside of government buildings grew to be so large that the G7 could not ignore the protests. In May 1998, “50,000 movement supporters formed a 10-kilometre ring around the G7 summit meeting in Birmingham [UK]” pressing them for more debt relief (Collins 1999, 419). This demonstration sent the message to G7 leaders, and to the IFIs, that the public was demanding improvements to the HIPCI. G7 leaders took the demonstration seriously because Germany, Japan, the US, and Italy -- all countries that had previously blocked British proposals for debt relief -- were by then supporting it (Collins 1999, 419). Demonstrations continued in other parts of the world, such as Rome and Cologne.

Another tool of advocacy that the Vatican used was to point out governments’ breaches of promises they made to assist with debt relief. For instance, the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for Peace and Justice, Archbishop Martin, “slammed the US and the EU for not delivering on promises to reduce the debt for developing countries […] Only $11 billion of the $100 billion that the G7 decided to allocate to reduce the debt of developing countries [had] been provided” (Henwood 2000). Because this program greatly depends on the contributions of the international financial institutions and wealthier creditor states such as the United States and the United Kingdom, the Vatican and transnational activists documented the lack of progress on the part of the creditors. Archbishop Martin explained: “We cannot have a just international system if the wealthier countries do not fulfil [sic] their
promises” (McGarry 2000, 7). Organizations addressing the debt crisis had success in obtaining verbal commitments from governments agreeing to act on policies favoring debt relief; however, there was no way to hold governments accountable when they failed to act (Fraker 2004, 74). By publicly shaming leading member states of the G7, the Vatican wanted to hold them accountable to their promise of reducing debt for developing countries. “The Archbishop called for debt-reduction agreements to be honored, for the transfer of the money to international organizations and the swift cancellation of debt owned” (Henwood 2000, n.p).

**CONCLUSION**

The Vatican’s campaigns to creditor states and to the IFIs were critically important in the global effort to address the debt burden of poor heavily indebted countries. National and IFI leaders recognized the Vatican, and especially Pope John Paul II, as leading advocates for debt relief. Moreover, IMF and World Bank leaders described the Vatican as “a solid player” and pointed out that they “preferred dealing with it and other church leaders as opposed to NGOs or activists” (Shelledy 2004, 153). Allied organizations, such as Jubilee 2000 and Oxfam, also praised the Vatican’s efforts. For example, Jubilee 2000 activists often quoted John Paul II’s endorsement of debt cancellation in “Tertio Millennio Adveniente” (Donnelly 1999, 18). The Vatican was able to mobilize and put direct and indirect pressure on those political leaders in a position to grant debt relief to the heavily indebted countries.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Transnational activism is an integral part of international politics. States are not the only actors to influence international policymaking; rather, there is a wide spectrum of participants from grassroots organizations to vast transnational organizations that enjoy membership from countries around the world. The literature I have presented on transnational activists shows the complexity of their behavior and the environment in which they carry themselves, traversing political opportunity structures to reach out to political leaders and to participate in international movements. Though the majority of transnational activists do not possess great intrinsic political power, they are still able to shape world policy and opinion through advocacy in the media and lobbying state leaders and international financial institutions (IFIs). The presence of transnational activists can be seen in current issues such as the Palestine-Israel dispute, and famine relief in the Horn of Africa.

Students of political activism have long ignored the Vatican. Though it enjoys a quasi-state status, it does not benefit from the full powers of states. This is partially due to its lack of military power and limited economic capacity. However, this does not explain the lack of scholarship on one of the world’s most politically active, religious institutions. Though the Vatican does not neatly fit the conventional academic definition of a transnational activist, it shares some characteristics and must travel through similar avenues in its advocacy work. As stated in the introduction my goal for this thesis was to make a distinctive contribution to scholarship by bringing attention to an important, yet overlooked player in international advocacy. This thesis has contributed to the scholarly understanding of the Vatican’s operations and characteristics in the international realm by analyzing an instance of the Vatican’s advocacy and comparing it to the work of secular transnational activists.

Through this analysis, I have gained insight into how the Vatican operates transnationally. Indeed, the Vatican has proven particularly competent in spurring members to participate in lobbying locally throughout the world due to its hierarchical and unified
nature. Likewise, the Vatican is adept at launching multiple campaigns through its media outreach, spreading awareness among members and non-members alike. One of my research questions was to understand the role that the Vatican plays in transnational activism, and how scholars should characterize it as an actor. I also asked how the Vatican and secular participants in transnational advocacy differ in terms of strategies and the roles they play in the international system. We know that the Vatican cannot be defined as a transnational activist due to its state qualities, however it bears many similarities to other nonstate activist entities with both its tactics in the political realm and its characteristics as an international organization as can be seen in the HIPC Initiatives. This examination has also revealed some of the features that set the Vatican apart from transnational activists, such as its Permanent Observer status in the United Nations, which grants it direct input in international resolutions. This quality has allowed the Vatican to participate in functions and activities of the UN on an almost equal footing as a Member State. When all else fails, the Church is still armed with its fundamental constant moral foundation, which often grants it a significant political and moral influence.

The Vatican working in transnational activism is clearest in the debt campaign for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). The HIPC Initiatives were the most successful examples of debt relief in decades. A score of various transnational activists and international organizations came together in an effort to convince states and IFIs to reduce debt and help developing states regain forward momentum. The Vatican, as the capital of the Holy See and as the voice of the Catholic Church, was a very powerful supporting actor in the advocacy for debt relief. The Vatican’s quasi-state features proved useful to achieve its interests in advancing and reforming the HIPC Initiatives. Though the Vatican does not possess military power or a sustainable economy, it possesses the moral authority vested in the leadership of the pope. The late Pope John Paul II played an essential role in the debt relief campaign. He was not advocating for material gains for himself or for his Church, but rather for monetary resources for poor countries. He was able to connect with audiences and political leaders using religious and spiritual rhetoric, as well as personal charisma. It is no surprise that “secular advocates of debt relief utilized [media] events to demonstrate the support of the pope in order to legitimize their cause” (Shelledy 2004, 152).
This thesis also showed how the Vatican was able to directly influence the decision making procedures within the IMF and World Bank by taking advantage of political opportunity structures (such as the UN) and its own hierarchical structures (such as the US Conference of Catholic Bishops). The Vatican persuaded states and IFIs to address the issue of debt relief, using its position as a Non-Member State Permanent Observer in the UN. Use of the UN as a political opportunity structure facilitated the Vatican’s outreach to political leaders, such as President Bill Clinton, as well as to the presidents of the IMF and the World Bank. The Vatican was able to participate in meetings and discussions regarding debt relief.

It is very important to note that, though the Vatican is a non-state member, other members treat the Vatican as if it were the equivalent of a state member of the UN (Abdullah 1996, 1843). This placed the Vatican in a position that state leaders and IFIs took seriously, rather than simply considering it a religious advocate.

It is important to note the effects that the Vatican had in its moral arguments against states to hold them accountable for debt relief. The Vatican relied on reminding states of their duty and promises in the first HIPCI to help lift low-income states out of poverty. In this way, the creditor states made a promise to the debtor states. The Vatican stressed that it was a mutual responsibility of both the creditors and debtors to fulfill their obligations. Without the Vatican and other advocates taking on a watchdog role, creditor states might have claimed that they had fulfilled their obligation with the flawed first draft effort. The Vatican used the strategy of illuminating the creditor states’ failures to live up to their promises.

One of the most influential actions in which the Vatican participated was the mobilization of its Church membership. Transnational activists and other advocates mobilize their members to put pressure on governments; however, none has the numerical advantage or coverage that is unique to the Vatican and the 1.21 billion members of the Church. This was a great driving force that put pressure on governments at a local scale. This was highlighted particularly when Carmen Rodriguez and other lay leaders gathered more than 18 million signatures from more than 160 countries in support of the HIPCI to present to German chancellor Gerhard Schröder (Donnelly 2007, 108). That coordination and unified petition inspired the German chancellor to accept in the name of the G8.

The scholarship on transnational activists has allowed us to understand some of the Vatican’s characteristics and tactics. It has demonstrated behavior such as relying on the
support of strong state governments, holding states accountable for their promises, operating through political opportunity structures, and mobilizing its members. All of these are strategies familiar to students of secular transnational activism. However, in this thesis I also established a few characteristics unique to the Vatican, such as its Permanent Observer status at the UN, the quasi-state features of the Holy See, and the Church’s vast membership. These qualities have been very helpful in the Vatican’s advocacy for the HIPCI, and are powerful tools in its further pursuits.

In the case of the HIPC Initiatives, the Vatican was working in collaboration with secular organizations. I cannot, however, conclude that this single case study demonstrates a generalizable result. In other issue areas, this kind of collaboration might not be possible. Future research would benefit from studies of Vatican advocacy work that conflicts with the interests, values, or priorities of secular transnational actors. This thesis has shown that the Vatican’s positions are derived from Catholic theology. In the case of debt relief, secular governments and secular organizations, such as Oxfam, shared in and approved of the Church’s Christian message of Jubilee because it was consistent with their own advocacy and human rights work on behalf of the poor. In this particular case, the Church’s religious dogma lined up with the values motivating its secular transnational allies, as well as those of secular states and institutions. In contrast, when the Vatican’s religious pursuits are at odds with normative secular beliefs, the allies most likely to join the Vatican’s cause are other religious organizations or conservative, religious states. Without the strong backing of secular allies and states, Vatican campaigns in other areas may not prove as effective as the HIPC Initiatives. Like any other institution trying to influence global policy, the Vatican needs strong alliances in order to realize its potential power. With this in mind, future research might explore other circumstances or cases in which the Vatican has been less successful at cultivating transnational alliances.

One such case could be Population Control. The movement began in the middle of the twentieth century with neo-Malthusian concerns about population growth in poor countries, and has since gained momentum with feminists, liberal advocacy groups, and secular states. Population control appears to be a topic in which the Vatican is fiercely at odds with secular advocacy networks. Western, liberal activists view population issues within a human rights framework tied to gender empowerment. For feminist organizations,
the expansion of women’s rights requires reducing or removing religious restrictions against women’s access to birth control or their right to choose abortion for unwanted pregnancies. Birth control and abortion, however, go against the core beliefs of Catholic dogma. The “Vatican traces Christian efforts to protect life across two thousand years. It holds that human life is a gift from God and, therefore, must be treated with the utmost respect and dignity” (Shelledy 2003, 60). In this case the Vatican cannot reconcile its dogmatic beliefs with the policies, values, and priorities of secular activists. Further research would likely find the Vatican isolated from potential allies, hence much less effective at using its moral authority, international political opportunity structures, and media influence to shape international policy outcomes. For instance, the Church was not able to prevent language accepting of abortion in international resolutions regarding women’s sexual reproductive rights, such as those resulting from the 1994 Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, or the 1995 World Congress on Women in Beijing. On gender issues the Vatican has found its only allies to be conservative, Christian and Islamic religious states and organizations.

This thesis has attempted to lay the groundwork for future research and analysis on the role of the Vatican in global politics. Overall, the Vatican is a potentially powerful actor in the international arena. When allied with other strong advocates, its unique resources and tactics can prove effective in influencing global policy. Existing scholarship on secular transnational activism has demonstrated its utility for better understanding the transnational advocacy work of this religious actor. However, more research is required to understand the differences between secular and religious transnational activism, as well as the relationships between them. On the issue of debt relief, this thesis has shown how transnational human rights advocacy coalitions were able to collaborate across the religious-secular divide to further their successes in a cause they shared. However, on other issues such as population control, it seems likely that the religious-secular divide may not be reconcilable. The Vatican’s moral authority, which is rooted in religious doctrine, proves to be an especially powerful tool of international politics when its moral imperatives align at least roughly with those of secular activists. Scholars of international relations have much to learn about religious transnational activism and its relationship with secular organizations that has thus far received far more academic attention.
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