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Competing Ideas: the religious foundations of the German and Italian Welfare State



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Competing Ideas

The Religious Foundations of the Italian and German Welfare States

What explains the formation of conservative welfare states in continental Europe? In recent years, scholars have increasingly pointed to the power of religion. Studying the Catholic influence on the formation of the welfare state in Italy and Germany, this paper shows that the same religion can influence different welfare state outcomes. The German Catholic church had a strong influence on the formation of the first modern welfare state while in Italy the very same institution actively forestalled the development of a modern welfare state. The key to this counterintuitive observation lies in the different patterns of ideational competition. While the Catholic Church in Germany entered into a virtuous cycle of ideational competition, Italian Catholicism was caught in a vicious cycle that did not allow generating modern social security ideas.

Introduction

At the end of the 19th century, the Catholic Church developed a sophisticated social doctrine in Germany. Capable to cope with the new social risks of industrialized capitalism it managed to leave a decisive imprint on the first modern welfare state. In Italy, where a comparable economic and social development was under way, the Catholic church did not develop a modern social doctrine and actively forestalled the development of a modern welfare state. The paper asks: How was it possible that the very same religion produced so vividly different social policy outcomes in the two countries?

The answer lies in the different challenges out of which Catholic social doctrine developed during Italian and German unification. At the beginning of the 19th century, the Catholic church stressed in both countries the central role of subsidiarity and emphasized an orthodox interpretation of the alms principle. The state should not engage in welfare provision. At the end of the 19th century, German Catholicism had developed modern social ideas that contained specific blueprints for a Catholic welfare state. No comparable development occurred in Italy, and Italian Catholicism remained hostile towards modern social security. This is surprising because Catholicism was in a social minority position in the German empire, while it enjoyed extraordinary social and political powers in Italy.

The paper argues that different patterns of ideational competition are key to understand these diverging developments. In Germany, a cycle of ideational competition unfolded that was highly conducive to the development of new social security ideas. In this virtuous cycle all the major social and political sub-entities in the new empire developed modern social security ideas. The conservatives became social conservatives, liberals became social liberals, socialists became social democrats and Catholics became social Catholics. In Italy the contrary happened. The hegemony of the Catholic church on one side and the liberal ideas of Italian nation-builders on the other side led to a vicious cycle of ideational competition. Both sides fell back on their orthodox doctrinal positions from the early 19th century. In other countries social Catholicism and social liberalism had since long replaced their orthodox siblings of laissez faire liberalism and subsidiarity Catholicism. This was not the case in Italy where liberal laissez faire and Catholic subsidiarity principle were perversely compatible when it came to the role of the state in welfare.

The following will first develop the context and puzzle of early modern social security formation in Italy and Germany further. The second part will present a framework for the study of the

influence of religious ideas on the welfare state. The third part will introduce the German case of virtuous ideational competition. The fourth part introduces the Italian case of vicious ideational stagnation. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings.

Developing the Puzzle

Italy and Germany unified out of heterogeneous political and social entities at the end of the 19th century. Both were late nation states and their full industrial take off came only in the last quarter of the 19th century. Despite the similar trajectories of modernization, Italy and Germany's path towards the development of the modern welfare state differed. While Germany formed the first modern welfare state at the end of the 19th century, nothing the like happened in Italy.

The divergent welfare paths are hard to explain with the help of classic theories of the welfare state. For the first encompassing theories of the welfare state, the Logic of Industrialization (LoI), the formation of modern welfare states was a question of timing and pace of industrialization (Alber 1982; Flora/Heidenheimer 1981; Wilensky 1975). The second major welfare state paradigm, the Power Resource Approach (PRA) emphasized the power resources of the working class as being decisive for the development of the welfare state (Korpi 1983; Stephens 1979; Esping-Andersen 1985).

Neither explanation can answer why social security legislation in the two countries developed so differently. For Gerschenkron, arguably the most prominent classic interpreter of historic economic development, Italy and Germany followed similar economic developmental paths.¹ Also the modernization indicators from Flora's (1986) and Alber's (1986) work on socio-economic modernization show two countries at roughly the same level of development.

The Power Resource Argument has a hard time to explain the divergence in welfare state formation. While the working class grew at high speed in both countries, conscious class formation in terms of socialist parties and unionization became a politically relevant factor only comparably late. When the first social security legislation was debated in the German parliament only 10 out of 354 deputies were socialists and they all voted against social security legislation in the 1880s (Haerendel/Peterle 2004a: XLVI). It is therefore of little surprise that both countries appear only scarcely in the accounts of Power Resource scholars.

¹ German industrialization took off earlier, both reached the peak of industrial capacities towards the end of the 19th century (Gerschenkron 1962).

Since Esping-Andersen's (1990) discovery of the conservative continental welfare state cluster in Europe religion kept on puzzling PRA scholars because the conservative regime cluster fit poorly with the PRA explanation of the welfare state. Some PRA scholars started to argue that welfare state development is greatest in the countries where the geographical distance to Rome is greatest, e.g. in Scandinavia (Ragin et al. 1993). Moreover, religion is often evoked as a force of Marxist false consciousness, developed by the churches to drive a wedge into the labor movement (Huber/Stephens 2001: 19; Korpi 2006: 175-176). Also Esping-Andersen pointed to the central role of the "churches" (Esping-Andersen 1990: 27) in the formation of conservative welfare states. However, he did not investigate this any further and left the conservative welfare state cluster "not particularly well explained" (Manow/van Kersbergen 2009: 15).

Numerous contributions have taken issue with the influence of religion on the conservative cluster during the past two decades. Early accounts that scrutinized the connection between religion and welfare stressed the prevalence of Catholicism in a nation (Castles 1993) while others saw Christian Democratic parties and their Catholic social doctrine as the major driving force behind religious influence on the welfare state (van Kersbergen 1995). Critics argued that not only Catholicism but also the other Christian denominations could have had an influence on social security legislation (Manow 2004; Kahl 2005). Van Kersbergen and Manow have recently put forward the most encompassing account (Manow/van Kersbergen 2009). Religion influences the welfare state through Christian Democratic parties whose emergence is dependent on the prevalent cleavage system and the electoral institutions in a given country.

However, the divergence of Italy and Germany can hardly be explained by doctrinal differences of the prevailing denominations. The above introduced frameworks have trouble to explain why majoritarian Protestant Germany developed a Catholic welfare state while Catholic Italy did not.

A deeper look into the prevailing social policy doctrines of the denominations on both countries yields another remarkable phenomenon: Italy and Germany differed strongly in the pace and quality of Catholic social doctrine development. Catholic social thought was at the beginning of the 19th century centered around poor relief and the alms logic in both countries. Hundred years later Catholic thought in the two countries diverged dramatically. In Italy, pre-modern alms logic and subsidiarity principle continued to dominate. In Germany, Catholicism had developed sophisticated institutional blueprints on how to construct a modern Catholic welfare state. What we call today the Bismarckian welfare state is to a large extent the product of the influence of the German Catholic social ideas on Bismarck's social security legislation. When modern social

Catholic teaching finally came to Italy and was inserted into the official body of church doctrine with *Rerum Novarum* (1891), it had to be imported from Germany (Misner 1992). It is no surprise that Lynch “finds little evidence that Christian Democracy has determined the shape of the Italian welfare state through the mechanism of parties that carry and enforce a particular set of socio-religious doctrines” (Lynch 2009: 114). Neither a party nor a doctrine existed.

The surprising aspect is not only that the very same institution and religion developed two strongly diverging templates for social welfare in the countries at roughly the same time but even more so that this modernization happened in Germany while orthodoxy prevailed in Italy. The chances of Catholicism to develop a modern social doctrine and to leave an imprint on modern welfare legislation should have been much better in Catholic Italy than in the mixed denominational Germany. Through a series of doctrinal developments during the last quarter of the 19th century (*Syllabus of Errors, Non Expedit*), the Vatican maintained tremendous social control over the Italian population. In contrast, in Germany, all important governing institutions were Protestant. Catholics were a minority (roughly one third of the population), concentrated in the south, the west and in some Eastern pockets. The administration, the officer corps, the education system, the emperor and Bismarck, all were vivid followers of cultural Protestantism (*Kulturprotestantismus*) which should become the empire’s master culture (*Leitkultur*).

The approaches that see a connection between religion and the welfare state assume implicitly that religions have predefined and fixed systems of welfare ideas that remain constant over time. None of the approaches looks at the formation of the doctrine process itself (a partial exception is Kahl 2006). To develop an approach that can explain how different welfare doctrines develop in different countries would help to come better to terms not only with the influence of religion on social policy but with a much greater question: what role do ideas play in politics? While no one would dare to say today anymore that ideas do not matter in politics, we still know astonishingly little about the circumstances under which they matter. To be more precise, why do they matter in some cases but not in others?

A theoretical framework of ideational cycles

Ideas are no longer a variable that we can “pass over in silence” (Carstensen 2011: 147). The past two decades have seen a flourishing of ideational contributions in political science. But why would an ideational approach be helpful when dealing with the influence of religious social doctrine on the welfare state?

First because religion is a system of ideas (Durkheim 2008 [1914]: 62) and hence analyzing religious social teaching means to analyze ideas. Second because Weber, who witnessed the formation of the first modern welfare legislation as a contemporary, remarked that “welfare and economic politics” are conflicts „not only, as we like to believe so much today, between ‘class interests’, but also between worldviews”(Weber 1973 [1917]: 192). Weber observed that decisions made in response to socioeconomic questions are subject to “last highest personal axioms of creed and value ideas” (Weber 1973 [1917]: 192). As a consequence, the fight over social and economic policy is a battle of ideas. However, in order to get the full picture of the impact of religion on welfare formation, the focus can not only rest on the formative process of social security ideas. It must be complemented by an analysis of how these ideas influence legislation. This recalls Baldwin’s powerful statement that “the welfare state is a series of laws, a framework of legislation. To study its origins and development is to deal in legislative and political history. Social issues play an important role here, but only as filtered through the parliamentary membrane” (Baldwin 1990: 53).

Contemporary analysis of the role of ideas in political science originates in the field of comparative political economy. Following Peter Hall’s (1993) work on policy paradigms, most ideational scholarship scrutinizes how hegemonic idea sets (usually two and usually they are Keynesianism and Neo-Liberalism) alternate (Berman 1998; Blyth 2001; 2002). The key for alternation from one paradigm to another is often identified as an external shock in which the old hegemonic idea loses legitimacy and opens a window of opportunity for the new idea to take over (Hall 1993: 291).

This model is Westminster centric, as it suffers from a bias on the policymaking process in the Westminster parliamentary systems, where clear majorities alternate and can impose new policy paradigms without engaging in compromises. There exist however situations, especially in the consociational democracies of continental Europe, in which other patterns of ideational competition emerge. One is a situation in which two major idea sets are present but neither of them can reach a dominant hegemonic position. This is the situation of a frozen bi-polar ideational world. The second is a multi-polar ideational situation in which more than two ideas compete. This entails ideational coalition building and ideational compromise. The first situation is one of vicious ideational competition, the second one virtuous ideational competition.

If considerable functional pressures are exerted on the existing ideational landscape (e.g. through industrialization, urbanization) and, a political competitor incorporates an answer to these

pressures into his political ideas, then the other political players have to respond by updating their programmatic ideas as well. If they fail to do so, they will be side-lined or look out-dated in the political competition. Therefore, when one party updates, modernizes or adapts its programmatic ideas to new contextual conditions, this exerts considerable competitive pressure on the others. What happens next is that the other political players also start to update their ideas. I call this phenomenon a virtuous cycle of ideational competition.

It is also possible that such a cycle does not unfold in light of functional pressures on the system. A stalemate or clear-cut and frozen power relations between the parties can lead to a vicious cycle of ideational competition. During vicious cycles of ideational competition none of the political actors departs from the status quo in response to a new contextual challenge and, hence, no modern ideas regarding the contextual issue are generated. While one situation leads to progress, the other one results in stasis.

The two situations mentioned above crystallize in the two cases of early modern social security formation that this paper scrutinizes. In Germany, the accelerated functional pressures of industrialization from the mid-19th century onwards gave rise to a new social stratus, that of the industrial worker. Facilitated through the proliferation of Marx's ideas, this new social stratus threatened to form a new coherent subculture based on the socialist worldview. This was alarming for the other existing subcultures and worldviews and they responded by developing their own ideas on social security in congruence with their worldviews (Social Catholicism, Conservative Protestant State Socialism, and Social Liberalism). The functional pressures of industrialization, and their ideational politicization through Marx, triggered a virtuous cycle of ideational competition on modern welfare ideas in Germany. Once the first political exponent of a worldview (Bismarck) made a step to implement his ideas in welfare legislation, the others had to follow suit in order not to become sidelined. At the end, the first modern welfare state emerged in Germany. In Italy, contrastingly, the unification of the nation led to a bi-polar rivalry between liberal state and church. Neither of the two could establish hegemony over the other. This bi-polar stalemate led to a vicious cycle of ideational competition in which neither power generated modern welfare state ideas as a response to the functional pressures generated through industrialization and liberal de-corporation of society in the 19th century.

Catholicism enters a virtuous cycle of ideational competition in Germany

Why was Marx convinced that the revolution would take place in Germany (instead of Russia)? The answer lies in the pace and fury with which capitalist industrialization unleashed in Germany.

A Prussian agrarian reform of 1807 abolished peasant serfdom but at the same time freed the landholders from any social responsibilities vis-à-vis his workers. This meant the “destruction of the peasant as a dependent but highly entitled estate” as Böhme (1978: 22) comments. The result was that “[p]ropertyless, uprooted, homeless, belonging neither to the state nor an estate, almost half of the inhabitants of the German population lived in misery” (Böhme 1978: 22). The agrarian reform freed vast labor resources for the upcoming industrialization (Abelshausen 2005: 26). Furthermore, a series of commercial reforms were enacted in Prussia and most German states, whereby old legal monopolies and prerogatives such as the guild system of the crafts were dismantled. This led to a constant process of “decorporation of society” (Abelshausen 2005: 31). The creation of the German customs union (Zollverein) between all German states in 1834 “finally created a vast internal market, one of the most important steps in the development of market forces in Germany” (Abelshausen 2005: 26).

When industrialization took off towards the mid of the 19th century, the now freed but job and income-less masses flowed into the industrial centers. The growth of German cities was massive. Berlin doubled from 412,000 inhabitants in 1850, to 826,000 only twenty years later and had 2,071,000 inhabitants in 1910 (Hohorst et al. 1978: 45). The social situation in the rapidly growing cities was horrible. Deprivation, disease, poor hygienic conditions and housing shortage were omnipresent. Much of today's inner city parts of Berlin were slums during the last half of the 19th century. Child mortality was at one third of all new born (Hohorst et al. 1978: 36-37).

Catholic social thinkers at first replied to this troubling situation with more orthodoxy. If the social situation was deteriorating and a whole social stratum was entering deep deprivation then this was not the fault of the new system of socioeconomic organization but the fault of declining faith. People got side-tracked by secular ideas. The deterioration of the socioeconomic situation and the de-corporation of society was the divine punishment for this (Langhorst/Stegmann 2005: 619).

Medieval times were idealized and romanticized by the German episcopate. Adam Heinrich Müller (1779-1829), one of the most prominent German Catholic social thinkers of that time, was convinced that in medieval times,

[t]he vast mass of the people was protected, through the preservation of the countless natural and individual associations, authorities, families, communities, estates that everyone belonged to, protected against the decay of his own forces and for the real abandoned, frail, displaced and for the few that are homeless, the Church took care. (Müller cited in Stegmann/Langhorst 2005: 619).

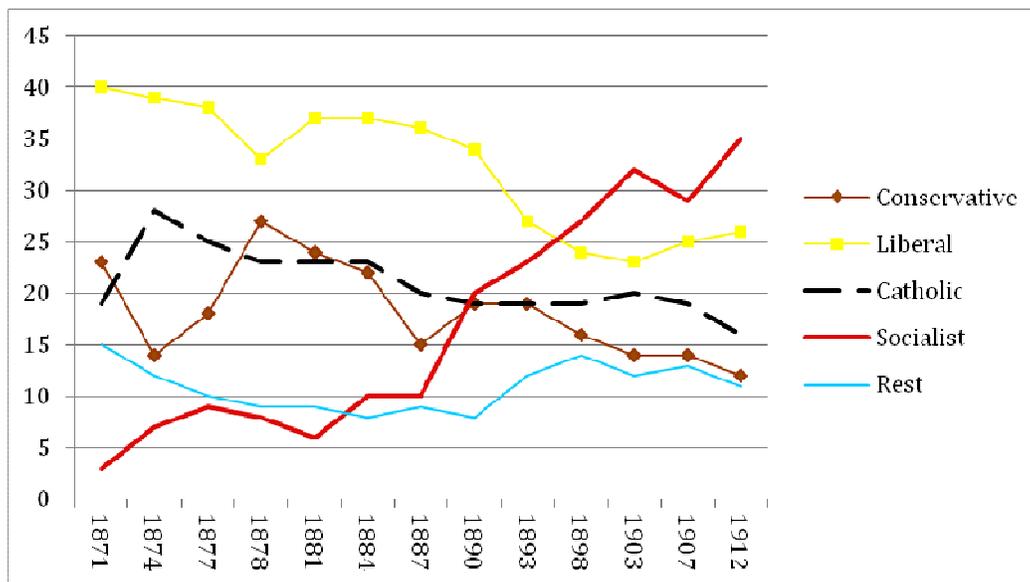
The Catholic prescription to restore this situation was simple: liberal thought, individualism and secularization had to be eradicated, then the old social fabric would restore itself.

However, the rapid industrialization did not only bring about relative deprivation but formed a whole new social stratus in society. Through the writings of Marx and Engels the industrial workers became an increasingly conscious class. Ever more Catholic workers started to defect from Catholicism to Marxism. Becoming member of the German socialist party required in the 19th century still the revoking of faith and to exit the church.

On the other side of the political spectrum Bismarck and his conservative Protestant subculture, started to think aloud about the welfare state as a tool for nation-building. When Bismarck started his unification project, Germany was little more than a patch work (*Flickenteppich*), made out of numerous small states and city states. It was strongly divided along territorial, regional and denominational lines. Citizens had multiple loyalties – the local ruler, the guilds, the feudal lord and the churches (Blackbourn 1998: XVI).

Bismarck's unification of the German territory through three successive wars neither brought him the loyalty of the conquered people nor a ready made German nation (Smith 1995: 35). The empire was instead divided along subcultures. Each of these subcultures was held together by a worldview and organized through a dense web of civil society association that accompanied their members from "the cradle to the grave". At the top of each subculture stood a political party that represented the interest of the subculture and its worldview. The four major subcultures, conservative Protestantism, liberal Protestantism, Catholicism and socialism (Lepsius 1993: 33), did not automatically dissolve within the new Protestant Prussian conservative master culture but proved to be highly resilient (see figure one). This was tricky for Bismarck because the empire, albeit always described as an authoritarian monarchy, had surprisingly open electoral institutions. The constitution from 1871 gave every man older than 25 the right to vote, regardless of property, literacy or profession. When drafting the constitution, Bismarck's plan had been to rally popular support through elections whenever he needed it for his politics. Convinced of his charismatic leadership, not being responsible to the Reichstag, and having the possibility to dissolve parliament whenever he needed to, he thought to be equipped enough to legislate without much strings attached. This was a serious miscalculation. Legislating became for Bismarck much trickier than he had thought.

Percentage of votes cast for each subculture.



Data from Lepsius, M. R. (1993) p. 33.

The introduction of social legislation was meant as a lever to crack the cohesion of the other subcultures, a political tool to bind citizens and the emerging working classes closer to the empire. Following its external territorial consolidation through war, Bismarck now aimed at the “internal furnishing of the Empire” (Bismarck 1881: 64). Alongside the repressive laws, against Catholics during the 1870s and socialists during the 1880s (the stick), welfare was the soft complement (the carrot) that aimed at wooing the workers away from the other subcultures (Ritter 1982: 44). This shines through in the imperial social message from 17th November 1881 which purports: “that the healing of the social damages can not only be reached through repression of social democratic riots, but that simultaneously the wellbeing of the worker has to be positively cultivated.” (Bismarck 1881: 63)

The ideational competition between Bismarck and the socialists for the best answer to the workers question put the prevailing orthodox romanticism of German Catholicism under severe pressure. Ideational competition started to unfold.

Representative for the impact of the ideational competition on the evolution of Catholic social thought in Germany is the development of the social thinking of Bishop Emmanuel von Ketteler. At first Ketteler interpreted the relative deprivation of large parts of the German population like his fellow Catholic social thinkers in purely theological terms. In 1848 he still

concluded that “the apostation from Christianity has brought misfortune over us, only the return to Christianity can help us” (Ketteler 1848: 160).

Under the impression of the advent of Marxist thinking and the growth of Lassalle’s socialist movement his thinking changed. Ketteler was impressed by the ideational developments on the left. He exchanged anonymous letters with the head of the general German workers association (*Allgemeiner Deutscher Arbeiterverein*) Friedrich Lassalle, the first social-democratic association in Germany (also Bismarck met with Lassalle in secrecy). Also Franz Hintze (1851-1921), who later became a leading figure of German social Catholicism, formed his capitalist criticism “after intensive reading of ‘Das Kapital’ from Marx” (Stegmann/Langhorst 2005: 646).

Driven by ideational competitive pressures, that the ideas of the left had triggered, Ketteler transformed from a representative of orthodox romantic Catholic social teaching into one of the most prominent promoters of a modern Catholic welfare state in Germany. From the 1860s onwards Ketteler saw the social question as being increasingly triggered by modern industrialized capitalism. In his book of 1864 *The Labor Question and Christianity* he states that:

There can no longer be any doubt that the whole material existence of almost the entire working classes, by far the majority of all persons in the modern states, the existence of their families, their daily worries about the very bread required for the subsistence of a man, his wife and children, is exposed to every fluctuation of the markets and the market prices. I do not know of anything that is more lamentable than this fact. What feelings must this invoke in these poor people who depend with everything they need, everything they love on the daily market price! This is the slave market of our liberal Europe, cut out according to the pattern set by our humane, enlightened, anti-Christian liberalism and Free-Masonry! (von Ketteler 1864: 20).

However, in 1864 pope Pius IX published the syllabus of errors. It heavily condemned any form of liberalism and socialism. Together with Lassalle’s death in a duel, and the subsequent orthodox-Marxist developments within the German worker’s association, this led to an alienation between Catholicism and the left in the German empire. The syllabus of errors termed socialism as “pests” (Syllabus of Errors 1846: IV) and Ketteler followed suit by proclaiming that socialism was “[o]ne of the most rotten obliquities of the human mind” (Ketteler 1871, cited in Görner 1986: 162).

This was the watershed for the development of German Catholic social teaching. Reactionary approaches that aimed at a wholesale establishment of the old medieval corporate social order were abandoned as unrealistic or too dangerous and in light of Marxist radicalization of the German workers movement. If German Catholicism wanted to leave an imprint on Bismarck’s social security formation it had to react quickly.

Ketteler lobbied the Catholic congress (*Katholikentag*), the annual major rally of German Catholicism, in 1869 to open a section dedicated to finding a modern Catholic answer to the workers question (Görner 1986: 165). Ketteler also lobbied the episcopate for the introduction of mandatory economic training for clergy. Not only did he press for doctrine development but also modernized the organizational capacity of the church. As Blackbourn assesses, “[t]he machinery of the Church (Max Weber) showed how Catholicism adapted the forms, if not the content, of the age of progress” and he concludes that “Catholic Germany boasted an array of lay associations without equal in Europe” (Blackbourn 1998: 298; 301).

Ketteler’s organizational efforts cumulated in the formation of the Center Party (*Zentrum*) in 1870. The foundational manifesto lists nine bullet points, of which two are dedicated to social reform (Söster Programm 1870: 56). While the first one of these enshrines the Center Party’s commitment to strive for mediation between capital, landed estates and workers, the second one proclaims “[f]reedom for all lawful solutions of the social tasks. Abolition of those mischiefs, which threaten the worker with moral or physical ruin” (Söster Programm 1870: 56).

The organizational and ideological transformations within Catholicism did not go unnoticed by the ones that had triggered the ideational competition in the first place. Marx wrote to Engels in 1869 infuriated about the efforts of the Catholics that

During this tour through Belgium, layover in Aachen and cruise up the Rhine, I convinced myself that especially in the Catholic areas we have to go against the clerics. I will work through the International on these matters. The dogs flirt with the labor question (e.g. Bishop Ketteler in Mainz, the clerics on the Düsseldorf congress etc.) where it deems them appropriate (Marx 1869: 165).

Bismarck called the Catholics from now on the black international (*Schwarze Internationale*) in reference to the socialist international and the black cloth of Catholic clergy (Matthoefer et al. 2001). The liberals responded to all this by increasing their efforts to build up a network of liberal workers unions (*Hirsch Dünkerschen Gewerkevereine*) and by developing social liberal thought further.

Modern social security legislation in Germany

The welfare state in Germany was born out of three major packages of laws: health insurance in 1883, statutory accident insurance in 1884, and old age and invalidity insurance in 1889. The laws made Germany a “pioneer” (Ritter 1997: 684) and the first country world wide to have a welfare state (Hennock 2007: 6).

The conservative subculture and Bismarck were not only anti-socialist but had through the founders crisis (1872-1873), the first capitalist bust in Germany, become strongly anti-liberal. Adolf Stöcker, one of the most prominent exponents of the Conservative camp, expressed at a party rally that

“[f]ree concurrence of forces, unlimited competition for existence, the cold law of supply and demand, the disdainful axiom that labor is a commodity: These are the fraternal ideas, with which a false liberalism dehumanizes economic life and destroys the social community.” (Stoecker 1881: 98)

For the “social conservative workers policy” (Ayass et al. 2003: XXV) to work it was essential to inhibit the emancipation of the workers while simultaneously improving their status. Therefore, Bismarck fiercely opposed national codification of work protection and collective bargaining rights while promoting patriarchal welfare from above (Bismarck 1882). Patriarchy was central in Bismarck’s programmatic ideas. In a Reichstag speech in 1889, Bismarck puts forward that “[a]n old man, who cannot work, somehow has to live and be fed, if one can speak of a patriarchic relationship at all” (Bismarck 1889: 674). Bismarck wanted the workers to be integrated in the dominant conservative Protestant subculture and worldview as subjects, as *Untertanen* in Heinrich Mann’s words (Mann 1918), not as uncomfortable partners. For Bismarck, social security had to avoid sparking emancipatory tendencies among the working class, and allow for a maximum of control of the new policy by the central state while also making sure that the welfare recipients understood that they derived their benefits from the benevolent leaders of the Protestant subculture. Welfare had to be centralized, under the control of the empire’s central administration and completely state financed.

This outcome was never achieved. Bismarck was so furious about the result of his welfare policies that he did not mention his great social security with a single word in his memoirs (Bismarck 1999 [1898]). Bismarck regarded health insurance as a “child foisted on to him” whereas he described old age and invalidity pensions as a “parliamentarian and privy councilor changeling” (Bismarck quoted in Ritter, 1982: 42). Despite that most scholars and the public alike call the German welfare state (and most other continental European welfare states) Bismarckian (Bonoli/Palier 2007; Clegg 2007; Natali/Rhodes 2004), these systems have little to do with Bismarck’s original intentions. How come?

The watering down of Bismarck’s bills can certainly not be attributed to the socialists. During the 1880s German socialism embraced maximalist positions of orthodox Marxism. The leading social democratic newspaper *Der Sozialdemokrat* consequently announced that

Never will we, for a lentil dish of an accident and invalidity insurance of highly dubious value, give up the right of the people to work and existence nor the right and the duty of the people to enforce their claims in an emergency situation through violence. This is the proud answer of Social Democracy to the message from the Kaiser (Der Sozialdemokrat 1881: 88).

Consequently, the socialists voted against all of the social security laws of the 1880s (Härendel/Peterle 2004: XLIII).

The liberal camp had also no great influence on the legislation. Early attempts of liberal social security legislation had failed in the 1870s and the founders-crisis (*Gründerkrise*), the first capitalist bust in Germany, had discredited liberal thought fundamentally in the empire. Bismarck did not search for the support of the Liberals on social security legislation and only the national right-wing liberals voted in favor of the legislation while left liberals voted against it (Haerendel/Peterle 2004: XLIII).

The Catholic subculture was the only one that had the power to water down Bismarck's reform proposals. Well organized and cohesive through Bismarck's existential attacks during the culture war (*Kulturkampf*), the Catholic center party and the clergy were determined to make Bismarckian social security legislation more Catholic and less Protestant.

The center party favored social security organized through cooperations along vocational lines (*Berufsgenossenschaften*) which translated the medieval corporatist logic of organization into modern capitalism. Only in the long run should this lead to a "reorganisation of society on the foundations of corporatist institutions, [...], and to prepare the restauration of the Christian world order" (Germania 1885: 271) as a congregation of the leading social policy experts in the Center Party concluded. Catholic Social policy experts like Hertling argued for mutual organizations with compulsory membership as carriers for social security (*Berufsgenossenschaften*) because they were based on "organically grown" (Hertling 1883: 131) forms of social security organizations like the *Knappschaften* for miners or the *Guilds* for craftsmen. The organization should be completely decoupled from the state through "total self-administration" by "the insured and the contributing employers". The state instead, should "confine itself to the necessary surveillance" (Germania 1885: 273) of the insurance bodies. The Center Party wanted social security to be financed equally by employers and employees as "[i]t is in the very nature of the relationship between employers and employees that the former contribute to the insurances of the latter" (Germania 1885: 273) as the Germania, the major Catholic newspaper, summarized.

Looking at the final legislation one can see that Catholicism managed to leave a strong imprint on the legislation. The final insurance system was not exclusively state funded and organized through a centralized insurance agency (*Reichsversicherungsanstalt*) and a federal tax but instead self administered by capital and labor and segmented along occupational lines, in line with the subsidiarity principle of Catholic social thought. The social security legislation of the 1880s is largely congruent with the provisions of *Rerum Novarum* issued in 1891.

A Vicious Cycle of Ideational Competition: Social Catholicism in Italy

Germany was unified by Prussia, Italy by Piedmont. Through a series of wars during the last half of the 19th century the Piedmontese rulers, the house of Savoy and their political mastermind Cavour (the Italian version of Bismarck) unified the patchwork of Italian states that had spread out over the peninsula since medieval times.

The unification processes in Italy and Germany differed however on the religious component. In Germany the Prussian state expanded its territory, backed by a strong Protestant Prussian state church, which was closely tied to the court and the ruling elites of Prussia. The culture war between this hegemonic Protestant culture that dominated all state institutions and the Catholic minority in the empire, was fierce but lasted only for a decade (1871-1878). Afterwards both sides accepted cohabitation and Bismarck even openly searched for Catholic support when he went on to suppress the socialists. In Italy, the scenario was different. Cavour unified Italy at the expense of the Vatican territory. At the beginning of the 19th century the Vatican state had still occupied most of the middle part of the Italian peninsula, roughly one third of Italy's territory. When the Italian state was proclaimed in 1861, the papal territories had been circumscribed to the Roman city walls. Ten years later, when unification was completed and the capital moved to Rome, the pope had to withdraw into the Vatican city. Out of protest Pius IX did not leave the compound till he died.

The retaliation of the Vatican for this humiliation was devastating. The Catholic church "did all it could to rob the Italian state of its legitimacy" (Kertzer 2000: 205). Pope Pius IX shifted the church's strategy away from temporal power over territory towards an increase in divine powers over people and the church apparatus. The plan was to increase the grip over the hearts and minds of the Italian people. Central to this were three doctrinal developments during the 1860s: the syllabus of errors, papal infallibility and the non expedite. This was supplemented with a Catholic counter-offensive against liberalism in society by fostering new features of the Catholic

creed, such as the virgin mary cult that was sparked around the same time as the doctrinal codification of the immaculate conception.

Pope Pius IX issued the encyclical *Quanta Cura* in 1864 containing the Syllabus of Errors which “upheld the temporal power of his Holiness, denounced liberalism as an anathema, and made Catholicism incompatible with nationalism.” (Kelikian 2002: 46). The syllabus was a sharp condemnation of liberalism, rationalism and the modern nation state through a list of 80 prominent liberal statements that were condemned. The syllabus argued fiercely against the abolition of the “temporal power of which the Apostolic See is possessed” (Syllabus of Errors 1864: 76) and declared it also as wrong that “[i]n the case of conflicting laws enacted by the two powers, the civil law prevails.” (Syllabus of Errors 1864: 42). In fact, Pollard puts forward that “[g]iven the strictures of the Syllabus, ‘Liberal Catholic’ seemed almost a contradiction in terms.” (Pollard 2008: 28).

The next step was the invention of papal infallibility to reinforce the central power of the papacy within Catholicism. Papal infallibility established the supremacy of the pope on all doctrinal matters by setting out that “such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves and not from the consent of the Church irreformable” (Vatican Council I 1869: Ch 4). Anyone breaking this dogma would be deemed “anathema”, (Vatican Council I 1869: Ch 4) banished or denounced in other words. In this way, the divine authority of the Pope became untouchable and his grip on the Vatican hierarchy was tightened as never before.

The reactionary program of Pius IX was rounded off by the *non expedit*. Best described with the phrase “neither elected nor electors” (Kertzer 2000: 193; Pollard 2008: 22) the pope’s bulletin instructed that Catholics should abstain from any political involvement and completely refuse any form of legitimating the new state.

The result was that no ordinary Italian, if he did not want to risk excommunication, gave the Italian state his loyalty. Not only could Catholics not vote or run for office but the new doctrinal developments also forestalled the formation of a party of religious defense in Italy (Kalyvas 1996). This period of open and covert warfare between the two most powerful political and social institutions on the Italian peninsula endured for the next 60 years and was ultimately only resolved by Mussolini through the Lateran treaties in 1929. Cavour’s dream (he had died in 1861) of a “free church in a free state” (Lönne 1986: 203) remained utopia. The problem of not coming

to terms with the church did not only impact on the cohesion of the nation but spilled over also into the political system.

19th century Italy is usually described as a parliamentary constitutional monarchy, a liberal regime, while the German empire is the autocratic counterpart. If one looks, at the franchise in post unification Italy, this has to be qualified. In liberal Italy the right to vote was much more limited than in authoritarian Germany. In 1870, male, literate citizens over 25, that had paid more over 40 Lire taxes per year had the right to vote. Only 500 000 out of a population of 25 million Italians fulfilled these requirements (Clark 1984). The single member district system in combination with transformismo governance (the governance with continuously alternating ad hoc majorities) further complicated the political situation. In 1874 a successful candidate had on average only to secure 426 votes. A politician in post-unification Italy only needed to patronize 426 people in his constituency to become perpetually reelected. He had little worry for the rest of the population. Clark describes 19th century parliament in Italy as a place “where favors were traded” (Clark 1984: 61). Deputies would pressure ministers for favors for their constituency in order to secure re-election (Mac-Smith 1969: 220-221). The Prime Minister’s job, meanwhile, was one “of creating and holding together a shifting coalition of support by persuasion and patronage” (Clark 1984: 61). Programmatic ideas were not needed to rally this small amount of votes. Instead, the lack of cohesion of government majorities meant that ministers could be easily put under pressure to transfer certain goods to certain constituencies in order to stabilize government.

Coupled with the heavy franchise restrictions the election system guaranteed that the old liberal establishment would find its way into parliament without being exposed to competition. The pope’s non expedite from 1868, which forbid Catholics to vote or to run for public office, exacerbated the situation. It froze political competition as the members of the largest opposition group in Italy, the Catholics, could neither run nor vote for office. No ideational competition could evolve.

Catholic Social Teaching and welfare policy in Italy

Italian welfare consisted of a widespread system of local, usually Church run, charity institutions – the so called Operé Pie. The roughly 20 000 Operé Pie existing at the time of unification constituted a highly fragmented, opaque, inefficient and often corrupt system of welfare provision. Operé Pie were usually constituted of poor relief institutions but sometimes also

hospitals and hospices. The Liberal Senator Leopoldo Franchetti wrote about Operé Pie in his famous report about state, administration and social conditions in Southern Italy in 1876:

the Operé Pie are in general considered by the class that administers them as a domain that has to strive for the personal advantage. For the honest ones they are a means of influence and favoritism, for the less honest a source of easy profits and illicit earnings. (Franchetti cited in Fargion 1986: 3)

The liberals that took power in the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, during the mid-19th century, had therefore ample reason to reform the existing system. It was highly dysfunctional, out of sync with the Liberal modernization claims, and in the hands of the Vatican, liberalism's arch-enemy.

Liberalism had already launched various attempts to bring poor relief under state control in Piedmont-Sardinia. Cavour had studied and published extensively on the English poor relief reforms of the early 19th century. He envisioned a modern welfare state along British lines that would help to form a great society as the pinnacle of the liberal nation- and state-building project. Like Bismarck in Germany, Italian Liberals in the 1850s were still convinced that unification could only be successful if supported by a welfare state. Cavour expressed this as early as 1851 in a speech to the Piedmont senate where he put forward:

I believe that there exists an immense prejudice against the idea of legal charity, but I predict that all societies which have arrived at a certain level of [economic] development will necessarily resort to legal charity. I also believe that experience will show in a not-so-distant future that legal charity, which is administered well and is governed by sound norms, can produce immense [economic and social] benefits [for the nation] without resulting in those devastating [financial] consequences [for the taxpayer and the state] that many [conservatives and critics] fear. (Cavour cited in Quine 2002: 14)

Cavour's idea was to liberate Italian society from the grip of the Catholic Church by establishing a state run system of welfare, but his first attempts ended in disastrous defeat. The Vatican was able to form an alliance with conservative Catholic deputies in the Piedmont parliament and managed to convince the Piedmontese monarchy of the merits of its cause. The social security law that was finally approved in 1859 did technically provide the possibility of temporary state supervision of Operé Pie. But it was clear that the state supervision was never put into practice. The result was drastic. Liberalism, from that point onwards, left Church welfare untouched, which meant that all previous intentions of creating a fruitful liberal debate on welfare that went beyond a 'state hands off approach' were put on ice. In fact, Quine notes:

In the 1860s and 1870s, the governing class issued no great program of social reform under the aegis of the new nation state. Nor did Italian liberalism more generally produce its own principles of social rights or entitlements to welfare (Quine 2002: 38).

With the abandonment of the programmatic idea of social reform, Italian liberalism abandoned social liberalism from its worldview. Italian liberalism instead adopted laissez faire programmatic ideas. Consequently, state interventions like social security encountered a "fear and loathe"

(Quine 2002: 39) attitude among Italian liberals in the first three decades after unification. Italian liberals did not want the state to engage in welfare. Market liberal laissez-faire ideas dominated from 1860 to the end of the 1880s.

This remarkably differs from the developments of liberalism in other European countries at the same time. While Liberalism in other European countries, like Germany or the UK, developed gradually away from pure laissez faire manchesterism towards more state driven approaches, Italian Liberalism seemed to take the opposite direction. Quine summarizes by putting forward that

Even when advocating individual responsibility for welfare, German liberals formulated corporatist plans for social betterment which did not preclude support for collectivism under state direction (Quine 2002: 39).

The ideological level of Italian liberalism in the late 19th century seemed to have fallen back to that of German or British liberalism in the 18th century.

The first law considering welfare after unification reflected these new programmatic ideas. Law No. 753 as approved by parliament on the 3rd August 1862 provided a legal basis and framework for the operation of *opéré pie* and had been layered attached onto an earlier Piedmont law from 1859. It established a potential technical supervisory role for the state over *opéré pie* which was never enforced. As so often in Liberal Italy, state supervision belonged only to the *paese legale* (legal world) and never became part of the *paese reale* (real world).

The question is why Italian Liberalism developed in a direction that had long been surpassed by the liberal movements in other countries? One explanation is that Cavour had learned from his clash with the Church in 1859 on welfare and shied away from further challenging the Church during unification. After having secularized the educational system, stripped the church of large parts of its property and encircled Rome, Cavour simply did not want to further “increase the resentment of the old elites against the new government” (Fargion 1986: 7). Even if social security reform was deeply entrenched in the liberal worldview, at that point in time it would have endangered the Liberal state-building interest.

Fargion has a different explanation and underlines that the passivity of the state on welfare came from a deep-seated disinterest in the lower social stratus by the new liberal state elites. She comments:

However, if we analyze the nature of the legislative directives approved in the first three decades of Italian parliamentary activity, there is no doubt about the undisputed substantial disinterest of the ruling classes in a narrower sense towards the charitable bodies and in a general sense towards problems of social-assistance (Fargion 1986: 6).

Ferrera puts forward that the constant brinkmanship on a debt crisis, along with the fact that the whole liberal movement is premised on having a balanced budget, countered any attempt to press for an active role of the State in welfare (Ferrera 1984). It was therefore convenient for the state to leave welfare in the hands of the Church. Indeed, as the following quote shows, the liberal ministers felt a chill when they thought of the possibility of opening the door to big government. Giuseppe Zanardelli, the minister of public works under Crispi put forward that:

we have no empire, no industry, no navy. If we expunge every expression of private activity, what will we have left? We will become a nation of administrators; we will create a society enmeshed in the machinery of the state; we will have *l'impiegomania*, [employee-mania] which, already being so widespread and consuming, will end up impeding the functioning of ministries and departments and blocking the vital circulatory system of government. (cited in Quine 2002: 40).

Ferrera argues that post-unification liberalism started embracing “laissez faire” as a core liberal idea of non-intervention of the state in welfare (Ferrera 1984: 28). The “plebe” should be helped through teaching it the “virtue of work and saving and the development of individual responsibility” (Depretis cited in Fargion 1986: 12), instead of through the provision of a safety net.

The paradox was that this seemed for Catholicism, the strongest archenemy of the liberalism, fully acceptable. The church welcomed laissez-faire policies because it meant that the liberal state would not intrude any further into the Church’s realm of welfare provision. The liberal laissez-faire principle and the Catholic subsidiarity principle made an ideational match. This perverted fit between the two doctrines that were on all other issues heavily opposed to one another led to a truce on welfare politics from the 1860s onwards. The Italian state did indeed challenge the Church on numerous fronts but, up to the 1890s, never on welfare. Operé pie, the Church’s massive welfare apparatus in Italy, was left untouched until 1890. Unlike in Germany, where Bismarck used social policy as a political means of eliminating his rivals, the liberal state in Italy did not engage in any equivalent action before the 1890s.

As there was no challenge to the organization of social security on the basis of operé pie, the episcopate saw no reason to invest in developing new ideas on modern social security that could be compatible with the Catholic creed. Catholic ideas on welfare and social security in 1880s Italy were therefore on a level comparable to that of German Catholic thinking on welfare in the 1820s. As early as 1969, the historian Dennis Mack Smith was already very much on point when putting forward that

[p]erhaps the very strength of clericalism in Italy had deprived her of the stimulus which in France was to create a flourishing school of lay Catholic philosophers. (Mac-Smith 1969:251)

Catholic social teaching in Italy, up until the 1880s, still embraced an organic interpretation of neo-Thomsonian ideas. Every individual had been attributed a place in society by God. If people started to change this through the introduction of potentially progressive social programs, then the organic body of society would be disabled. Early Italian Catholic social welfare remained, therefore, confined to poor relief. The archbishop of Milan Cardinal Ferrari, a prominent exponent of Italian Catholic social teaching, instructed the lower clergy to

make the poor understand that everything is ordained by God, that it is God who makes some rich and some poor (Cited in Pollard 2008: 51)

The *operé pie* system worked perfectly for this purpose. Money was transferred from the rich to the poor through alms. This had the advantage that the rich would be granted ascension into heaven through the doing of good deeds while, on the other side, the poor were guaranteed not to starve. The bad news was that the poor would always remain poor. Rising from the lower social classes to higher rungs was not part of the logic of this system. This connection between the divine and the temporal world of welfare granted the church a monopoly as the middle man that organized the welfare transfers between the different groups in society. As no credible challenger on welfare rose to rival this system in Italy, as Bismarck or socialism in the German case, the Vatican saw little need to develop alternatives.

From a vicious to a virtuous cycle in Italy

The first real attempt to intrude into the Catholic's sphere of influence came by way of Crispi's provisions regarding *operé pie* in 1890. With the Law No. 6892 of the 17th of July 1890 he established full state supervision over *operé pie*. After the political and social economic agony that a long period of *laissez-faire* politics had brought to Italy, Crispi was determined to grant the new state a stronger and more proactive role. The Crispi law was a milestone in social security development in Italy because it represented a first real break of the Church's virtual monopoly on poor relief. Nevertheless, it did not mark the advent of modern social security in the country as it essentially left the old system of charitable institutions intact.

However, the content of the proposal that Crispi presented to parliament on the 18th February 1890 was characterized by "a logic of cold rationalization of the existing" (Fargion 1986: 16). Crispi had been inspired by Bismarck's anti-Catholic culture war legislation. Therefore, Crispi's

legislation was anticlerical rather than social-reformist. The idea was to crowd out the Church from poor relief, not to modernize it.

The Vatican answered by unleashing its press, mobilizing its followers and even lifted non expedite to a limited extent in order to block the proposal. Despite this strong clerical resistance the bill passed parliament.

The important outcome of Crispi's legislation was the break of the truce between the Vatican and the liberal elites. The fallback position of subsidiarity for Catholicism and of laissez-faire for liberalism was no longer comfortable. However, the question remains why Crispi broke with the Church at exactly that point in time. It is true that Crispi was a "mangia prete", an anti-Catholic priest eater. More important was however, that the equilibrium between state and Church in Italy had been upset in the 1880s by the arrival of the socialist worldview that threatened to form a new subculture. As the number of strikes increased drastically in the 1880s (263 strikes between 1880 and 1886), the government first tried to quash the workers movement by jailing most of the socialist party leadership. Turatti, the socialist leader, was sentenced to 12 years after he allegedly participated in a strike in Milan.

When this did not help much, the liberals had to think of alternatives to repression. Similarly to Bismarck, the governing camp saw social security as a political means "to press for an authoritarian restoration in an anti-parliamentarian direction" (Ferrera 1984: 30). However, like in Germany, this triggered a virtuous cycle of ideational competition. Ferrera remarks that, from the end of the 1880s onwards, thinking about social security became ever more "en vogue" in Italy. Even if Catholicism, conservatism, liberalism and the left had not tabled any serious social security ideas between 1860 and 1890s, from this point onwards they showed a sudden remarkable interest in the social question (Ferrera 1986: 388). The social question, which was largely a southern question in Italy, became widely debated in public all over the country. In Turin an intellectual movement similar to the socialists of the chair (*Kathedersozialisten*) started to emerge and discussed liberal or state induced conservative welfare solutions (Ferrera 1986: 388). The left started to think in revisionist terms about state-provided social security while the Catholic Church slowly began refining its ideas under the influence of the social encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Following this ideational competition the first compulsory social insurance law was introduced under Prime Minister Giolitti in 1898 (Cherubini 1977: 112; Quine 2002: 68-70).

Conclusion

The paper asked how it was possible that Catholicism produced so different social doctrines and welfare state outcomes in Italy and Germany. The answer has been found in the different dynamics of ideational competition. While Germany saw the emergence of a virtuous cycle of ideational competition, through which the Catholic Church was stimulated to develop a modern catholic welfare concept, Italian Catholicism was caught in a vicious ideational cycle and did not develop modern social security ideas during the early years of national consolidation after unification. This means that the pace of industrialization or the growth of the labor movement does not directly determine the shape and form of the welfare state, but that such modernizing factors are mediated through the ideational competition that they stimulate on social security ideas.

This argument also holds for other periods of welfare state politics in Italy and Germany. Picot (2012; 2014) has shown that the dynamic form of political party competition had a strong impact on welfare state formation in Italy and Germany in the post war period. Morgan has identified different modes of electoral competition as culpable for the diverging family policy outcomes during the 2000s (Morgan 2014).

Beyond the scope of welfare and religious politics the paper also touched upon the role of ideas in politics. It seems that ideational pluralism is more conducive to situations of ideational competition and hence can more easily lead to adaptive and progressive change in politics. In contrast, ideational monocultures are prone to a higher degree of stasis.

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