

Can Western Church Influence Explain Western Individualism? Comment on “The Church, Intensive Kinship, and Global Psychological Variation” by Jonathan F. Schulz et al.

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In a recent contribution “The Church, Intensive Kinship, and Global Psychological Variation”, Schulz, Bahrami-Rad, Beauchamp & Henrich (2019) propose a central role for the medieval Church in the development of European individualism, primarily by its antagonism toward endogamy and the discouragement of the intensive kinship structures characteristic of other historical civilizations. This contrasts with my recently published book *Individualism and the Western Liberal Tradition: Evolutionary Origins, History, and Prospects for the Future* (MacDonald, 2019), which proposes that Western individualism, as expressed in the characteristic European marriage system and in a plethora of other cultural expressions, is ultimately the outcome of selection in the ancestral environments of northern Europe and northern Eurasia more widely. This commentary highlights the historical evidence bearing on these alternative explanations for European exceptionalism. The main conclusion is that European individualism, as expressed in kinship structure and social organization, was firmly established before the advent of Christianity.

Key Words: Individualism, Europe, Hajnal line, Family structure, Ancestry

Because of its uniqueness, Western individualism presents a daunting question for scholars and in particular for a theory based on evolutionary psychology. There are essentially two ways for an evolutionary perspective to

attempt to understand uniqueness. One is to propose a unique evolutionary environment resulting in genetically based uniqueness; the other is to propose universal psychological mechanisms interacting with particular cultural contexts. "The Church, Intensive Kinship, and Global Psychological Variation" (Schulz, Bahrami-Rad, Beauchamp, & Henrich, 2019) is an example of the latter. It presents a theory of Western individualism in which the cultural context created by the medieval Catholic Church, particularly the prohibitions on relatedness in marriage, played a central role in the development of the individualistic psychology of the West. More precisely, the paper attempts to explain "a substantial portion" of the variation in psychological traits widely recognized to be characteristic of individualism ("individualistic, independent, analytically minded, and impersonally prosocial [e.g., trusting of strangers] while revealing less conformity, obedience, in-group loyalty, and nepotism" [Schulz et al., 2019:1,8]) by exposure to the medieval Western Church. Within this cultural framework, there is no attempt to present the motivations of the Church for creating this cultural context in terms of particular psychological mechanisms.

These issues intersect with much of the discussion in my recently published *Individualism and the Western Liberal Tradition: Evolutionary Origins, History, and Prospects for the Future* (MacDonald, 2019). However, my theory is based on the proposal that Western uniqueness derives ultimately from unique ancestral environments in northwestern Europe, with emphasis on a north-south genetic cline in the relative genetic contributions of northern hunter gatherers, Indo-Europeans, and early farmers from the Middle East, resulting in persistent ethnically based differences in individualism. While Schulz et al. control for a wide range of variables, they do not control for regional genetic differences within Western Europe that have been uncovered by recent population genetic research (reviewed in my Chapter 1), nor do they review research by family historians indicating important regional variation within Western Europe that does not map onto exposure to the Western Church (reviewed in my Chapter 4).

However, I do discuss the influence of the Western Church, concluding that the Church's

...influence was directed at altering Western culture away from extended kinship networks and other collectivist institutions, motivated ultimately by the desire to extend its own power [analyzed as an evolved human universal]. However, although the Church promoted individualism and doubtless influenced Western culture in that direction, this influence built on individualistic tendencies that long predated Christianity and were due ultimately to ethnic tendencies toward individualism unique to European peoples. (MacDonald, 2019:170)

My approach thus combines pre-historic natural selection for individualist psychology with particular cultural contexts, one of which is the influence of the Catholic Church, the latter interpreted as building on pre-existing tendencies. My Chapter 5 on the medieval Church argues, on the basis of data similar to that cited by Schulz et al., that the Church facilitated individualism — and may well have sped up the establishment of individualism, but did not cause it. Given that Schulz et al. claim to have achieved only a partial explanation, there is thus no fundamental disagreement. However, based on my treatment, here I attempt to show why exposure to the medieval Church is an inadequate explanation of psychological individualism in the West.

1. Primordial Tendencies toward Western Individualism

There is much that our approaches have in common. In particular, they note that kinship relationships are central in understanding human societies and that the general trend has been a shift away from extensive kinship relationships typical of hunter-gatherers throughout the world, with relatively weak ties to many people of varying genetic distance (discussed in my Chapter 3), to intensive kinship relations where kinship is deeply embedded within closely related groups, e.g., clans and kindreds with a distinct hierarchy based on degree of genetic relatedness as is commonly found in agricultural societies.

However, I also provide evidence that Western individualism was influenced by genetic differences peculiar to the peoples of Western Europe. I show on the basis of historical and contemporary population genetic data that there is a genetic cline from north to south in Western Europe in which hunter-gatherer genes (and Indo-European-derived genes; see below) are more prevalent in the north of Europe. Importantly, the northern European hunter-gatherers retained their relatively extensive kinship patterns while nevertheless creating complex societies with large populations able to hold off agriculture for 2000–3000 years against the farming culture originating from the relatively collectivist early farmers who arrived in southern Europe from the Middle East ~8,500 years before present (Price, 1991:229). Areas in Western Europe with greater representation of early farmer genes (e.g. 90 percent in Sardinia, and higher in the south of France than in the north) exhibit relatively collectivist family structures, continuing into the present.

The basic argument is that traditional agricultural societies based on intensive kinship were centered around defensible resources, such as large river valleys like the Yangtze, Nile, and Euphrates, capable of being controlled on a year-round basis by a kinship group. This was not possible in the north of Europe. Groups congregated for part of the year near a highly productive resource — the

seashore and its supply of shellfish and other marine life — but were forced to disperse into small family-based groups for part of the year (Bang-Anderson, 1996; Zvelebil & Dolukhanov, 1991). And because of the relatively harsh northern environment, there was selection for a suite of psychological traits conducive to paternal provision of offspring, bilateral kinship relations, and monogamy (pair-bonding), whereas polygyny (acknowledged by Schulz et al. as a marker of clan-based cultures) by wealthy, powerful males able to set up households consisting of multiple, closely related families, would be ecologically impossible. Whereas an individual's position in societies based on intensive kinship depends on status in a strongly hierarchical kinship group, hunter-gatherer cultures are much more egalitarian, with strong controls against despotic leadership.

Moreover, as Burton, Moore et al. (1996) note, the North Eurasia and Circumpolar cultural area, including northern Europe but also a diverse group of north Eurasian cultures (e.g., Japan, Korea, the Inuit, Aleuts, Lapps), tends toward bilateral kinship relations, which result in an extensive set of kinship relations, as well as monogamy, exogamy, and lack of cousin marriage, all of which figure prominently in the discussion below. Schulz et al. correctly regard bilateral kinship relations as an aspect of extensive kinship relations, but I interpret these data as supporting a primordial, genetically influenced, climate-based theory of kinship intensity rather than as due to Church influence given that bilateral kinship relations also occur in northern non-Western societies.

Schulz et al. thus fail to note pre-existing tendencies toward extensive kinship among northern hunter-gatherers continuing into the present. They also fail to note features of Indo-European culture as it developed in Europe that militated against a strong role for intensive kinship (discussed in my Chapter 2). The Indo-European-based cultures that dominated Europe until the Protestant Reformation and the decline of the aristocracy were an amalgam of “Armenian-like” Near Eastern peoples (48–58 percent) with three northern hunter-gatherer groups: Caucasus hunter-gatherers, Ancient North Eurasians (including Siberia), and Eastern hunter-gatherers (Allentoft et al., 2015; Mathieson et al., 2015). Indo-European-derived cultures were never based on the clan-type, intensively kinship-oriented cultures common, say, in the Middle East:

In *jahili* and early Islamic poetry we find men, women, and children who defined themselves not as individuals but as kin. In short, whether one was an oasis-dweller or a resident of the highlands of Yemen, a pastoral nomad, or someone whose way of life fell somewhere between settled and nomadic, it was kinship — one's family, one's clan, one's tribe — that defined who one was. The issue of kinship remained important even in the cosmopolitan urban worlds of medieval Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo,

and elsewhere. It continues in many Islamic societies today. (Lindsay, 2005:45-46)

Rather, Indo-European culture had important elements of a free market, with a strong role for reciprocity within the group and institutions above the level of kinship-based groupings. Upward mobility was dependent on military talent, not on kinship relations, especially being able to recruit followers able to effectively conquer and hold territory. Individualistic competition for lasting fame and glory was a defining feature. As Ricardo Duchesne (2011) notes, Indo-European heroes in ancient Greece and elsewhere in the West were individuals first and foremost — men who distinguished themselves from others by their feats in pursuit of individual renown, as shown by these lines from *Beowulf*:

As we must all expect to leave / our life on this earth, we must earn some renown, / If we can before death; daring is the thing / for a fighting man to be remembered by. /... A man must act so / when he means in a fight to frame himself / a long lasting glory; it is not life he thinks of. (in Duchesne, 2011:438)

Thus, within the *Männerbünde*, “the warrior brotherhood bound by oath to one another and to their ancestors during a ritually mandated raid,” (Anthony, 2007/2010:364) status was determined by military talent not kinship connections. In such a culture, intensive kinship had at best a secondary role — these cultures never developed into the clan-based cultures typical of so much of the rest of the world. Although kinship retained some importance, the *Männerbünde* existed at a higher level than kinship-based groups and functioned partly to settle disputes among them.

The aristocratic individualism of the PI-Es [proto-Indo-Europeans] was based on reciprocity, not despotism or kinship ties. For example, at the heart of PI-E culture was the practice of gift-giving as a reward for military accomplishment. Successful leaders were expected to reward their followers handsomely (Anthony, 2007/2010, 238). Oath-bound contracts of reciprocal relationships were characteristic of PI-Es and this practice continued with the various I-E groups that invaded Europe. These contracts formed the basis of patron-client relationships based on reputation—leaders could expect loyal service from their followers, and followers could expect equitable rewards for their service to the leader. This is critical because these relationships are based on talent and accomplishment, not ethnicity (i.e., rewarding people on the basis of closeness of kinship) or despotic subservience (where followers are essentially unfree). (MacDonald, 2019:35)

Oath-bound contracts, reciprocity, and reputation — all markers of individualism — were thus critical. Moreover, conquered peoples were not eradicated and, after varying periods of time, upward mobility was typically possible for conquered peoples if they had military talent. The walls that separated conquerors from the conquered in terms of marriage, citizenship, and social status were eventually breached — a marker of individualism because, again, individual talent was critical, not kinship connections. Within Europe at least, conquering Indo-Europeans did not erect barriers of permanent separation from those they had conquered; they did not create a social structure based on intensive kinship that endeavored to separate itself permanently from those they conquered, as depicted, for example, in the Old Testament (MacDonald, 1994) and continuing, according to a United Nations report, in present-day Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians (Reuters, 2017). For example, ancient Rome, a prototypical variant of Indo-European militarized culture, absorbed the peoples they conquered and recruited them for military service, thus allowing Rome to expand enormously. However, these conquered peoples typically achieved citizenship eventually and many even achieved high status within Roman society, assuming high political and military office.

From the earliest period of the Republic, there are examples of the social fluidity of the Roman aristocracy. Appius Claudius came to Rome from Sabine territory in 509 BC and became a member of the patriciate. L. Fulvius Curvus, from Tusculum became consul 60 years after Rome conquered Tusculum in 381 BC. ...

Openness to foreigners can also be seen in that Latium, comprising the nearby towns with similar language and culture, had rights of *commercium* (could own property in other towns), *connubium* (marriage), and *migrandi* (migration). This set a precedent for later times, when other, non-Latin peoples would be incorporated into Roman society with partial citizenship (*civitas sine suffragio*). Such peoples might later be upgraded to full citizenship: e.g., the Sabines were upgraded from *civitas sine suffragio* to full citizenship in 268 BC. This openness to other peoples was “a key element in Rome’s later imperial success” (Forsythe, 2005, 185). [MacDonald, 2019:79, 80]

A defining feature therefore of Indo-European-derived cultures in Europe was the permeability of groups, as individuals were free to defect to other groups with greater possibility of success. Primordially, individualist competition was in military ventures, but later occurred in other forms of competition in which groups were permeable and defection possible, including intellectual competition characterized by group permeability — a prerequisite for science.

Ricardo Duchesne (2011) highlights disputation as a critical component in Western intellectual discourse, analyzed in terms of the Indo-European cultural legacy of personal striving for fame. Beginning in ancient Greece, intellectual debate was intensely competitive, and individuals were free to defect from a particular scholar if they found another more appealing. Intellectuals sought followers not by depending on pre-existing kinship or ethnic connections, but rather by their ability to attract followers in a free market of ideas in which people were free to defect to other points of view. Just as members of a *Männerbund* were free to defect to other groups with objectively better prospects for military success, the free market of ideas would naturally default to arguments and ideas that can appeal to others who are free to defect from the group and where groups are highly permeable. In a social context consisting of others who are similarly free to defect, logical arguments and predictive theories about the natural world would come to the fore. (MacDonald, 2019:482-483)

Analytic thinking (a marker of individualism) became prized in this free market of ideas, as seen, for example, in Aristotle's logic and Euclid's geometry. Similarly, capitalism presupposes individualist economic competition and the ability of individuals to defect from purchasing particular products or investing in business ventures if they find a better opportunity.

2. Sources and Targets of Church Power

Schulz et al. see exposure to the Western Church as a critical variable in the development of Western individualism and emphasize the Church's rules on incestuous marriage. My discussion of Church influence is much broader. I discuss other Church policies that facilitated individualism, most importantly creating an image of reproductive altruism by enforcing clerical celibacy and ending corruption as a result of the Papal Revolution beginning in the tenth century and completed by the High Middle Ages. This image was a necessary development for producing the intense religious fervor and popular loyalty of the period, thus enabling the Church to have significant power over secular elites fearful of being excommunicated and thus losing legitimacy in the eyes of their people.

Along with the acceptance of celibacy and asceticism, there was a concern to extend the power of the church — “a powerful movement to gain command of all life in society and organize it according to monastic views” (Miccoli, 1990:57). It is this drive to increase its own power at the expense of other potential sources of power — kings and the aristocracy,

extended kinship groups—that best explains the behavior of the medieval Church. This desire for power is a human universal entirely congruent with evolutionary thinking, except that in this case, it was not accompanied by the usual accouterments of power [typically seen in clan-based cultures]: reproductive success and control over women. (MacDonald, 2019:186)

Church policies directed against the power of secular elites focused on marriage as an essential battleground, including, besides rules on incestuous marriage, developing ideologies and enforcing social controls supporting monogamy, preventing divorce, and preventing bastards from inheriting. Particularly important was enforcing consent as the basis of marriage (not considered by Schulz et al., 2019). Consent in marriage promotes individualist marriage choice based on the characteristics of the spouse rather than family strategizing in which one's spouse is determined by parents, with the result that “the family, the tribe, the clan, were subordinated to the individual. If one wanted to marry enough, one could choose one's own mate and the Church would vindicate one's choice (Noonan, 1973:430).

The Church successfully developed ideologies in which violations of ecclesiastical policies on sex and marriage were regarded as sinful and induced guilt in sinners. These ideologies tapped into domain-general mechanisms of prefrontal control over behavior (MacDonald, 2008). For example, explicit construals of costs and benefits of religiously relevant actions mediated by human language and the ability of humans to create explicit representations of events may influence individuals to avoid religiously proscribed food or refrain from fornication, adultery, or incest in the belief that such actions would lead to rewards in the afterlife.

Similarly, the Church developed ideologies of moral egalitarianism and moral universalism that undermined the ideology of natural hierarchy typical of the ancient world, and often encouraged the emerging cities as independent power centers opposed to the interests of feudal lords. Regarding the ideology of moral egalitarianism:

Canon law ... had a strongly egalitarian tenor—status, which had been central to ancient law—was irrelevant. Ecclesiastical ideology thus facilitated the Western liberal tradition. Aristocrats and commoners had the same moral standing. Moreover, canon law was recruited to lessen the power of kinship groups by also rejecting the privileged status of testimony from family and friends (which had led to more powerful families getting favorable judgments). (MacDonald, 2019:188; emphasis in original)

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However, it is not the case that the Church invented monogamy as the norm for Western marriage:

Whereas all of the other economically advanced cultures of the world have been typified by polygyny by successful males, Western societies beginning with the ancient Greeks and Romans and extending up to the present have had a powerful tendency toward monogamy (MacDonald, 1990). Thus the Catholic Church cannot be seen as originating monogamy, but, as indicated in the following, it did have a central role in maintaining monogamy at least through the Middle Ages.

The Catholic Church was the heir to Roman civilization where monogamy was ingrained in law and custom, and during the Middle Ages it took it upon itself to impose monogamy on the emerging European aristocracy (MacDonald, 1995a,b). Relatively low-level polygyny (in comparison to other societies based on intensive agriculture such as China, India, the Middle East, and Meso-America) did exist in Europe, and during the Middle Ages it became the object of conflict between the Church and the aristocracy. The Church was “the most influential and important governmental institution [of Europe] during the medieval period,” and a major aspect of this power over the secular aristocracy involved the regulation of sex and reproduction (Ullman, 1970:1). (MacDonald, 2019:176-177)

Early Roman marriage practices departed from Indo-European patterns by eschewing bridewealth (payment from the groom), a practice common in tribal societies around the world and closely linked to male sexual competition (wealthy males are able to purchase more females). Roman monogamy was maintained by controls on sexual behavior (bigamy and polygyny were illegal), laws relating to legitimacy (bastards suffered social opprobrium; marriage with slaves was typically prohibited); inheritance laws penalized children who were not the products of monogamous marriage (bastards could not inherit; the children of slaves retained the status of the mother) (MacDonald, 1990). In an intensively polygynous society such as classical China, none of these occurred, so that, for example, the offspring of a concubine were entirely legitimate and could inherit property, depending on the wishes of the father.

At least during the first centuries of the Republic, marriage of patricians was by *confarreatio*—monogamous marriage in which divorce was rare and difficult. Among the patricians, the most prestigious rank of Roman society, monogamy without divorce was generally practiced and was considered the ideal form of marriage. At the beginning of the Republic and until 254 B.C., the highest religious office, pontifex maximus, could only be held by patricians and was very

prestigious and much sought after. These high priests were required to be married by *confarreatio* and the marriage could only be dissolved by death; although divorce in a *confarreatio* marriage became possible in the later Republic, it remained rare and difficult to achieve. Originally, the high priest of Jupiter (*flamen dialis*) was required to marry a virgin and to have parents who had been married by *confarreatio* (relaxed when plebeians were allowed to hold the office); their marriages remained indissoluble throughout the Republic. Vestal Virgins, who were highly venerated as part of the state religion, were daughters of patricians who had been married by *confarreatio*; they were paragons of chastity, like monks and nuns in medieval Western Christianity, who retained their virginity through their reproductive years. Finally, Stoicism, which became a powerful movement among artists, intellectuals and politicians during the Empire, extolled the ideal of monogamous family based on conjugal affection and sexual restraint for both sexes.

Similarly, in ancient Athens, Solon's laws (early sixth century B.C.), like the policies of the medieval Church, were specifically targeted at the aristocracy's ability to accumulate concubines and children who could inherit substantial amounts of property. "By eliminating a man's bastard children from the family, Solon's laws made it less socially useful for a man to father bastards or to keep a concubine either in addition to or in place of a wife" (Lape, 2002-2003, 119). Bastards literally had no biological relatives recognized by law.

3. How Widespread Was Compliance with the Church's Rules on Incestuous Marriage?

Given the importance of the rules on "incest" (i.e., consanguineous marriage) for Schulz et al.'s account, it is important for them to show that the Church's policy had real effects — that incestuous marriage declined from previous levels after the rise of the Church. Schulz et al. measure the rate of cousin marriage only in the twentieth century, not during the Middle Ages or previous periods (Schulz, 2019b:6-7). As a result, they do not provide data on the effectiveness of the Church policy, a critical lacuna in their account because if in fact cousin marriage was never common in the West, there is little reason to believe that the elaborate rules surrounding incestuous marriage had a decisive role. And, if so, explanations that take into account primordial ethnic tendencies become more plausible. Here I cite some relevant scholarship indicating that exogamy was the norm in the West dating at least from Roman times and likely long before.

As noted above, the North Eurasia and Circumpolar culture area is characterized not only by bilateral kinship relations but also monogamy, exogamy, and lack of cousin marriage (Burton et al., 1996), indicating tendencies

toward these traits independent of Church influence; Jones (2008) emphasizes that there is a shared cultural and genetic ancestry in this culture region, with Northeast Asians most similar to Europeans and West Asians, and he suggests that this fits with linguistic evidence: North Eurasian and Circumpolar language families and languages — including the Indo-European languages of Europe, Uralic-Yukaghir, Altaic, Korean, Japanese, Chukchi-Kamchatkan, and Eskimo-Aleut — have been classified in the same language macrofamily.

Moreover, given that the Indo-European conquering groups were based on predatory male bands (the *Männerbünde*), marriage was thus likely to be exogamous. This is supported by the relatively high presence of Indo-European (Yamnaya-derived) Y-chromosomes in ancient DNA from the Corded Ware culture of much of northern Europe ~5000 years ago (Goldberg et al., 2017). Selection favoring mutations for eye and hair color unique to Europe was likely due to sexual selection for marriage by individual choice of mate characteristics rather than marriage with relatives arranged by family strategizing (Frost, 2006; Salter, 1996), and I make a similar argument for the greater role of love as a basis of marriage in the West compared to societies based on intensive kinship relations (MacDonald, 2019, Chapter 3).

Regarding the Western Roman Empire, quoting Brent D. Shaw and Richard P. Saller (1984):

There is strong evidence for continuity of the general practice of exogamy in the western Roman empire from the pre-Christian period (first three centuries after Christ) to the era of the establishment of Christianity as the state religion; endogamous marriage was rare, if it occurred at all. Despite legal rules permitting cousin marriage in the pagan era, parallel and cross-cousin marriages were rare among aristocrats, as were parallel-cousin marriages among modest inhabitants of the western empire. Consequently, the Christian ban on marriages within the sixth degree of kinship had little impact. The dispersed pattern of property holding offered pagan aristocrats no incentive to marry within the family to protect consolidated estates; their financial interests were met by marriage within the same class. ... The Church's ban on endogamy should not be interpreted as part of an effort to disrupt transmission of property within the family: no such effort was necessary because for centuries pagan aristocrats had been using the will to disperse their wealth widely. The Church need only have replaced the emperor as the principal institutional beneficiary of these wills in order to enrich itself (Shaw & Saller, 1984:432)

...

In sum, when the Church moved to formalise an extended incest prohibition in the fourth century, it was not acting to disrupt a widespread practice of close-kin endogamy in the western Roman empire. In fact, Augustine, in his discussion in the *City of God* concerning the recent extension of the incest rule, clearly indicates the opposite. He states categorically that marriage between cousins always had been *raro per mores* ('rare in customary practice'), well before the imposition of the new prohibitions (Shaw & Saller, 1984:438-439).

Grubbs (2002, 165) notes that Augustine lived in the Latin West "where marriage between close kin had always been frowned on in law and custom".

Moreover, the view that the nuclear family was the main household structure in Roman Western Europe remains dominant in more recent scholarship (Huebner, 2011).

It's worth considering that these incest rules were an effort by the Church to flex its moral authority by not only adopting the traditional taboo against consanguineous marriage but expanding it to an extreme degree.¹ The power of the Church rested on its moral authority—hence the historical importance of the Papal Revolution and its effectiveness in regulating sex and marriage. Prescriptions for behavior presented as moral imperatives are common among ruling elites and emerging ruling elites. Further, I note:

Whatever the rationale given to these prohibitions by the Church, there is evidence that the aristocracy obeyed the ecclesiastical rules. There were very few marriages closer than fourth or fifth cousins among the French nobility of the tenth and eleventh centuries (Bouchard, 1981). These practices weakened the extended kinship group, since the expanded range of incestuous marriages prevented the solidarity of extended kinship groups by excluding "the reinforcing of blood with marriage" (Goody, 1983, 145).² The result was that biological relatedness was spread diffusely throughout the nobility rather than concentrated at the top. The direct descendants of the family rather than the wider kinship group also benefited: "Men in high secular positions ... strove to consolidate their fortunes and their families in order to secure as much as possible for their direct descendants to the detriment of wider kin" (Leyser, 1979, 50). (MacDonald, 2019:210-211)

¹ Gerhard Meisenberg, personal communication, September 16, 2020.

² One effect of this policy, emphasized by Goody, was that families were often left without direct heirs and left their property to the Church.

The important point in the above passage is that the aristocracy obeyed the rules on incest in the tenth and eleventh centuries—not surprising given that the Church directed its campaign to achieve power mainly at elite power centers, especially the aristocracy, not the commoners. After all, males with little wealth or power could hardly aspire to cementing a powerful kinship group via marriage ties any more than they could aspire to polygyny or having concubines. I know of no evidence that those of more modest means avoided marriage within the prohibited degrees of relatedness. All of the cases cited by C.B. Bouchard in which the Church railed against incestuous marriage were from the nobility (Bouchard, 1981). For example, the Capetian kings of France were forced to accept Russian women and eventually to lower their standards for appropriate rank to daughters of counts and other lesser nobles.

Indeed, in the relatively small, isolated communities of traditional Western Europe—where highly circumscribed regional dialects were common and people had little mobility—people perforce married within the local community and could thus hardly avoid marrying someone without a common great-great-great-great-great grandfather.

Elizabeth Archibald's *Incest in the Medieval Imagination* further contextualizes these findings. In a comment that applies to the general population rather than only the nobility, she notes that “in practical terms, the seventh degree, the extent of memory, and all known kin probably came to mean much the same thing for many people in the Middle Ages” (Archibald, 2001:37). Given that most people would necessarily choose partners locally, it would have been impossible to honor the Church's rules, since “... the list of possible partners with whom sex was prohibited must have covered every possible partner in many small communities ...” (Archibald, 2001:38). Further the discussion of actual cases shows little concern with the seven degrees of relatedness, but much concern with near blood relatives (e.g., uncle, niece) or affinal relatives. In general:

However much the Church rationalized its position and strove to enforce it, it is evident from ecclesiastical correspondence, court records, and well-known scandals of the time that the rules were ignored or honoured in the breach by many Christians during the Middle Ages, or were manipulated for personal advantage to get around the principle of the indissolubility of marriage. ... In spite of the determination with which the Church insisted on its complex rules of who could marry whom, the ecclesiastical authorities were remarkably lenient in interpreting many parts of the incest legislation, especially in regard to more distant relations and affines. It is also clear that many people in the Middle Ages were not particularly bothered by breaches of the incest rule, such as the marriage of second

cousins [who on average share only around three percent of their genomes by descent] (Archibald, 2001:410).

It's noteworthy that after the tenth and eleventh centuries the French aristocracy was widely known to flout the rules on incest, being well aware they were marrying incestuously in the eyes of the Church, but invoking these rules in the event of desiring a divorce. Thus the rule-following in the tenth and eleventh centuries by secular elites did not fundamentally alter their psychology in the direction of individualism — a critical point given that Schulz et al. propose that the Church's policy shaped individualist psychology. And given that the Church's rules had little or no effect on the great majority of people, it is difficult to suppose that the Church's rules fundamentally changed the psychology of Western Europeans generally. Moreover, this “convenient escape hatch” enabling divorce was an important factor in the Lateran Council's reducing the permitted degrees of relatedness to four in 1215 (Bouchard, 1981:269).

4. The Geography of Church Influence

Regarding the central claim that the length of time under the influence of the Western Church was critical to the rise of individualism, I note the following in Chapter 5:

There are other grounds for emphasizing the underlying ethnic component of Western individualism and egalitarianism. For instance, there were important differences between Western and Eastern Christendom, and within Western Christendom itself. Regarding the latter, at least from the early Middle Ages, the Western family pattern was confined to northwest Europe, particularly the area encompassed by the Frankish Empire, Britain, and Scandinavia, but not, as emphasized in Chapter 4, the region to the south of the Loire in what is now France (Hartman, 2004), and excluding much of Europe outside the Hajnal line despite being part of the Western Christendom (e.g., southern Italy, Ireland, the southern Iberian peninsula, Croatia and parts of eastern Europe) (see also Mitterauer, 2010, 62). [Schulz et al. (2019b, 9) are correct to note that southern Italy was subjected to Church influence relatively late—in the eleventh century, which they interpret as explaining the relative lack of individualism in the region. However, this is much earlier, e.g., than Sweden which, along with other Scandinavian countries, has the most individualistic family structure in Europe (see MacDonald, 2019, Chapter 4)]. Individualist family structure, which many scholars point to as critical for understanding the

rise of the West, thus fails to include significant parts of Western Christendom.

One might argue that differences in family structure between Eastern and Western Europe are explainable by the later introduction of Christianity in Eastern Europe. Poland, for example, was Christianized relatively late (beginning in the tenth century) compared to the Frankish Empire (beginning with the conversion of Clovis I in 496). However, Scandinavian societies, which have the most individualist family structure in Europe (see Chapter 4), also converted quite late. For example, Denmark, the first Christian Scandinavian country, became Christianized only after the conversion of Harold Bluetooth in the mid-960s (Winroth, 2012). Sweden followed much later, first establishing an archdiocese in 1164 and even then, eradication of pagan practices and beliefs took considerably longer. Ethnic differences are a far more parsimonious explanation. (MacDonald, 2019:222)

Winroth (2012) notes that because of its prestige as the religion of the most powerful European kingdoms, Christianity was useful for emerging military chiefdoms in cementing followers in Scandinavia, but Christian beliefs were not particularly important; simply being baptized was sufficient, and pagan practices continued in secret even after they were outlawed. Despite the rule that only popes could divide a diocese and appoint bishops, kings did both. This continued until, inspired by the papal reform movement, Swedish bishops insisted on enforcing canon law. This resulted in three archbishops being exiled in the second half of the twelfth century. Thus it is unlikely that the canon law on incest was enforced much before the thirteenth century. Indeed, Hagland (2004, 215, 217) notes that the confusion in the modes of calculation in the various laws suggests lack of a serious effort by the Church to enforce the canonical laws; moreover, the fact that the degrees of forbidden marriage were not revised until over fifty years after they were changed by the Fourth Lateran Council is “perhaps the strongest indication that the prohibition to the seventh degree was never really important in Norway and was never pushed very hard by the Church of Rome.”

The case of Scandinavia is particularly interesting. Despite coming to Christianity relatively late, Scandinavia is regarded as having the most individualist family structure in Western Europe (Heady, 2017; Iacovou & Skew, 2010). Indeed, Sweden is “the least family-dependent and the most individualized society on the face of the earth” (Trägårdh, 2014:22). Families are “voluntary associations” and relatively prone to “independence (of children), individualism, and (gender) equality” (Trägårdh, 2014:22). The “Swedish theory of love” is that partners should not be dependent on each other — that true love means not

entering a relationship as dependent in any way (e.g., financially) on the other person (Trägårdh, 2014:27).

Further, Scandinavia was never exposed to the Frankish manorial system which on some accounts was responsible for Western individualism (Mitterauer, 2010), and in Schulz et al.'s (2019) account, there is a special role for the Frankish Empire in Christianizing Western Europe. However, Sweden, perhaps the most individualistic country on Earth, was never manorialized and the peasants had much more freedom and status than in Frankish areas. The peasant in medieval Sweden “retained his social and political freedom to a greater degree, played a greater part in the politics of the country, and was altogether a more considerable person, than in any other western European country” (Roberts, 1967:4-5).

The respect for law and a positive view of the state are historically linked to the relative freedom of the Swedish peasantry. The weakness, not to say absence of feudal institutions, corresponds with a history of self-reliance, self-rule, land ownership, representation as an estate in parliament, and the consequent willingness and ability to participate in the political affairs of the country. There is, of course, a strong mythological aspect to this oft-claimed lack of feudal traditions in Sweden. ... [Nevertheless,] the consequence of the relative inclusion and empowerment was that their status as *subjects* was balanced by their position as *citizens*. As an estate in parliament, they had a part in passing laws which in this way gained popular legitimacy. Furthermore, since the peasants and the King (at times joined by the Clergy) often were joined in a common struggle against their common adversary, the Nobility, many peasants came to view the State, in the figure of the King as in some sense being “on their side.” ... But all things told, the peasant struggle to retain their legal, political and property rights was remarkably successful, and by the time that democratic and liberal ideas made their way to Sweden from the Continent in the nineteenth century, they were effectively fused with these politically strong yeoman traditions (Trägårdh, 2014:32-33).

The contrast between northern and southern France also bears emphasis because it cannot be accommodated within a causal role for the Church in Western individualism.

There are major differences within France corresponding to the division between the Germanic peoples who predominated northeast of “the eternal line” which connects Saint Malo and Geneva and the rest of

France (Ladurie, 1986:341). The northeast developed large-scale agriculture capable of feeding the growing towns and cities prior to the agricultural revolution of the eighteenth century. It was supported by a large array of skilled craftsmen in the towns, and a large class of mid-level ploughmen who “owned horses, copper bowls, glass goblets and often shoes; their children had fat cheeks and broad shoulders, and their babies wore tiny shoes. None of these children had the swollen bellies of the rachitics of the Third World” (Ladurie, 1986, 341). The northeast thus became the center of French industrialization and world trade.

Southwest of the St. Malo-Geneva line, however, “rural life became completely de-urbanized. Western and southwestern France became ‘wild’ with dispersed habitation, by virtue of an antithesis that had long been familiar: poor peasants scattered throughout the countryside, rustic and uncivilized to a degree, living ... among their fields and meadows in isolation, outside the community of others” (Ladurie, 1986:341). This area was never fully manorialized despite being under Frankish control since early in the sixth century. “Vassalage and the *seigneurie* appear fully developed only in the big-village, open-field country between the Loire and the borders of Flanders” (Homans, 1957/2016:180). This fits with the proposal that the Germanic peoples of the north created a manorial culture long predating the medieval period — a culture that was not exportable to non-Germanic areas despite militarily dominating these areas (MacDonald, 2019:139-140).

Several of the points in my summary of the material on family structure in Chapter 4 can also be applied to the question of the importance of Church influence with appropriate modifications (in brackets).

The central argument here is that the origins of the unique northwest European family structure lie in biological influences stemming from a combination of Indo-European peoples originating on the steppes of southeast Europe and hunter-gather peoples whose evolutionary past lies in northwest Europe itself.

1. The widespread practice of placing servants in households of non-relatives cannot be explained in purely economic terms as a response to medieval manorialism [or Church influence]. However, it is compatible with elaborate systems of non-kinship-based reciprocity that have been noted in hunter-gatherer cultures in harsh environments (Chapter 3) as well as a characteristic of Proto-Indo-European cultures and their descendants (Chapter 2)

- dating back thousands of years.
2. Also compatible with primordialist explanations, ... historians are unable to firmly date the origins of the individualist family. The fact that customs of monogamy, late marriage and individualist inheritance patterns long preceded the early Middle Ages [and therefore Church influence] suggests that the individualist family pattern is rooted in the evolutionary history of the northwest European peoples. [This contrasts with Schulz et al.'s (p. 2) claim that the nuclear family pattern found in Western Europe was the direct result of Church policy.] ...
 4. The very different family forms in northwest versus much of southern Europe (including southern France) persisted in near proximity despite the same religion (until the Reformation) and despite manorialism [and Church influence] in both areas as a result of the Frankish conquests. [This contrasts with Schulz et al. (2019a) lumping all of France into the same category of Church influence because of its incorporation in the Frankish Empire (see their Figure 1A)— with the exception of Celtic Brittany which, like Ireland, departs from the Western individualist family model in the direction of a greater emphasis on kinship. This flies in the face of very clear differences in family structure along relatively individualist (northern France) and relatively collectivist (southern France) structures. Further, Schulz et al. use proximity to a bishopric as measured in 50-year intervals from 550 AD to 1500 as their measure of Church influence. However, their Figure S2.1 shows that the relatively collectivist southern France had at least as many bishoprics in 1000 and in 1500 as the relatively individualist northern France and many more than Scandinavia which has the most individualist family structure in Europe (Schulz et al., 2019b). Finally, while Schulz et al. note that southern Italy was incorporated into the Western Church relatively late, thus purporting to explain their relatively intensive kinship relations, my treatment emphasizes the ethnic difference between northern and southern Italy, with Germanic peoples predominant in the north.].
...
6 There is a cline within northwest Europe such that the most individualist family patterns occur in Scandinavia, particularly Sweden which never underwent manorialism [and, as noted by

Schulz et al. (2019a, Figure 1A; 2019b, Figure S2.1), was exposed relatively late to Church influence.] (MacDonald, 2019:165-167)

Conclusion

I conclude that the extent of Church influence is inadequate as an explanation of Western individualism and that an adequate account requires a consideration of the unique evolutionary history of the peoples of Western Europe.

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