

# Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law

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August, 2006

## Review of David Yamane, The Catholic Church in State Politics: Negotiating Prophetic Demands & Political Realities (Rowman & Littlefield 2005) (Invited)

Patrick McKinley Brennan



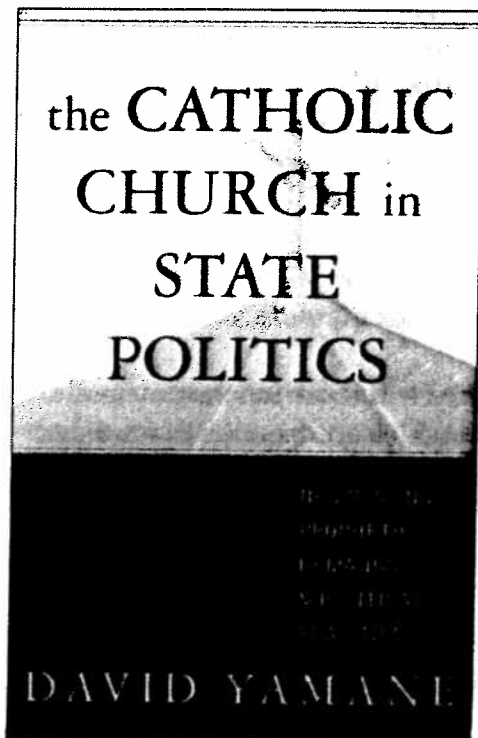
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***The Catholic Church in State Politics: Negotiating Prophetic Demands and Political Realities.*** By David Yamane. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005. 208 pp. \$24.95.

Until the early twentieth century, the Catholic bishops in the United States expressed their collegiality through occasional councils and meetings. In 1917 the bishops for the first time came together in the formal organization that eventually mutated into today's United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, whose efforts and accomplishments at the national level are widely known and variously judged. *The Catholic Church in State Politics* demonstrates that the national level is today only the more visible of the collegial functioning of the bishops in the United States. David Yamane has provided a much-needed and fascinating study of the emergence and operation since the 1960s of Catholic conferences at the state level. Thirty-five

such conferences are in operation today; in 2002 the average conference budget exceeded \$400,000.

The book begins with a history of the conferences; it then explicates the internal structures of the conferences; next it studies the strengths of the conferences and assesses the challenges they face in making Catholic perspectives heard in state law-making. As Yamane makes plain, the principal function of these conferences is not to teach Catholics; it is to influence public policy and law state by state. In the concluding chapters, Yamane analyzes the conferences' place within the overall life of the church in the modern, secularized world. The book is a cautious celebration of the state conferences' efforts to help see a "seamless garment of life" ethic be given legal effect.



The book is well-written, thoroughly documented, and, in its consideration of questions of ecclesiology and of liberal political theory, both insightful and provocative. There can be no doubt but that David Yamane has done a great service by providing a rich empirical account of the work of the church at the level of state politics. Readers will vary in their assessment of the appropriateness of the work Yamane describes and admires, but this is a book to be read by anyone with an interest in how the Catholic Church in the United States clothes the public square at the state level, where many of the hot-button issues arise and receive resolution that is frequently final.

Yamane's use of the work of such scholars as Richard John Neuhaus, Michael Perry, Steven Smith, and Paul Weithman, on the place of religion in the American public square, is deft and apt.

Of particular future interest is the fact that, as Yamane demonstrates, the typical conference is headed by a board whose voting members are the bishops of the state; the trend over the last quarter-century has been *away* from lay membership on the boards. Under the direction of its board, each conference employs the services of lay people trained or experienced in legislative practice, law, or other disciplines. Their practical expertise has led to influence that

unassisted successors to the apostles could not reasonably hope for. Yamane stresses that the conferences' work carries the "authority" of the (local) church in virtue of their largely episcopal-governed boards. Writing in 2004, Yamane was optimistic about the future of the conferences; he also noted (157) the reservations of then-Cardinal Ratzinger to institutional interpositions between local bishops and the Church universal.

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